The time for Carlyle's departure for London had now arrived. A letter came from Mrs. Buller begging his immediate presence. *Meister* was finished and paid for. A presentation copy was secured for Mainhill, and there was no more reason for delay. The expedition was an epoch in Carlyle's life. There was, perhaps, no one of his age in Scotland or England who knew so much and had seen so little. He had read enormously—history, poetry, philosophy; the whole range of modern literature—French, German, and English—was more familiar to him, perhaps, than to any man living of his own age; while the digestive power by which all this spiritual food had been digested and converted into intellectual tissue was equally astonishing. And yet all this time he had never seen any town larger than Glasgow, or any cultivated society beyond what he had fallen in with at occasional dinners with Brewster, or with the Bullers at Kinnaird. London had hovered before him rather as a place of doubtful possibilities than of definite hope. The sanguine Irving would have persuaded him that it would open its arms to a new man of genius. Carlyle knew better. He had measured his own capabilities. He was painfully aware that they were not of the sort which would win easy recognition, and that if he made his way at all it would be slowly, and after desperate and prolonged exertion. He would never go to bed unknown and wake to find himself famous. His own disposition was rather towards some quiet place in Scot-
land, where with fresh air and plain food he could possess
his soul in peace and work undisturbed and unconfused. Still London was to be seen and measured. He was to go by
sea from Leith, and for the first week or two after his ar-
ival he was to be Irving's guest at Pentonville. A few happy
days were spent at Haddington, and on Sunday morning,
June 5, he sailed—sailed literally. Steamers had begun to
run, but were not yet popular; and the old yacht, safe if te-
dious, was still the usual mode of transit for ordinary travel-
ners.

Carlyle has described in his *Reminiscences* his arrival in
London, his reception in Irving's house, and his various ad-
ventures during his English visit.¹ When written evidence
rises before us of what we said and did in early life, we find
generally that memory has played false to us, and has so
shaped and altered past scenes that our actions have be-
come legendary even to ourselves. Goethe called his auto-
biography *Dichtung and Wahrheit*, being aware that facts
stand in our recollection as trees, houses, mountains, rivers
stand in the landscape; that lights and shadows change their
places between sunrise and sunset, and that objects are
grouped into new combinations as the point of vision alters.
But none of these involuntary freaks of memory can be traced
in Carlyle's *Reminiscences*. After two and forty years the
scenes and persons which he describes remain as if photo-
graphed precisely as they are to be found in his contempo-
rary letters. Nothing is changed. The images stand as they
were first printed, the judgements are unmodified, and are
often repeated in the same words. His matured and epito-
mised narrative may thus be trusted as an entirely authentic
record of the scenes which are recorded at fuller length in the
accounts which he sent at the time to his family and friends.
With Irving he was better pleased than he expected. Un-
 easiness Carlyle had felt about him—never, indeed, that the
simplicity and truth of Irving's disposition could be im-
paired or tarnished, but that he might be misled and con-
 fused by the surroundings in which he was to find him.
"The orator," he wrote, "is mended since I saw him at
Dunkeld: he begins to see that his honours are not super-
natural; and his honest practical warmth of heart is again
becoming the leading feature in his character."² He was
thrown at once into Irving's circle, and made acquaintance with various persons whom he had previously heard celebrated. Mrs. Strachey, Mrs. Buller's sister, he admired the most. Her husband, too, he met and liked, and her niece, Miss Kirkpatrick. [He was soon introduced to the literary worthies of London—"Barry Cornwall," Allan Cunningham, Thomas Campbell—and, of course, made the pilgrimage to Highgate to meet Coleridge.]

Coleridge naturally was an object of more than curiosity. He was then at the height of his fame—poet, metaphysician, theologian, accomplished, or supposed to be accomplished, in the arts in which Carlyle was most anxious to excel. Carlyle himself had formed a high if not the highest opinion of the merits of Coleridge, who was now sitting up at Highgate receiving the homage of the intellectual world, and pouring out floods of eloquence on all who came to worship in a befitting state of mind. The befitting state was not universal even in those who sincerely loved the great man. Leigh Hunt and Lamb had sate one night in the Highgate drawing room for long hours listening to the oracle discoursing upon the Logos. Hunt, as they stood leaning over a stile in the moonlight, on their way home, said, "How strange that a man of such indisputable genius should talk such nonsense!" "Why, you see," said Lamb, stammering, "C-c-coleridge has so much f-f-fun in him."

The finished portrait of Coleridge is found in Carlyle's Life of Sterling. The original sketch is in a letter of the 24th of June to his brother John.

