CHAPTER IX

CARLYLE'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

PERHAPS the profoundest of Robert Browning's critics, in the opening sentence of his work,[1] quotes a saying of Hegel's, "A great man condemns the world to the task of explaining him"; adding, "The condemnation is a double one, and it generally falls heaviest on the great man himself who has to submit to explanation." "Cousin," the graceful Eclectic is reported to have said to the great Philosopher, "will you oblige me by stating the results of your teaching in a few sentences?" and to have received the reply, "It is not easy, especially in French."

The retort applies, with severity, to those who attempt to systematise Carlyle; for he himself was, as we have seen, intolerant of system. His mathematical attainment and his antipathy to logical methods, beyond the lines of square and circle, his love of concise fact and his often sweeping assertions are characteristic of the same contradictions in his nature as his almost tyrannical premises and his practically tender-hearted conclusions. A hard thinker, he was never a close reasoner; in all that relates to human affairs he relies on nobility of feeling rather than on continuity of thought. Claiming the full latitude of

[1] *Browning as a Philosophical and Religious Teacher*, by Professor Henry Jones, of St. Andrews.

the prophet to warn, exhort, even to command, he declines either to preach or to accept the rubric of the partisan or of the priest.

In praise of German literature, he remarks, "One of its chief qualities is that it has no particular theory at all on the front of it;" and of its leaders, "I can only speak of the revelations these men have made to me. As to their doctrines, there is nothing definite or precise to be said"; yet he asserts that Goethe, Richter, and the rest, took him "out of the blackness and darkness of death." This is nearly the feeling that his disciples of forty years ago entertained towards himself; but their discipleship has rarely lasted through life. They came to his writings, inspired by the youthful enthusiasm that carries with it a vein of credulity, intoxicated by their fervour as by new wine or mountain air, and found in them the key of the perennial riddle and the solution of the insoluble mystery. But in later years the curtain to many of them became the picture.

When Carlyle was first recognised in London as a rising author, curiosity was rife as to his "opinions"; was he a Chartist at heart or an Absolutist, a Calvinist like Knox, a Deist like Hume, a Feudalist with Scott, or a Democrat with Burns—inquisitions mostly vain. He had come from the Scotch moors and his German studies, a strange element, into the midst of an almost foreign society, not so much to promulgate a new set of opinions as to infuse a new life into those already existing. He claimed to have a "mission," but it was less to controvert any form of creed than to denounce the insufficiency of shallow modes of belief. He raised the tone of literature by referring to higher standards than those currently accepted; he tried to elevate men's minds to the contemplation of something better than themselves, and impress upon them the

vacuity of lip-services; he insisted that the matter of most consequence was the grip with which they held their convictions and their willingness to sacrifice the interests on which they could lay their hands in loyalty to some nobler faith. He taught that beliefs by hearsay are not only barren but obstructive; that it is only

> When half-gods go, the gods arrive.

But his manner of reading these important lessons admitted the retort that he himself was content rather to dwell on what is *not* than to discover what *is* true. "Belief," he reiterates, is the cure for all the worst of human ills; but belief in what or in whom? In "the eternities and immensities," as an answer, requires definition. It means that we are not entitled to regard ourselves as the centres of the universe; that we are but atoms of space and time, with relations infinite beyond our personalities; that the first step to a real recognition of our duties is the sense of our inferiority to those above us, our realisation of the continuity of history and life, our faith and acquiescence in some universal law. This truth, often set forth

> By saint, by sage, by preacher, and by poet,

no one has enforced with such eloquence as Carlyle; but though he founded a dynasty of ideas, they are comparatively few; like a group of strolling players, each with a well-filled wardrobe, and ready for many parts.

The difficulty of defining Carlyle results not merely from his frequent golden nebulosity, but from his love of contradicting even himself. Dr. Johnson confessed to Boswell that when arguing in his dreams he was often worsted and took credit for the resignation with which he

bore these defeats, forgetting that the victor and the vanquished were one and the same. Similarly his successor took liberties with himself which he would allow to no one else, and in doing so he has taken liberties with his reader. His praise and blame of the profession of letters, as the highest priesthood and the meanest trade; his early exaltation of "the writers of newspapers, pamphlets, books," as "the real effective working church of a modern country"; and his later expressed contempt for journalism as "mean and demoralising"—"we must destroy the faith in newspapers"; his alternate faith and unfaith in Individualism; the teaching of the *Characteristics* and the *Signs of the Times* that all healthy genius is unconscious, and the censure of Sir Walter Scott for troubling himself too little with mysteries; his commendation of "the strong warrior" for writing no books, and his taking sides with the mediæval monks against the king—there is no reconciliation of such contradictories. They are the expression of diverse moods and emphatically of different stages of mental progress, the later, as a rule, more negative than the earlier.

This change is most marked in the sphere of politics. At the close of his student days Carlyle was to all intents a Radical, and believed in Democracy; [1] he saw hungry masses around him, and, justly attributing some of their suffering to misgovernment, vented his sympathetic zeal for the oppressed in denunciation of the oppressors. He began not only by sympathising with the people, but by believing in their capacity to manage best their own affairs: a belief that steadily waned as he grew older until he denied to them even the right to choose their rulers. As late, however, as 1830, he argued against Irving's conservatism in terms recalled in the *Reminiscences*. "He objected clearly to my Reform Bill notions, found Demo-

[1] Passage quoted (Chap. II.) about the Glasgow Radical rising in 1819.

cracy a thing forbidden, leading even to outer darkness: I a thing inevitable and obliged to lead whithersoever it could." During the same period he clenched his theory by taking a definite side in the controversy of the age. "This," he writes to Macvey Napier, "this is the day when the lords are to reject the Reform Bill. The poor lords can only accelerate (by perhaps a century) their own otherwise inevitable enough abolition."

The political part of *Sartor Resartus*, shadowing forth some scheme of well-organised socialism, yet anticipates, especially in the chapter on *Organic Filaments*, the writer's later strain of belief in dukes, earls, and marshals of men: but this work, religious, ethical, and idyllic, contains mere vague suggestions in the sphere of practical life. About this time Carlyle writes of liberty: "What art thou to the valiant and the brave when thou art thus to the weak and timid, dearer than life, stronger than death, higher than purest love?" and agrees with the verdict, "The slow poison of despotism is worse than the convulsive struggles of anarchy." But he soon passed from the mood represented by Emily Brontë to that of the famous apostrophe of Madame Roland. He proclaimed that liberty to do as we like is a fatal license, that the only true liberty is that of doing what is right, which he interprets living under the laws enacted by the wise. In 1832 he writes to his wife, "Tell Mrs. Jeffrey that I am that monster made up of all the Whigs hate—a radical and an absolutist." In the result, the Absolutist, in a spirit made after Plato's conception of various elements, devoured the Radical. The leading counsel against the aristocracy changed his brief and became chief advocate on their side, declaring "we must recognise the hereditary principle if there is to be any fixity in things." As early as 1835, he writes to Emerson:—

I believe literature to be as good as dead . . . and nothing but hungry Revolt and Radicalism appointed us for perhaps three generations. . . . I suffer also terribly from the solitary existence I have all along had ; it is becoming a kind of passion with me to feel myself among my brothers. And then How? Alas, I care not a doit for Radicalism, nay, I feel it to be a wretched necessity unfit for me; Conservatism being not unfit only but false for me : yet these two are the grand categories under which all English spiritual activity, that so much as thinks remuneration possible, must range itself.

And somewhat later—

People accuse me, not of being an incendiary Sansculotte, but of being a Tory, thank Heaven !

Some one has written with a big brush, "He who is not a radical in his youth is a knave, he who is not a conservative in his age is a fool." The rough, if not rude, generalisation has been plausibly supported by the changes in the mental careers of Burke, Coleridge, Southey, and Wordsworth. But Carlyle was "a spirit of another sort," of more mixed yarn; and, as there is a vein of conservatism in his early Radicalism, so there is, as also in the cases of Landor and even of Goethe, still a revolutionary streak in his later Conservatism. Consequently, in his instance, there is a plea in favour of the prepossession (especially strong in Scotland) which leads the political or religious party that a distinguished man has left still to persist in claiming him; while that which he has joined accepts him, if at all, with distrust. Scotch Liberals will not give up Carlyle, one of his biographers keenly asseverating that he was to the last "a democrat at heart"; while the representative organ of northern Conservatism on the same ground continues to assail him—"mit der Dummheit kämpfen Götter selbst vergebens." On all questions directly bearing on the physical welfare of the masses of the people, his speech and action remained consistent with his declaration

that he had "never heard an argument for the corn laws which might not make angels weep." From first to last, he was an advocate of Free Trade — though under the constant protest that the greatness of a nation depended in a very minor degree on the abundance of its possessions —and of free, unsectarian, and compulsory Education; while, in theology, though remote from either, he was more tolerant of the dogmatic narrowness of the Low Church of the lower, than of the Ritualism of the upper, classes. His unwavering interest in the poor and his belief that legislation should keep them in constant view, was in accord with the spirit of Bentham's rubric: but Carlyle, rightly or wrongly, came to regard the bulk of men as children requiring not only help and guidance but control.

On the question of "the Suffrage" he completely revolved. It appears, from the testimony of Mr. Froude, that the result of the Reform Bill of 1832 disappointed him in merely shifting the power from the owners of land to the owners of shops, and left the handicraftsmen and his own peasant class no better off. Before a further extension became a point of practical politics he had arrived at the conviction that the ascertainment of truth and the election of the fittest did not lie with majorities. These sentences of 1835 represent a transition stage:—

> Conservatism I cannot attempt to conserve, believing it to be a portentous embodied sham. . . . Whether the Tories stay out or in, it will be all for the advance of Radicalism, which means revolt, dissolution, and confusion, and a darkness which no man can see through.