I have seen many . . . curiosities. Not the least of these I reckon Coleridge, the Kantean metaphysician and quondam Lake poet. I will tell you all about our interview when we meet. Figure a fat flabby incurvated personage, at once short, rotund and relaxed, with a watery mouth, a snuffy nose, a pair of strange brown timid yet earnest looking eyes, a high tapering brow, and a great bush of grey hair—you will have some faint idea of Coleridge. He is a kind, good soul, full of religion and affection, and poetry and animal magnetism. His cardinal sin is that he wants will; he has no resolution, he shrinks from pain or labour in any of its shapes. His very attitude bespeaks this: he never straightens his knee joints, he stoops with his fat ill shapen shoulders, and in walking he does not tread but shovel and slide—my father would call it skluiffing. He is also always busied to keep by strong and frequent inhalations the water of his mouth from overflowing; and his eyes
have a look of anxious impotence; he *would* do with all his heart, but he knows he dare not. The conversation of the man is much as I anticipated. A forest of thoughts; some true, many false, most part dubious, all of them ingenious in some degree. But there is not method in his talk; he wanders like a man sailing among many currents, whithersoever his lazy mind directs him—; and what is more unpleasant he preaches, or rather soliloquizes: he cannot speak; he can only “tal-k” (so he names it). Hence I found him unprofitable, even tedious: but we parted very good friends I promising to go back and see him some other evening—a promise I fully intend to keep. . . . I reckon him a man of great and useless genius—a strange not at all a great man.

The Bullers were still uncertain about their future movements. One day they were to take a house at Boulogne, the next to settle in Cornwall, the next to remain in London, and send Carlyle with the boys into the country. As a temporary measure, ten days after his arrival he and Charles found themselves located in lodgings at Kew Green, which Carlyle soon grew weary of and Charles Buller hated; while Carlyle, though he appreciated, and at times even admired, Mrs. Buller’s fine qualities, was not of a temper to submit to a woman’s caprices.

Mrs. Page [his landlady] was unlike the dames who had driven Carlyle so distracted in Edinburgh, and the contrast between the respectful manners of English people and the hard familiarity of his countrywomen struck him agreeably. Time and progress have done their work, whether for good or evil, and it would at present be difficult to find reverential landladies either at Kew Green or anywhere in the British dominions; Kew Green has become vulgarised, and the grace has gone from it; the main points of the locality can be recognised from Carlyle’s picture, but cockneys and cockney taste are now in possession. The suburban sojourn came to an early end, and with it Carlyle’s relations with Mr. Buller and his family. He describes the close of the connection in words which did not express his deliberate feeling. He knew that he owed much to Mrs. Buller’s kindness; and her own and Mr. Buller’s regard for him survived in the form of strong friendship to the end of their lives. But he was irritated at the abruptness with which he conceived that he had been treated. He was proud and thin-skinned. [A] letter [to his mother] is dated from Irving’s house at
Pentonville, which was again immediately opened to him, and contains the history of the Buller break-up, and of a new acquaintance which was about to take him to Birmingham. "My dear Mother" [he begins],

I suppose you are not expecting to hear from me so soon again, and still less to hear the news I have got to tell you. The last letter was dated from Kew Green; there will no more of mine be dated there: last time, I was complaining of the irresolute and foolish fluctuations of the Bullers; I shall never more have reason to complain of their proceedings, I am now free of them for ever and a day. . . . It was agreed that I should quit them—an arrangement not a little grievous to old Buller & his son, but nowise grievous to his wife, one of whose whims was Cambridge University; in which whim so long as she persists, she will be ready to stake her whole soul on the fulfilment of it. . . .

My movements for a while must be rather desultory. My first is to the northward. Among the worthy persons whom I have met with here is a Mr. Beddomes [Badams], a friend of Irvings, a graduate in medicine tho' his business is in chemical manufactories at Birmingham, where I understand he is rapidly realizing a fortune. This man one of the most sensible clear-headed persons I have ever met with seems also one of the kindest. After going about together for a day or two, talking about pictures, and stomach-disorders in the cure of which he is famous, and from which he once suffered four years of torment in person—what does the man do but propose that I should go up to Birmingham, and live a month with him that he might find out the make of me, and prescribe for my unfortunate inner man! . . . I have consented to go with him.5

Carlyle was now once more his own master, adrift from all engagements which made his time the property of others, and without means or prospect of support save what his pen could earn for him. Miss Welsh had expected with too sanguine ignorance that when his first writings had introduced him to the world, the world would rush forward to his assistance; that he would be seized upon for some public employment, or at worst would be encouraged by a sine-cure. The world is in no such haste to recognise a man of original genius. Unless he runs with the stream, or with some one of the popular currents, every man's hand is at first against him. Rivals challenge his pretensions; his talents are denied; his aims are ridiculed; he is tried in the furnace of criticism, and it is well that it should be so. A man does not know himself what is in him till he has been