No one had less faith in the pæan chanted by Macaulay and others on the progress of the nation or of the race, a progress which, without faith in great men, was to him inevitably downward; no one protested with equal emphasis against the levelling doctrines of the French

Revolution. It has been observed that Carlyle's *Chartism* was "his first practical step in politics"; it is more true to say that it first embodied, with more than his usual precision, the convictions he had for some time held of the dangers of our social system; with an indication of some of the means to ward them off, based on the realisation of the interdependence of all classes in the State. This book is remarkable as containing his last, very partial, concessions to the democratic creed, the last in which he is willing to regard a wide suffrage as a possible, though by no means the best, expedient. Subsequently, in *Past and Present* and the *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, he came to hold "that with every extension of the Franchise those whom the voters would elect would be steadily inferior and more unfit." Every stage in his political progress is marked by a growing distrust in the judgment of the multitude, a distrust set forth, with every variety of metaphor, in such sentences as the following:—

There is a divine message or eternal regulation of the Universe. How find it? All the world answers me, "Count heads, ask Universal Suffrage by the ballot-box and that will tell!" From Adam's time till now the Universe was wont to be of a somewhat abstruse nature, partially disclosing itself to the wise and noble-minded alone, whose number was not the majority. Of what use towards the general result of finding out what it is wise to do, can the fools be? . . . If of ten men nine are recognisable as fools, which is a common calculation, how in the name of wonder will you ever get a ballot-box to grind you out a wisdom from the votes of these ten men? . . . Only by reducing to zero nine of these votes can wisdom ever issue from your ten. The mass of men consulted at the hustings upon any high matter whatsoever, is as ugly an exhibition of human stupidity as this world sees. . . . If the question be asked and the answer given, I will generally consider in any case of importance, that the said answer is likely to be wrong, and that I have to go and do the reverse of the same . . . for how should I follow a multitude to do evil? Cease to brag to me of America and its model

institutions. . . . On this side of the Atlantic or on that, Democracy is for ever impossible! The Universe is a monarchy and a hierarchy, the noble in the high places, the ignoble in the low; this is in all times and in all places the Almighty Maker's law. Democracy, take it where you will, is found a regulated method of rebellion, it abrogates the old arrangement of things, and leaves zero and vacuity. It is the consummation of no-government and *laissez faire.*

Alongside of this train of thought there runs a constant protest against the spirit of revolt. In *Sartor* we find: "Whoso cannot obey cannot be free, still less bear rule; he that is the inferior of nothing can be the superior of nothing"; and in *Chartism*—

Men who rebel and urge the lower classes to rebel ought to have other than formulas to go upon, . . . those to whom millions of suffering fellow-creatures are "masses," mere explosive masses for blowing down Bastiles with, for voting at hustings for us—such men are of the questionable species. . . . Obedience . . . is the primary duty of man. . . . Of all "rights of men" this right of the ignorant to be guided by the wiser, gently or forcibly—is the indisputablest. . . . Cannot one discern, across all democratic turbulence, clattering of ballot-boxes, and infinite sorrowful jangle, that this is at bottom the wish and prayer of all human hearts everywhere, "Give me a leader"?

The last sentence indicates the transition from the merely negative aspect of Carlyle's political philosophy to the positive, which is his HERO-WORSHIP, based on the excessive admiration for individual greatness,—an admiration common to almost all imaginative writers, whether in prose or verse; on his notions of order and fealty, and on a reverence for the past, which is also a common property of poets. Antiquity, then Feudalism, according to his view, had their chiefs, captains, kings, and flourished or not as it followed them well or ill. Democracy, the new and dangerous force of this age, must be represented and then de-

nominated by great men raised to independence over the arbitrary will of a multitude, to be trusted and obeyed and followed if need be to death.

> Your noblest men at the summit of affairs is the ideal world of poets. . . . Other aim in this earth we have none. That we all reverence "great men" is to me the living rock amid all rushings down whatsoever. All that democracy ever meant lies there, the attainment of a truer Aristocracy or Government of the Best. Make search for the Able man. How to get him is the question of questions.

It is precisely the question to which Carlyle never gives, and hardly attempts, a reply; and his failure to answer invalidates the larger half of his politics. Plato has at least detailed a scheme for eliminating his philosopher guardians, though it somewhat pedantically suggests a series of Chinese examinations: his political, though probably unconscious disciple has only a few negative tests. The warrior or sage who is to rule is *not* to be chosen by the majority, especially in our era, when they would choose the Orators who seduce and "traduce the State"; nor are we ever told that the election is to rest with either Under or Upper House: the practical conclusion is that when we find a man of great force of character, whether representing our own opinions or the reverse, we should take him on trust. This brings us to the central maxim of Carlyle's political philosophy, to which we must, even in our space, give some consideration, as its true meaning has been the theme of so much dispute.