157
tested; far less can others know; and the metal which glit­ ters most on the outside most often turns out to be but pinchbeck. A longer and more bitter apprenticeship lay upon Carlyle than even he, little sanguine as he was, might at this time have anticipated. His papers on Schiller had been well received and were to be collected into a volume; a contemptuous review of *Meister* by De Quincey appeared in the *London Magazine,* but the early sale was rapid. He had been well paid for the first specimens of jewels which he had brought out of the German mines. An endless vein remained unwrought, and the field was for the present his own. Thus he went down to Birmingham to his friend with a light heart, anxious chiefly about his health, and convinced that if he could mend his digestion, all else would be easy for him. Birmingham with its fiery furnaces and fiery politics was a new scene to him, and was like the opening of some fresh volume of human life. He has given so full a history of his experiences when he was Mr. Badams' guest that there is no occasion to dwell upon it. The visit lasted two months instead of one. His first impression of the place, as he described it in a letter to his brother, is worth preserving as a specimen of his powers of minute word-painting, and as a description of what Birmingham was sixty years ago.

Birmingham I have now tried for a reasonable time, and I cannot complain of being tired of it. As a town, it is pitiful enough; a mean congeries of bricks, including scarcely one or two large capitalists, some hundreds of minor ones, and perhaps a hundred and twenty thousand sooty artisans in metals & chemical produce. The streets are ill-built, ill-paved, always flimsy in their aspect, often poor, sometimes miserable. Not above one or two of them are paved with flag-stones at the sides; and to walk upon the little egg-shaped slipper flints that supply their place is something very like a penance. Yet withal it is interesting, from some of the commons or lanes that spot or intersect the green woody undulating environs, to view this City of Tubal-cain. Torrents of thick smoke with ever and anon a burst of dingy flame are issuing from a thousand funnels; “a thousand hammers fall by turns on the red [i]ron of the furnace”; you hear the clank of innumerable steam-engines, the rumbling of vans and cars and the hum of men, interrupted by the sharper rattle of some canal-boat loading or disloading, or perhaps some fierce explosion where the cannon-founders are proving their new-made ware. I have seen their rolling mills; their polishing of teapots and buttons and gunbarrels, and fire-shovels and swords, and all manner of toys and tackle; I have looked into their iron-
works (where 150,000 men are smelting the metal, in a district a few miles to the north), their coal mines—fit image of Avernus!—their tubs and vats (as large as country-churches) full of copperas and aquafortis and oil of vitriol; and the whole is not without its attractions as well as repulsions, of which when we meet I will preach to you at large.⁶

But all the while Carlyle's heart was in Scotland, at Haddington—and less at Haddington than at Mainhill. The strongest personal passion which he experienced through all his life was his affection for his mother. She was proud and wilful, as he. He had sent her, or offered her, more presents, and she had been angry with him. She had not been well, and she was impatient of doctors' regulations.

Eight weeks were passed with Badams, without, however, the advantage to Carlyle's health which he had looked for. There had been daily rides into the country, visits to all manner of interesting places—Hadley, Warwick, and Kenilworth. The society had been interesting, and Badams himself all that was kind and considerate. But the contempt of "drugs" which he had professed in London had been rather theoretic than practical; and the doses which had been administered perhaps of themselves accounted for the failure of other remedies. At the beginning of September an invitation came to Carlyle to join the Stracheys at Dover. The Irvings were to be of the party. Irving needed rest from his preaching. Mrs. Irving had been confined and had been recommended sea air for herself and her baby. The Stracheys and Miss Kirkpatrick had taken a house at Dover; the Irvings had lodgings of their own, but were to live with their friends, and Carlyle was to be included in the party. Mrs. Strachey was a very interesting person to him, still beautiful, younger than Mrs. Buller, and a remarkable contrast to her. Mrs. Buller was a sort of heathen; Mrs. Strachey was earnestly religious. She is "as unlike her" [Mrs. Buller], Carlyle told his mother, "as pure gold is to gilt copper: she is an earnest, determined, warm-hearted, religious matron, while the other is but a fluttering patroness of routs and operas."⁷ An invitation to stay with her had many attractions for him.