It is a misfortune of original thought that it is hardly ever put in practice by the original thinker. When his rank as a teacher is recognised, his words have already lost half their value by repetition. His manner is aped by those who find an easy path to notoriety in imitation; the belief he held near his heart is worn as a creed like

a badge; the truth he promulgated is distorted in a room of mirrors, half of it is a truism, the other half a falsism. That which began as a denunciation of tea-table morality, is itself the tea-table morality of the next generation: an outcry against cant may become the quintessence of cant; a revolt from tyranny the basis of a new tyranny; the condemnation of sects the foundation of a new sect; the proclamation of peace a bone of contention. There is an ambiguity in most general maxims and a seed of error, which assumes preponderance over the truth when the interpreters of the maxim are men easily led by formulæ. Nowhere is this degeneracy more strikingly manifested than in the history of some of the maxims which Carlyle either first promulgated or enforced by his adoption. When he said, or quoted, "Silence is better than speech," he meant to inculcate patience and reserve. Always think before you speak: rather lose fluency than waste words: never speak for the sake of speaking. It is the best advice, but they who need it most are the last to take it; those who speak and write not because they have something to say, but because they wish to say or must say something, will continue to write and speak as long as they can spell or articulate. Thoughtful men are apt to misapply the advice, and betray their trust when they sit still and leave the "war of words to those who like it." When Carlyle condemned self-consciousness, a constant introspection and comparison of self with others, he theoretically struck at the root of the morbid moods of himself and other mental analysts; he had no intention to over-exalt mere muscularity or to deify athletic sports. It were easy to multiply instances of truths clearly conceived at first and parodied in their promulgation; but when we have the distinct authority of the discoverer himself for their correct interpretation, we can at once appeal to it. A yet graver, not

uncommon, source of error arises when a great writer misapplies the maxims of his own philosophy, or states them in such a manner that they are sure to be misapplied.

Mr. Carlyle has laid down the doctrine that MIGHT IS RIGHT at various times and in such various forms, with and without modification or caveat, that the real meaning can only be ascertained from his own application of it. He has made clear, what goes without saying, that by "might" he does not intend mere physical strength.

> Of conquest we may say that it never yet went by brute force; conquest of that kind does not endure. The strong man, what is he? The wise man. His muscles and bones are not stronger than ours; but his soul is stronger, clearer, nobler. . . . Late in man's history, yet clearly at length, it becomes manifest to the dullest that mind is stronger than matter, that not brute Force, but only Persuasion and Faith, is the king of this world. . . . Intellect has to govern this world and will do it.

There are sentences which indicate that he means something more than even mental force; as in a letter to Mr. Lecky, quoted by Mr. Froude (vol. iv. p. 288), "Right is the eternal symbol of Might"; and again in *Chartism*, "Might and right do differ frightfully from hour to hour; but give them centuries to try it, and they are found to be identical. The strong thing is the just thing. In kings we have either a divine right or a diabolic wrong." But, on the other hand, we read in *Past and Present*:—

> Savage fighting Heptarchies: their fighting is an ascertainment who has the right to rule over them.

And again—

> Clear undeniable right, clear undeniable might: *either* of these, once ascertained, puts an end to battle.

And elsewhere—

> Rights men have none save to be governed justly. . . .

Rights I will permit thee to call everywhere correctly articulated mights. . . . All goes by wager of battle in this world, and it is, well understood, the measure of all worth. . . . By right divine the strong and capable govern the weak and foolish. . . . Strength we may say is Justice itself.

It is not left for us to balance those somewhat indefinite definitions. Carlyle has himself in his Histories illustrated and enforced his own interpretations of the summary views of his political treatises. There he has demonstrated that his doctrine, "Might is Right," is no mere unguarded expression of the truism that moral might is right. In his hands it implies that virtue is in all cases a property of strength, that strength is everywhere a property of virtue; that power of whatever sort having any considerable endurance, carries with it the seal and signal of its claim to respect, that whatever has established itself has, in the very act, established its right to be established. He is never careful enough to keep before his readers what he must himself have dimly perceived, that victory *by right* belongs not to the force of will alone, apart from clear and just conceptions of worthy ends. Even in its crude form, the maxim errs not so much in what it openly asserts as in what it implicitly denies. Aristotle (the first among ancients to *question* the institution of slavery, as Carlyle has been one of the last of moderns to defend it) more guardedly admits that strength is in itself *a* good,—καὶ ἔστιν ἀεὶ τὸ κρατοῦν ἐν ὑπεροχῇ ἀγαθοῦ τινος,—but leaves it to be maintained that there are forms of good which do not show themselves in excess of strength. Several of Carlyle's conclusions and verdicts seem to show that he only acknowledges those types of excellence that have already manifested themselves as powers; and this doctrine (which, if adopted in earlier ages, would practically have left possession with physical strength) colours all his

History and much of his Biography. Energy of any sort compels his homage. Himself a Titan, he shakes hands with all Titans, Gothic gods, Knox, Columbus, the fuliginous Mirabeau, burly Danton dying with "no weakness" on his lips. The fulness of his charity is for the errors of Mohammed, Cromwell, Burns, Napoleon I.,—whose mere belief in his own star he calls sincerity,—the atrocious Francia, the Norman kings, the Jacobins, Brandenburg despots; the fulness of his contempt for the conscientious indecision of Necker, the Girondists, the Moderates of our own Commonwealth. He condones all that ordinary judgments regard as the tyranny of conquest, and has for the conquered only a *væ victis*. In this spirit, he writes:—

> M. Thierry celebrates with considerable pathos the fate of the Saxons; the fate of the Welsh, too, moves him; of the Celts generally, whom a fiercer race swept before them into the mountains, whither they were not worth following. What can we say, but that the cause which pleased the gods had in the end to please Cato also?

When all is said, Carlyle's inconsistent optimism throws no more light than others have done on the apparent relapses of history, as the overthrow of Greek civilisation, the long night of the Dark Ages, the spread of the Russian power during the last century, or of continental militarism in the present. In applying the tests of success or failure we must bear in mind that success is from its very nature conspicuous. We only know that brave men have failed when they have had a "sacred bard." The good that is lost is, *ipso facto*, forgotten. We can rarely tell of greatness unrecognised, for the very fact of our being able to tell of it would imply a former recognition. The might of evil walks in darkness: we remember the martyrs who, by their deaths, ultimately drove the Inquisition from England; not those

whose courage quailed. "It was their fate," as a recent writer remarks, "that was the tragedy." Reading Carlyle's maxim between the lines of his chapter on the Reformation, and noting that the Inquisition triumphed in Spain, while in Austria, Bavaria, and Bohemia the new truths were stifled by stratagem or by force; that the massacre of St. Bartholomew was successful; and that the revocation of the Edict of Nantes killed the France of Henry IV., we see its limitations even in the long perspective of the past.[1] Let us, however, grant that in the ultimate issue the Platonic creed, "Justice is stronger than injustice," holds good. It is when Carlyle turns to politics and regards them as history accomplished instead of history in progress that his principle leads to the most serious error. No one has a more withering contempt for evil as meanness and imbecility; but he cannot see it in the strong hand. Of two views, equally correct, "evil is weakness," such evil as sloth, and "corruptio optimi pessima," such evil as tyranny—he only recognises the first. Despising the palpable anarchies of passion, he has no word of censure for the more settled form of anarchy which announced, "Order reigns at Warsaw." He refuses his sympathy to all unsuccessful efforts, and holds that if races are trodden under foot, they are *φύσει δοῦλοι . . . δυνάμενοι ἄλλου εἶναι*; they who have allowed themselves to be subjugated deserve their fate. The cry of "oppressed nationalities" was to him mere cant. His Providence is on the side of the big battalions, and forgives very violent means to an orderly end. To his credit he declined to acknowledge the right of Louis Napoleon to rule France; but he accepted the Czars, and ridiculed Mazzini till forced to admit, almost with chagrin, that he had, "after all," substantially succeeded.

[1] *Vide* Mill's *Liberty*, chap. ii. pp. 52-54.

Treason never prospers, what's the reason?
That when it prospers, none dare call it treason.

Apprehending, on the whole more keenly than any of his contemporaries, the foundations of past greatness, his invectives and teaching lay athwart much that is best as well as much that is most hazardous in the new ideas of the age. Because mental strength, endurance, and industry do not appear prominently in the Negro race, he looks forward with satisfaction to the day when a band of white buccaneers shall undo Toussaint l'Ouverture's work of liberation in Hayti, advises the English to revoke the Emancipation Act in Jamaica, and counsels the Americans to lash their slaves—better, he admits, made serfs and not saleable by auction—not more than is necessary to get from them an amount of work satisfactory to the Anglo-Saxon mind. Similarly he derides all movements based on a recognition of the claims of weakness to consideration and aid.

Fallen cherub, to be weak is miserable,
Doing or suffering.

The application of the maxim, "Might is Right," to a theory of government is obvious; the strongest government must be the best, *i.e.* that in which power, in the last resort supreme, is concentrated in the hands of a single ruler; the weakest, that in which they are most widely diffused, is the worst. Carlyle in his Address to the Edinburgh students commends Machiavelli for insight in attributing the preservation of Rome to the institution of the Dictatorship. In his last great work this view is developed in the lessons he directs the reader to draw from Prussian history. The following conveys his last comparative estimate of an absolute and a limited monarchy:—

This is the first triumph of the constitutional Principle which has since gone to such sublime heights among us—heights

which we begin at last to suspect may be depths leading down, all men now ask whitherwards. A much-admired invention in its time, that of letting go the rudder or setting a wooden figure expensively to take care of it, and discovering that the ship would sail of itself so much the more easily. Of all things a nation needs first to be drilled, and a nation that has not been governed by so-called tyrants never came to much in the world.