The Dover visit, however, was accomplished, and the unexpected trip to Paris which grew out of it. For this, too,
the reader is mainly referred to the *Reminiscences* which
need no correction from contemporary letters; and to which
those letters, though written when the scenes were fresh,
can still add little, save a further evidence of the extreme ac­
curacy of his memory.8

Mrs. Strachey came down [to Dover] after a few days.
The little party was always together—walking on the beach
or reading Fletcher’s *Purple Island*. Mrs. Strachey herself
was in full sympathy with Irving, if no one else was. Then
her husband came, who was especially wanting in sympathy.
The difference of sentiment became perceptible. The
French coast lay invitingly opposite. The weather was
beautiful. A trip to Paris was proposed and instantly de­
cided on. Mr. Strachey, Miss Kirkpatrick, and Carlyle were
to go. Mrs. Strachey and the Irvings were to stay behind. A
travelling carriage was sent across the channel, post-horses
were always ready on the Paris road, and Carlyle, who had
but left Scotland for the first time four months before, and
had been launched an entire novice into the world, was now
to be among the scenes so long familiar to him as names.
They went by Montreuil, Abbeville, Nampont, with Sterne’s
*Sentimental Journey* as a guide book, when Murray was
unknown. They saw the Cathedral at Beauvais, for which
Carlyle did not care at all; they saw French soldiers,
for which he cared a great deal. He himself could speak a
little French; Strachey, like more Englishmen, almost
none. Montmorency reminded him of Rousseau. From
Montmartre they looked down on Paris: “not a breath of
smoke or dimness anywhere, every roof and dome and spire
and chimney-top clearly visible, and the skylights sparkling
like diamonds: I have never,” he says, “since or before,
seen so fine a view of a Town.”9 Carlyle, who could see
and remember so much of Stratford, where he stayed only
while the coach changed horses, coming on Paris fresh, with a
mind like wax to receive impressions, yet tenacious as steel
in preserving them, carried off recollections from his twelve
days’ sojourn in the French capital which never left him, and
served him well in after years when he came to write about
the Revolution. He saw the places of which he had read. He
saw Louis Dix-huit lying in state, Charles Dix, Legendre
(whose *Geometry* he had translated for Brewster), the
great Laplace, M. de Chézy the Persian professor. He heard Cuvier lecture. He went to the Théâtre Français, and saw and heard Talma in Oedipè. He listened to a sermon at Ste. Geneviève. A more impressive sermon was a stern old grey-haired corpse which he saw lying in the Morgue. He saw the French people, and the ways and works of them, which interested him most of all. These images, with glimpses of English travellers, were all crowded into the few brief days of their stay; the richest in new ideas, new emotions, new pictures of human life, which Carlyle had yet experienced.

From the many letters which he wrote about it, I select one to his brother John.

Of Paris I shall say nothing till we meet. It is the Vanity-fair of the universe, and cannot be described in many letters. . . . With very few exceptions the streets are narrow and crowded and unclean; the kennel in the middle, and a lamp hanging over it here and there, on a rope from side to side. There are no foot-paths; but an everlasting press of carriages and carts, and dirty people hastening to and fro among them, amidst a thousand gare-gares! and sacrés and other oaths and admonitions; while by the side are men roasting chestnuts in their booths; fruit-shops, wine-shops, barbers, silk-merchants selling à Prix juste (without cheating), restaurateurs, cafés, traiteurs, magasins de bon-bons, billiard tables, estaminets (gin-shops), débits de tabac (where you buy a cigar for a halfpenny, and go out smoking it), and every species of dépôt and entrepot and magasin for the comfort and refreshment of the physical part of the natural man; plying its vocation in the midst of noise and stink, both of which it augments by its produce and its efforts to dispose of it. The Palais Royal is a spot unrivalled in the world; the chosen abode of vanity and vice; the true palace of the tigre-singes (tiger-apes) as Voltaire called his countrymen; a place which I rejoice to think is separated from me by the girdle of the ocean, and never likely to be copied in the British isles. I dined in it often; and bought four little bone Huis at a frank (9-1/2 d) each for our four sisters at Mainhill. It is a sort of emblem of the French character; the perfection of the physical and fantastical part of our nature, with an absence of all that is solid and substantial in the moral and often in the intellectual part of it. Looking-glasses and trinkets and fricassées and gaming-tables seem to be the life of a Frenchman; his home is a place where he sleeps and dresses; he lives in the salon du restaurateur on the boulevards or the garden of the Palais royal. Every room you enter, destitute of carpet or fire, is expanded into boundlessness by mirrors, and I should think about fifty thousand dice-boxes are set a rattling every night (especially on Sundays) within the
walls of Paris. There the people sit and chatter, and fiddle away existence as if it were all a raree-shew; careless how it go, so they have excitement, des sensations agréables. Their palaces and picture-galleries and triumphal arches are the wonder of the Earth; but the stink of their streets is considerable, and you cannot walk on them without risking the fracture of your legs of [or] neck. 10

Such was Carlyle's sudden visit to Paris—an incident of more importance to him than he knew at the moment. He complained before and he complained after of the hardness of fortune to him; but fortune in the shape of friends was throwing in his way what very few young men better connected in life have the happiness of so early falling in with. The expedition created no small excitement at Mainhill. The old people had grown up under the traditions of the war. For a son of theirs to go abroad at all was almost miraculous. When they heard that he was gone to Paris, "all the stoutness of their hearts" was required to bear it.