Among the currents of thought contending in our age, two are conspicuously opposed. The one says: Liberty is an end not a mere means in itself; apart from practical results the crown of life. Freedom of thought and its expression, and freedom of action, bounded only by the equal claim of our fellows, are desirable for their own sakes as constituting national vitality: and even when, as is sometimes the case, Liberty sets itself against improvements for a time, it ultimately accomplishes more than any reforms could accomplish without it. The fewer restraints that are imposed from without on human beings the better: the province of law is only to restrain men from violently or fraudulently invading the province of other men. This view is maintained and in great measure sustained by J. S. Mill in his *Liberty*, the *Areopagitica* of the nineteenth century, and more elaborately if not more philosophically set forth in the comprehensive treatise of Wilhelm von Humboldt on *The Sphere and Duties of Government*. These writers are followed with various reserves by Grote, Buckle, Mr. Herbert Spencer, and by Mr. Lecky. Mill writes:—

The idea of rational Democracy is not that the people themselves govern; but that they have security for good government. This security they can only have by retaining in their own hands the ultimate control. The people ought to be masters employing servants more skilful than themselves.[1]

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[1] It should be noted that Mill lays as great stress, and a more practical stress, on Individualism as Carlyle does. He has the same belief in the essential mediocrity of the masses of men whose "think-

To this Carlyle, with at least the general assent of Mr. Froude, Mr. Ruskin, and Sir James Stephen, substantially replies:—

In freedom for itself there is nothing to raise a man above a fly; the value of a human life is that of its work done; the prime province of law is to get from its subjects the most of the best work. The first duty of a people is to find—which means to accept—their chief; their second and last to obey him. We see to what men have been brought by "Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity," by the dreams of idealogues, and the purchase of votes.

This, the main drift of Carlyle's political teaching, rests on his absolute belief in strength (which always grows by concentration), on his unqualified admiration of order, and on his utter disbelief in what his adverse friend Mazzini was wont, with over-confidence, to appeal to as "collective wisdom." Theoretically there is much to be said for this view: but, in practice, it involves another idealism as aerial as that of any "idealogue" on the side of Liberty. It points to the establishment of an Absolutism which must continue to exist, whether wisdom survives in the absolute rulers or ceases to survive. Κρατεῖν δ' ἔστι καὶ μὴ δικαίως. The rule of Cæsars, Napoleons, Czars may have been beneficent in times of revolution; but their right to rule is apt to pass before their power, and when the latter descends by inheritance, as from M. Aurelius to Commodus, it commonly degenerates. It is well to learn, from a safe distance, the amount of good that may be associated with despotism: its worst evil is lawlessness, it not only suffocates freedom and

ing is done for them . . . through the newspapers," and the same scorn for "the present low state of society." He writes, "The initiation of all wise and noble things comes and must come from individuals: generally at first from some one individual"; but adds, "I am not countenancing the sort of 'hero-worship' which applauds the strong man of genius for forcibly seizing on the government of the world. . . . All he can claim is freedom to point out the way."

induces inertia, but it renders wholly uncertain the life of those under its control. Most men would rather endure the "slings and arrows" of an irresponsible press, the bustle and jargon of many elections, the delay of many reforms, the narrowness of many streets, than have lived from 1814 to 1840, with the noose around all necks, in Paraguay, or even precariously prospered under the paternal shield of the great Fritz's extraordinary father, Friedrich Wilhelm of Prussia.

Carlyle's doctrine of the ultimate identity of "might and right" never leads, with him, to its worst consequence, a fatalistic or indolent repose; the withdrawal from the world's affairs of the soul "holding no form of creed but contemplating all." That he was neither a consistent optimist nor pessimist is apparent from his faith in the power of man in some degree to mould his fate. Not "belief, belief," but "action, action," is his working motto. On the title-page of the *Latter-Day Pamphlets* he quotes from Rushworth on a colloquy of Sir David Ramsay and Lord Reay in 1638: "Then said his Lordship, 'Well, God mend all!'—'Nay, by God, Donald; we must help Him to mend it,' said the other."

"I am not a Tory," he exclaimed, after the clamour on the publication of *Chartism*, "no, but one of the deepest though perhaps the quietest of Radicals." With the Toryism which merely says "stand to your guns" and, for the rest, "let well alone," he had no sympathy. There was nothing selfish in his theories. He felt for and was willing to fight for mankind, though he could not trust them; even his "king" he defines to be a minister or servant of the State. "The love of power," he says, "if thou understand what to the manful heart power signifies, is a very noble and indispensable love"; that is, the power to raise men above the "Pig Philosophy," the worship of clothes, the acquiescence

in wrong. "The world is not here for me, but I for it." "Thou shalt is written upon life in characters as terrible as thou shalt not"; are protests against the mere negative virtues which religionists are wont unduly to exalt.