The holiday was over. Carlyle returned to London with the Stracheys, and settled himself in lodgings in Southampton Street, near Irving. Here at any rate he intended to stay till Schiller was off his hands complete in the form of the book. That accomplished, the problem of his future life remained to be encountered. What was he to do? He was adrift, with no settled occupation. To what should he turn his hand? Where should he resolve to live? He had now seen London. He had seen Birmingham with its busy industries. He had seen Paris. He had been brought into contact with English intellectual life. He had conversed and measured strength with some of the leading men of letters of the day. He knew that he had talents which entitled him to a place among the best of them. But he was sick in body, and mentally he was a strange combination of pride and self-depreciation. He was free as air, but free only, as it seemed to him, because of his insignificance,—because no one wanted his help. Most of us find our course determined by circumstances. We are saved by necessity from the infirmity of our own wills. No necessity interfered with Carlyle. He had the world before him with no limitations but his poverty, and he was entirely at sea. So far only he was determined, that he would never sell his soul to the
Devil, never speak what he did not wholly believe, never
do what in his inmost heart he did not feel to be right, and
that he would keep his independence, come what might.

Literature lay open. Nothing could hinder a man there
save the unwillingness of publishers to take his wares; but
of this there seemed to be no danger. Meister seemed to be
coming to a second edition; the Schiller, such parts of it as
had as yet appeared, had been favourably noticed; and
Schiller's own example was specially encouraging. Schiller,
like himself, had been intended for the ministry, had re­
coiled from it, had drifted, as he had done, into the initial
states of law, but had been unable to move in professional
harness. Schiller, like himself again, had been afflicted with
painful chronic disease, and, though it killed him early, his
spirit had triumphed over his body. At the age at which
Carlyle had now arrived, Schiller's name was known in
every reading household in Germany, and his early plays
had been translated into half the languages in Europe.
Schiller, however, more fortunate than he, possessed the
rare and glorious gift of poetry. Carlyle had tried poetry
and had consciously failed. He had intellect enough. He had
imagination—no lack of that, and the keenest and widest
sensibilities; yet with a true instinct he had discovered that
the special faculty which distinguishes the poet from other
men, nature had not bestowed upon him. He had no correct
metrical ear; the defect can be traced in the very best of his
attempts, whether at translation or at original composi­
tion. He could shape his materials into verse, but without
spontaneity, and instead of gaining beauty they lost their force
and clearness. His prose at this time was, on the other
hand, supremely excellent, little as he knew it. The sen­
tences in his letters are perfectly shaped, and are pregnant
with meaning. The more impassioned passages flow in
rhythmical cadence like the sweetest tones of an organ.
The style of the Life of Schiller is the style of his letters. He
was not satisfied with it; he thought it "wretched," "bom­
bastic," "not in the right vein." It was in fact simple. Few
literary biographies in the English language equal it for
grace, for brevity, for clearness of portraiture, and artist­
like neglect of the unessentials. Goethe so clearly recog­
nised its merits, that in 1830 it was to be translated under his
direction into German, and edited with a preface by himself. While England and Scotland were giving Carlyle at best a few patronising nods, soon to change to anger and contempt, Goethe saw in this young unknown Scotchman the characteristics of a true man of genius, and spoke of him "as a new moral force, the extent and effects of which it was impossible to predict."\(^{11}\)

The rewriting and arranging of the *Life of Schiller* was more tedious than Carlyle expected. It was not finished till the middle of winter, all which time Carlyle was alone in his London lodgings.

The correspondence with Miss Welsh had continued regularly since Carlyle left Scotland. Letters written under such circumstances are in their nature private, and so must for the most part remain. Miss Welsh, however, was necessarily a principal element in any scheme which Carlyle might form for his future life, and to her his views were exposed without the smallest reserve. The pensions or sinecures of which her too sanguine expectation had dreamt, he had known from the first to be illusions. He must live, if he lived at all, by his own hand. He had begun to think that both for body and mind London was not the place for him. He had saved between two and three hundred pounds, beyond what he had spent upon his brothers. His tastes were of the simplest. The plainest house, the plainest food, the plainest dress, was all that he wanted. The literary men whom he had met with in the metropolis did not please him. Some, like Hazlitt, were selling their souls to the periodical press. Even in Campbell and Coleridge the finer powers were dormant or paralysed, under the spell it seemed of London and its influences. Southey and Wordsworth, who could give a better account of their abilities, had turned their backs upon the world with its vain distinctions and noisy flatteries, and were living far away among the lakes and mountains. [To Jane, Carlyle wrote of his London acquaintances.]