Carlyle's so-called Mysticism is a part of his German poetry; in the sphere of common life and politics he made use of plain prose, and often proved himself as shrewd as any of his northern race. An excessively "good hater," his pet antipathies are generally bad things. In the abstract they are always so; but about the abstract there is no dispute. Every one dislikes or professes to dislike shams, hypocrisies, phantoms,—by whatever tiresomely reiterated epithet he may be pleased to address things that are not what they pretend to be. Diogenes's toil with the lantern alone distinguished the cynic Greek, in admiration of an honest man. Similarly the genuine zeal of his successor appears in painstaking search; his discrimination in the detection, his eloquence in his handling of humbugs. Occasional blunders in the choice of objects of contempt and of worship—between which extremes he seldom halts,—demonstrate his fallibility, but outside the sphere of literary and purelp yersonal criticism he seldom attacks any one, or anything, without a show of reason. To all gospels there are two sides, and a great teacher who, by reason of the very fire that makes him great, disdains to halt and hesitate and consider the *juste milieu*—seldom guards himself against misinterpretation or excess. Mazzini writes, "He weaves and unweaves his web like Penelope, preaches by turns life and nothingness, and wearies out the patience of his readers by continually carrying them from heaven to hell." Carlyle, like Ruskin, keeps himself right not by caveats but by contradictions of himself, and sometimes in a way least to be expected. Much of his writing is a blast of war, or a protest against the philanthropy

that sets charity before justice. Yet in a letter to the London Peace Congress of 1851, dated 18th July, we find:—

> I altogether approve of your object. Clearly the less war and cutting of throats we have among us, it will be the better for us all. As men no longer wear swords in the streets, so neither by and by will nations. . . . How many meetings would one expedition to Russia cover the cost of?

He denounced the Americans, in apparent ignorance of their "Constitution," for having no Government; and yet admitted that what he called their anarchy had done perhaps more than anything else could have done to subdue the wilderness. He spoke with scorn of the "rights of women," their demand for the suffrage, and the *cohue* of female authors, expressing himself in terms of ridiculous ridicule of such writers as Mrs. Austen, George Sand, and George Eliot; but he strenuously advocated the claim of women to a recognised medical education. He reviled "Model Prisons" as pampering institutes of "a universal sluggard and scoundrel amalgamation society," and yet seldom passed on the streets one of the "Devil's elect" without giving him a penny. He set himself against every law or custom that tended to make harder the hard life of the poor: there was no more consistent advocate of the abolition of the "Game Laws." Emerson says of the mediæval architects, "they builded better than they knew." Carlyle felt more softly than he said, and could not have been trusted to execute one of his own Rhadamanthine decrees.[1] Scratch the skin of the Tartar and you find beneath the despised humanitarian. Everything that he has written on "The Condition of England Question" has a practical bearing, and many of his suggestions have found a place

[1] *Vide* a remarkable instance of this in the best short *Life of Carlyle*, that by Dr. Richard Garnett, p. 147.

on our code, vindicating the assertion of the *Times* of the day after his death, that "the novelties and paradoxes of 1846 are to a large extent nothing but the good sense of 1881." Such are:—his insistence on affording every facility for merit to rise from the ranks, partially embodied in the Abolition of Purchase Act; his advocacy of State-aided Emigration, of administrative and civil service Reform,—the abolition of "the circumlocution office" in Downing Street,—of the institution of a Minister of Education; his dwelling on the duties as well as the rights of landowners,—the theme of so many Land Acts; his enlarging on the superintendence of labour,—made practical in Factory and Limited Hours Bills—on care of the really destitute, on the better housing of the poor, on the regulation of weights and measures; his general contention for fixing more exactly the province of the legislative and the executive bodies. Carlyle's view that we should find a way to public life for men of eminence who will not cringe to mobs, has made a step towards realisation in the enfranchisement of our universities. Other of his proposals, as the employment of our army and navy in time of peace, and the forcing of able-bodied paupers into "industrial regiments," have become matter of debate which may pave the way to legislation. One of his desiderata, a statute of limitations on "puffing," it has not yet been found feasible, by the passing of an almost prohibitive duty on advertisements, to realise.

Besides these specific recommendations, three ideas are dominant in Carlyle's political treatises. *First*—a vehement protest against the doctrine of *Laissez faire*; which, he says, "on the part of the governing classes will, we repeat again and again, have to cease; pacific mutual divisions of the spoil and a would-let-well-alone will no longer suffice":—a doctrine to which he is disposed to trace the Trades

Union wars, of which he failed to see the issue. He is so strongly in favour of *Free-trade* between nations that, by an amusing paradox, he is prepared to make it *compulsory.* "All men," he writes in *Past and Present,* "trade with all men when mutually convenient, and are even bound to do it. Our friends of China, who refused to trade, had we not to argue with them, in cannon-shot at last?" But in Free-trade between class and class, man and man, within the bounds of the same kingdom, he has no trust: he will not leave "supply and demand" to adjust their relations. The result of doing so is, he holds, the scramble between Capital for larger interest and Labour for higher wage, in which the rich if unchecked will grind the poor to starvation, or drive them to revolt.