On the whole, however, [Irving] is among the best fellows in London; by far the best that I have met with. Thomas Campbell has a far clearer judgment, infinitely more taste and refinement; but there is no living well of thought or feeling in him; his head is a shop not a manufactory; and for his heart, it is as dry as a Greenock
kipper. I saw him for the second time, the other night; I viewed him more clearly and in a kindlier light, but scarcely altered my opinion of him. He is not so much a man, as the Editor of a Magazine: his life is that of an exotic; he exists in London, as most Scotchmen do, like a shrub disrooted, and stuck into a bottle of water. Poor Campbell! There were good things in him too: but Fate has pressed too heavy on him, or he has resisted it too weakly. His poetic vein is failing or run out; he has a Port-Glasgow wife, and their only son is in a state of idiocy. I sympathized with him; I could have loved him, but he has forgot the way to love.— Little Procter here has set up house on the strength of his writing faculties, with his wife a daughter of the “Noble Lady” [Mrs. Anna Montagu]. He is a good-natured man, lively and ingenious; but essentially a Small.— Coleridge is sunk inextricably in the depths of putrescent indolence. Southey and Wordsworth have retired far from the din of this monstrous city. So has Thomas Moore. Whom have we left? The dwarf Opium-Eater (my Critic in the London Magazine) lives here in lodgings, with a wife and children living or starving on the scanty produce of his scribble, far off in Westmoreland. He carries a laudanum bottle in his pocket; and the venom of a wasp in his heart. . . . A rascal Maghean (or Mag[i]n[n] who writes much of the blackguardism of Blackwood) his [has] been frying him to cinders on the gridiron of the John Bull. Poor Dequincey! He had twenty thousand pounds, and a liberal share of gifts from nature: vanity and opium have brought him to the state of “dog distract or monkey sick.” If I could find him, it would give me pleasure to procure him one substantial beef-steak before he dies— Hazlitt is writing his way thro’ France and Italy: the ginshops and pawnbrokers bewail his absence. Leigh Hunt writes “wishing caps” for the Examiner, and lives on the tightest of diets at Pisa.— But what shall I say of you, ye Theodore Hooks, ye Majins, and Darlys, and all the spotted fry that “report” and “get up” for the “Public Press”; that earn money by writing calumnies, and spend it in punch and other viler objects of debauchery? Filthiest and basest of the children of men! . . .

Such is the “Literary World” of London; indisputably the poorest part of its population at present.\(^\text{12}\)

While in this humour with English men of letters, Carlyle was surprised and cheered by a letter from one of the same calling in another country, the man whom above all others he most honoured and admired, Goethe himself. He had sent a copy of his translation of *Meister* to Weimar, but no notice had been taken of it, and he had ceased to expect any. “It was almost like a message from Fairy Land; I could scarcely think that *this was* the real hand and signature of that mysterious personage, whose name had floated thro’ my fancy, like a sort of spell, since boyhood; whose
Goethe. Unbounded was Carlyle's reverence for the German sage, who stands behind his vision of the hero. Correspondence, begun in 1824, continued regularly from 1827 until Goethe's death in 1832. Carlyle earned Goethe's respect through his biography of Schiller, his translation of Wilhelm Meister, and his articles on German literature. Chiefly from Goethe's writings, Wilhelm Meister in particular, did Carlyle take strength to emerge from the Leith Walk "conversion" of 1822 described graphically in "The Everlasting No" of Sartor. "I then felt, and still feel, endlessly indebted to Goethe in the business," he wrote in the Reminiscences; "he, in his fashion, I perceived, had travelled the steep rocky road before me,—the first of the moderns." Carlyle's brother John sent him this engraving, a gift to Carlyle from Baron von Eichthal, from Munich in 1828. Underneath it Goethe had written in 1825: "Liegt dir Gestern klar und offen / Wirkst du Heute kräftig frey; / Kannst auch auf ein Morgen hoffen / Das nicht minder glücklich sey." Carlyle translated the lines thus: "Know'st thou Yesterday, its aim and reason; / Work'st thou well Today, for worthy things? / Calmly wait the Morrow's hidden season, / Need'st not fear what hap soe'er it brings." (Engraving by S. Bendixon after the painting by Carl Christian Vogel von Vogelstein, courtesy of the Carlyle House, Chelsea.)
thoughts had come to me in maturer years with almost the impressiveness of revelations.”

This is the first of several letters which Carlyle received from Goethe; the earliest token of the attention which he had commanded from the leader of modern literature, an attention which deepened into regard and admiration when the *Life of Schiller* reached Goethe’s hands. The acquaintance which was to prove mutually interesting came of course to nothing. The momentary consequence which attached to him as the correspondent of the poet-minister of the Duke of Weimar disappeared in England, where he seemed no more than an insignificant struggling individual, below the notice of the privileged circles.