Second.—As a corollary to the abolition of *Laissez faire,* he advocates the *Organisation of Labour,* "the problem of the whole future to all who will pretend to govern men." The phrase from its vagueness has naturally provoked much discussion. Carlyle's bigoted dislike of Political Economists withheld him from studying their works; and he seems ignorant of the advances that have been made by the "dismal science," or of what it has proved and disproved. Consequently, while brought in evidence by most of our modern Social idealists, Comtists and Communists alike, all they can say is that he has given to their protest against the existing state of the commercial world a more eloquent expression than their own. He has no compact scheme,—as that of St. Simon or Fourier, or Owen—few such definite proposals as those of Karl Marx, Bellamy, Hertzka or Gronlund, or even William Morris. He seems to share with Mill the view that "the restraints of communism are weak in comparison with those of capitalists," and with Morris to look far forward to some golden age; he has given emphatic support to a copartnership of employers and employed,

in which the profits of labour shall be apportioned by some rule of equity, and insisted on the duty of the State to employ those who are out of work in public undertakings.

> Enlist, stand drill, and become from banditti soldiers of industry. I will lead you to the Irish bogs . . . English fox-covers . . . New Forest, Salisbury Plains, and Scotch hill-sides which as yet feed only sheep . . . thousands of square miles . . . destined yet to grow green crops and fresh butter and milk and beef without limit:—

an estimate with the usual exaggeration. Carlyle's later work is, however, an advance on his earlier, in its higher appreciation of Industrialism. He looks forward to the boon of "one big railway right across America," a prophecy since three times fulfilled; and admits that "the new omnipotence of the steam engine is hewing aside quite other mountains than the physical," *i.e.* bridging the gulf between races and binding men to men. He had found, since writing *Sartor*, that dear cotton and slow trains do not help one nearer to God, freedom, and immortality.

Carlyle's *third* practical point is his advocacy of *Emigration*, or rather his insistence on it as a sufficient remedy for Over-population. He writes of "Malthusianism" with his constant contempt of convictions other than his own:—

> A full formed man is worth more than a horse. . . . One man in a year, as I have understood it, if you lend him earth will feed himself and nine others (?) . . . Too crowded indeed! . . . What portion of this globe have ye tilled and delved till it will grow no more? How thick stands your population in the Pampas and Savannahs—in the Curragh of Kildare? Let there be an *Emigration Service*, . . . so that every honest willing workman who found England too strait, and the organisation of labour incomplete, might find a bridge to carry him to western lands. . . . Our little isle has grown too narrow for us, but the world is wide enough yet for another six thousand years. . . . If this

small western rim of Europe is over-peopled, does not everywhere else a whole vacant earth, as it were, call to us "Come and till me, come and reap me"?

On this follows an eloquent passage about our friendly Colonies, "overarched by zodiacs and stars, clasped by many-sounding seas." Carlyle would apparently force emigration, and coerce the Australians, Americans, and Chinese, to receive our ship-loads of living merchandise; but the problem of population exceeds his solution of it. He everywhere inclines to rely on coercion till it is overmastered by resistance, and to overstretch jurisdiction till it snaps.

His countenance of Autocracy may have disastrous results in Germany, where the latest representative of the Hohenzollerns is ostentatiously laying claim to "right divine." In England, where the opposite tide runs full, it is harmless: but, by a curious irony, our author's leaning to an organised control over social and private as well as public life, his exaltation of duties above rights, may serve as an incentive to the very force he seemed most to dread. Events are every day demonstrating the fallacy of his view of Democracy as an embodiment of *laissez faire*. Kant with deeper penetration indicated its tendency to become despotic. Good government, according to Aristotle, is that of one, of few, or of many, for the sake of all. A Democracy where the many rule for the many alone, may be a deadly engine of oppression; it may trample without appeal on the rights of minorities, and, in the name of the common good, establish and enforce an almost unconditioned tyranny. Carlyle's blindness to this superlative danger—a danger to which Mill, in many respects his unrecognised coadjutor, became alive[1]

[1] *Vide passim* the chapter in *Liberty* entitled "Limits to the Authority of Society over the Individual," where Mill denounces the idea of "the majority of operatives in many branches of industry . . . that bad workmen ought to receive the same wages as good."

—emphasises the limits of his political foresight. He has consecrated Fraternity with an eloquence unapproached by his peers, and with equal force put to scorn the superstition of Equality; but he has aimed at Liberty destructive shafts, some of which may find a mark the archer little meant.