Goethe’s letter was more than a compliment. Goethe, who did not throw away his words in unmeaning politenesses, had noticed Carlyle; and notice was more welcome from such a source than if it had come from ministers or kings. The master had spoken approvingly. The disciple was encouraged and invigorated. He had received an earnest that his intellectual career would not be a wholly unfruitful one. Pleasant as it was, however, it did not help the solution of the pressing problem, what was he immediately to do? The prospect of a farm in Scotland became more attractive the more he thought of it. Freedom, fresh air, plain food, and the society of healthy, pious people, unspoilt by the world and its contagion—with these life might be worth having and might be turned to noble uses. He had reflected much on his engagement with Miss Welsh. He had felt that perhaps he had done wrong in allowing her to entangle herself with a person whose future was so uncertain, and whose present schemes, even if realised successfully, would throw her, if she married him, into a situation so unlike what she had anticipated, so unlike the surroundings to which she had been accustomed. In his vehement way he had offered to release her if she wished it; and she had unhesitatingly refused. As little, however, was her ambition gratified with the prospect of being mistress of a Scotch farm. She had mocked at his proposal. She had pointed out with serious truth his own utter unfitness for a farmer’s occupation. She had jestingly told him that she had land of her own at Craigenputtoch. The tenant was leaving. If he was bent on trying, let him try Craigenputtoch. He took her jest in
earnest. Why should he not farm Craigenputtoch? Why should not she, as she was still willing to be his life companion, live with him there? Her father had been born in the old manor-house, and had intended to end his days there. To himself the moorland life would be only a continuance of the same happy mode of existence which he had known at Mainhill. In such a household, and in the discharge of the commonest duties, he had seen his mother become a very paragon of women. He did not understand, or he did not wish to understand, that a position which may be admirably suited to a person who has known no other, might be ill-adapted to one who had been bred in luxury and had never known a want uncared for. The longer he reflected on it, the more desirable the plan of taking Craigenputtoch appeared to him to be.

Miss Welsh, after having lost Irving, had consented to be Carlyle's wife as soon as he was in a fair position to marry, in the conviction that she was connecting herself with a man who was destined to become brilliantly distinguished, whom she honoured for his character and admired for his gifts, in whose society and in whose triumphs she would find a compensation for the disappointment of her earlier hopes. She was asked to be the mistress of a moorland farming establishment. Had she felt towards Carlyle as she had felt towards his friend, she would perhaps have encountered cheerfully any lot which was to be shared with the object of a passionate affection. But the indispensable feeling was absent. She was invited to relinquish her station in society, and resign comforts which habit had made necessary to her, and she was apparently to sacrifice at the same time the very expectations which had brought her to regard a marriage with Carlyle as a possibility. She knew better than he what was really implied in the situation which he offered her. She knew that if farming on a Scotch moor was to be a successful enterprise, it would not be by morning rides, metaphorical vituperation of "lazy hinds," and forenoons and evenings given up to poetry and philosophy. Both he and she would have to work with all their might, and with their own hands, with all their time and all their energy, to the extinction of every higher ambition. Carlyle himself also she knew to be entirely unfit for any such occupation.
The privations of it might be nothing to him, for he was used to them at home, but he would have to cease to be himself before he could submit patiently to a life of mechanical drudgery. She told him the truth with the merciless precision which on certain occasions distinguished her.

Think of some more promising plan, than farming the most barren spot in the county of Dumfries-shire— What a thing that would be to be sure! you and I keeping house at Craigenputtoch! I would just as soon think of building myself a nest on the Bass-rock—nothing but your ignorance of the place saves you from the imputation of insanity for admitting such a thought. Depend upon it, you could not exist there a twelvemonth. For my part I would not spend a month on it with an Angel— Think of something else then—apply your industry to carry it into effect[sic.] your talents to glide[e] over the inequality of our births and then—we will talk of marrying. If all this were realized I think I should have good sense enough to abate something of my romantic ideal, and to content myself with stopping short on this side idolatry— At all events I will marry no one else— This is all the promise I can or will make. A positive engagement to marry a certain person at a certain time, at all haps and hazards[,] I have always considered the most rediculous thing on earth: it is either altogether useless or altogether miserable; if the parties continue faithfully attached to each other it is a mere ceremony—if otherwise it becomes a galling fetter reveting [riveting] them to wretchedness and only to be broken with disgrace.

Such is the result of my deliberations on this very serious subject[.] You may approve of it or not; but you cannot either persuade me or convince me out of it— My decisions—when I do decide [—] are unalterable as the laws of the Medes & Persians— Write instantly and tell me that you are content to leave the event to time and destiny—and in the meanwhile to continue my Friend and Guardian which you have so long and so faithfully been— and nothing more—

It would be more agreeable to etiquette, and perhaps also to prudence, that I should adopt no middle course in an affair such as this—that I should not for another instant encourage an affection I may never reward and a hope I may never fulfil; but cast your heart away from me at once since I cannot embrace the resolution which would give me a right to it for ever. This I would assuredly do if you were like the generality of lovers, or if it were still in my power to be happy independent of your affection but as it [is] neither etiquette nor prudence can obtain this of me. If there is any change to be made in the terms on which we have so long lived with one another; it must be made by you not me— I cannot make any[.]]

An ordinary person who had ventured to make such a proposal as Miss Welsh had declined, would have been
supremely foolish if he had supposed that it could be acceded to; or supremely selfish if he had possessed sufficient influence with the lady whom he was addressing to induce her to listen to it. But Carlyle was in every way peculiar. Selfish he was, if it be selfishness to be ready to sacrifice every person dependent on him, as completely as he sacrificed himself to the aims to which he had resolved to devote his life and talents. But these objects were of so rare a nature, that the person capable of pursuing and attaining them must be judged by a standard of his own. His rejoinder throws a light into the inmost constitution of his character. He thanked Miss Welsh for her candour; he was not offended at her resoluteness; but also, he said, he must himself be resolute. She showed that she did not understand him. He was simply conscious that he possessed powers for the use of which he was responsible, and he could not afford to allow those powers to run to waste any longer.

The functions of a biographer are, like the functions of a Greek chorus, occasionally at the important moments to throw in some moral remarks which seem to fit the situation. The chorus would remark, perhaps, on the subtle forms of self-deception to which the human heart is liable, of the momentous nature of marriage, and how men and women plunge heedlessly into the net, thinking only of the satisfaction of their own immediate wishes. . . . Self-sacrifice it might say was a noble thing. But a sacrifice which one person might properly make, the other might have no reasonable right to ask or to allow. It would conclude, however, that the issues of human acts are in the hands of the gods, and would hope for the best in fear and trembling. Carlyle spoke of self-denial. The self-denial which he was prepared to make was the devotion of his whole life to the pursuit and setting forth of spiritual truth; throwing aside every meaner ambition. But apostles in St. Paul’s opinion were better unwedded. The cause to which they give themselves leaves them little leisure to care for the things of their wives. To his mother Carlyle was so loving,

That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
Visit her face too roughly.16

This was love indeed—love that is lost in its object, and
THE YEARS 1824–1825

thinks first and only how to guard and foster it. His wife he would expect to rise to his own level of disinterested self-surrender, and be content and happy in assisting him in the development of his own destiny; and this was selfishness—selfishness of a rare and elevated kind, but selfishness still; and it followed him throughout his married life. He awoke only to the consciousness of what he had been, when the knowledge would bring no more than unavailing remorse. He admired Miss Welsh; he loved her in a certain sense; but, like her, he was not in love.

He admired Miss Welsh. Her mind and temper suited him. He had allowed her image to intertwine itself with all his thoughts and emotions; but with love his feeling for her had nothing in common but the name. There is not a hint anywhere that he had contemplated as a remote possibility the usual consequence of a marriage—a family of children. He thought of a wife as a companion to himself who would make life easier and brighter to him. But this was all, and the images in which he dressed out the workings of his mind served only to hide their real character from himself.

Miss Welsh had been perfectly candid; and had she ended there, Carlyle—if persons in such situations were ever as wise as they ought to be—would have seen from [her] frank expression of her feelings that a marriage with himself was not likely to be a happy one for her. He had already dimly perceived that the essential condition was absent. She did not love him as she felt that she could love. As little, however, could she make up her mind to give him up or consent that, as he had said, they should "go forth upon our several paths."¹⁷ She refused to believe that he could mean it. "How could I," she said, "part from the only living soul that understands me? I would marry you tomorrow rather! but then,—our parting would need to be brought about by death or some dispensation [sic] of uncontrollable Providence—were you to will it, to part would no longer be bitter, the bitterness would be in thinking you unworthy."¹⁸ Part with Carlyle, however, she would not, unless he himself wished it.

Thus matters drifted on to their consummation. The stern and powerful sense of duty in these two remarkable persons
held them true through a long and trying life together to the course of elevated action which they had both set before themselves. He never swerved from the high aims to which he had resolved to devote himself. She, by never failing toil and watchfulness, alone made it possible for him to accomplish the work which he achieved. But we reap as we have sown. Those who seek for something more than happiness in this world must not complain if happiness is not their portion. She had the companionship of an extraordinary man. Her character was braced by the contact with him, and through the incessant self-denial which the determination that he should do his very best inevitably exacted of her. But she was not happy. Long years after, in the late evening of her laborious life, she said, "I married for ambition. Carlyle has exceeded all that my wildest hopes ever imagined of him—and I am miserable."