I have been thus particular in describing the conditions under which *The French Revolution* was composed, because this book gave Carlyle at a single step his unique position as an English man of letters, and because it is in many respects the most perfect of all his writings. In his other works the sense of form is defective. He throws out brilliant detached pictures, and large masses of thought, each in itself inimitably clear. There is everywhere a unity of purpose, with powerful final effects. But events are not left to tell their own story. He appears continually in his own person, instructing, commenting, informing the reader at every step of his own opinion. His method of composition is so original that it cannot be tried by common rules. The want of art is even useful for the purposes which he has generally in view: but it interferes with the simplicity of a genuine historical narrative. *The French Revolution* is not open to this objection. It stands alone in artistic regularity and completeness. It is a prose poem with a distinct beginning, a middle, an end. It opens with the crash of a corrupt system, and a dream of liberty which was to bring with it a reign of peace and happiness and universal love. It pursues its way through the failure of visionary hopes into regicide and terror, and the regeneration of mankind by the guillotine. It has been called an *epic*.\(^1\) It is rather an Aeschylean drama composed of facts literally true, in which the Furies are seen once more walking on this prosaic earth and shaking their serpent hair.

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1. *epic*
The form is quite peculiar, unlike that of any history ever
written before, or probably to be written again. No one can
imitate Carlyle who does not sincerely feel as Carlyle felt.
But it is complete in itself. The story takes shape as it grows,
a definite organic creation, with no dead or needless matter
anywhere disfiguring or adhering to it, as if the metal had
been smelted in a furnace seven times heated, till every
particle of dross had been burnt away. As in all living things,
there is the central idea, the animating principle round which
the matter gathers and develops into shape. Carlyle was
writing what he believed would be his last word to his coun-
trymen. He was not looking forward to fame or fortune, or
to making a position for himself in the world. He belonged
to no political party, and was engaged in the defence of no
theory or interest. For many years he had been studying
painfully the mystery of human life, wholly and solely that
he might arrive at some kind of truth about it and under-
stand his own duty. He had no belief in the virtue of special
"Constitutions." He was neither Tory, nor Whig, nor Rad-
ical, nor Socialist, nor any other "ist." He had stripped
himself of "formulas, as of poisonou[s] Nessus' shirts," and
flung them fiercely away from him, finding "formulas"
in these days to be mostly lies agreed to be believed. In
the record of God's law, as he had been able to read it,
he had found no commendation of "symbols of faith," of
church organisation, or methods of government. He wrote,
as he said to Sterling, "in the character of man" only; and
of a man without earthly objects, without earthly prospects,
who had been sternly handled by fate and circumstances,
and was left alone with the elements, as Prometheus on the
rock of Caucasus. Struggling thus in pain and sorrow, he
desired to tell the modern world that, destitute as it and its
affairs appeared to be of Divine guidance, God or justice
was still in the middle of it, sternly inexorable as ever;
that modern nations were as entirely governed by God's
law as the Israelites had been in Palestine—laws self-acting
and inflicting their own penalties, if man neglected or defied
them. And these laws were substantially the same as those
on the Tables delivered in thunder on Mount Sinai. You
shall reverence your Almighty Maker. You shall speak
truth. You shall do justice to your fellow-man. If you set
truth aside for conventional and convenient lies; if you prefer your own pleasure, your own will, your own ambition, to purity and manliness and justice, and submission to your Maker's commands, then are whirlwinds still provided in the constitution of things which will blow you to atoms. Philistines, Assyrians, Babylonians, were the whips which were provided for the Israelites. Germans and Huns swept away the Roman sensualists. Modern society, though out of fear of barbarian conquerors, breeds in its own heart the instruments of its punishment. The hungry and injured millions will rise up and bring to justice their guilty rulers, themselves little better than those whom they throw down, themselves powerless to rebuild out of the ruins any abiding city; but powerful to destroy, powerful to dash in pieces the corrupt institutions which have been the shelter and the instrument of oppression.

And Carlyle believed this—believed it singly and simply as Isaiah believed it, not as a mode of speech to be used in pulpits by eloquent preachers, but as actual literal fact, as a real account of the true living relations between man and his Maker. The established forms, creeds, liturgies, articles of faith, were but as the shell round the kernel. The shell in these days of ours had rotted away, and men supposed that, because the shell was gone, the entire conception had been but a dream. It was no dream. The kernel could not rot. It was the vital force by which human existence in this planet was controlled, and would be controlled to the end.

In this conviction he wrote his spectral History of the French Revolution.* Spectral, for the actors in it appear without their earthly clothes: men and women in their natural characters, but as in some vast phantasmagoria, with the supernatural shining through them, working in fancy their own wills or their own imagination; in reality, the mere instruments of a superior power, infernal or divine, whose awful presence is felt while it is unseen.

To give form to his conception, Carlyle possessed all the qualities of a supreme dramatic poet, except command of metre. He has indeed a metre, or rather a melody, of his own. The style which troubled others, and troubled himself when he thought about it, was perhaps the best possible to
convey thoughts which were often like the spurting of volcanic fire; but it was inharmonious, rough-hewn, and savage. It may be said, too, that he had no “invention.” But he refused to allow that any real poet had ever “invented.” The poet had to represent truths, not lies, or the polite form of lies called fiction. Homer, Dante, believed themselves to be describing real persons and real things. Carlyle “created” nothing; but with a real subject before him he was the greatest of historical painters. He took all pains first to obtain an authentic account of the facts. Then, with a few sharp lines, he could describe face, figure, character, action, with a complete insight never rivalled except by Tacitus, and with a certain sympathy, a perennial flashing of humour, of which Tacitus has none. He produces a gallery of human portraits each so distinctly drawn, that whenever studied it can never be forgotten. He possessed besides another quality, the rarest of all, and the most precious, an inflexible love of truth. It was first a moral principle with him; but he had also an intellectual curiosity to know everything exactly as it was. Independently of moral objections to lies, Carlyle always held that the fact, if you knew it, was more interesting than the most picturesque of fictions, and thus his historical workmanship is sound to the core. He spared himself no trouble in investigating; and all his effort was to delineate accurately what he had found. Dig where you will in Carlyle’s writings, you never come to water. Politicians have complained that Carlyle shows no insight into constitutional principles, that he writes as if he were contemptuous of them or indifferent to them. Revolutionists have complained of his scorn of Robespierre, and of his tenderness to Marie Antoinette. Catholics find Holy Church spoken of without sufficient respect, and Tories find kings and nobles stripped of their fine clothes and treated as vulgar clay. But Constitutions had no place in Carlyle’s Decalogue. He did not find it written there that one form of government is in itself better than another. He held with Pope:

For Forms of Government let fools contest;
Whate’er is best administered is best.5

His sympathies were with purity, justice, truthfulness, man-
ly courage, on whichever side he found them. His scorn was for personal cowardice, or cant, or hollow places of any kind in the character of men; and when nations are split into parties, wisdom or folly, virtue or vice, is not the exclusive property of one or the other.

A book written from such a point of view had no "public" prepared for it. When it appeared, partisans on both sides were offended; and to the reading multitude who wish merely to be amused without the trouble of thinking, it had no attraction till they learned its merits from others. But to the chosen few, to those who had eyes of their own to see with, and manliness enough to recognise when a living man was speaking to them, to those who had real intellect, and could therefore acknowledge intellect and welcome it whether they agreed or not with the writer's opinions, the high quality of The French Revolution became apparent instantly, and Carlyle was at once looked up to, by some who themselves were looked up to by the world, as a man of extraordinary gifts; perhaps as the highest among them all. Dickens carried a copy of it with him wherever he went. Southey read it six times over. Thackeray reviewed it enthusiastically. Even Jeffrey generously admitted that Carlyle had succeeded upon lines on which he had himself foretold inevitable failure. The orthodox political philosophers, Macaulay, Hallam, Brougham, though they perceived that Carlyle's views were the condemnation of their own, though they felt instinctively that he was their most dangerous enemy, yet could not any longer despise him. They with the rest were obliged to admit that there had arisen a new star, of baleful perhaps and ominous aspect, but a star of the first magnitude in English literature.

But six months had still to pass before the book could be published, and I am anticipating. Carlyle had been so long inured to disappointment, that he expected nothing from the world but continued indifference. His only anxiety was to be done with the thing, and it had still to be printed and corrected. The economical crisis had been postponed. Life could be protracted at Cheyne Row for another six months on the proceeds of "Mirabeau" and "The Diamond Necklace."

Printing a book is like varnishing a picture. Faults and
merits both become more conspicuous. Carlyle, who was hard to please with his own work, and had called it worth nothing while in progress, found it in the proofs better than he expected. He made no foul copy of it or of anything that he wrote in these early days. The sentences completed themselves in his head before he threw them upon paper, and only verbal alterations were afterwards necessary; but he omitted many things in his proof sheets, redivided his books and chapters, and sharpened the lights and shadows.

Meantime the economic problem, though postponed, was still unsolved. The book was finished, but no money could be expected from it, at least for a considerable time; and, unless something could be done, it was likely that London, and perhaps England, would lose Carlyle just at the moment when they were learning the nature of the man to whom they were refusing ordinary maintenance. His circumstances were no secret. His friends were doubtless aware that he had been invited to lecture in America. A large number of persons, more or less influential, knew vaguely that he was a remarkable man, and some of them cast about for means to prevent such a scandal. One of the most anxious and active, be it recorded to her honour, was Harriet Martineau.

To Miss Martineau, to Miss [Jane] Wilson, another accomplished lady friend, and to several more, it occurred that if Carlyle could be wanted to lecture in Boston, he might equally well lecture in London. If he could speak as well in public as he could talk in private, he could not fail of success; and money, a little, but enough, might be realised in this way. The Royal Institution was first thought of, but the pay at the Royal Institution was small, and the list, besides, was full for the year. The bold ladies turned their disappointment to better advantage. Carlyle gave a grumbling consent. They canvassed their acquaintance. They found two hundred persons ready each to subscribe a guinea to hear a course of lectures from him in a room engaged for himself only. The French Revolution was not to appear till the summer. That so many lords and ladies and other notabilities should have given their names for such a purpose implies that Carlyle's earlier writings had already made an impression. London society loves novelties, but it
expects that the novelties shall be entertaining, and does not go into a thing of this kind entirely on hazard. Carlyle was spared all trouble. All that he had to do was to prepare something to say; and Willis's Rooms were engaged for him, the lectures to begin on May 1. He shuddered, for he hated display, but he felt that he must not reject an opening so opportunely made for him. He had no leisure for any special study, but he was full of knowledge of a thousand kinds. He chose the subject which came most conveniently for him, since he had worked so hard upon it at Craigenputtoch—German literature. There were to be six lectures in all. A prospectus was drawn up and printed, intimating that on such and such days Thomas Carlyle would deliver addresses:

I. Of the Teutonic People. German Language. Affinities. ULFILA. Northern Immigrations. The Nibelungen Song.

II. The Minne-singers. The Didactic: Tauler, Boner, Hugo von Trimberg: Gesta Romanorum. Tyll Eulenspiegel; Reynard the Fox; Theuerdank, by KAISER MAX. Legend of Faust; Popular Legends. Universities. The Reformation: LUTHER; ULRICH HUTTEN.

III. The Master-singers: HANS SACHS. Jacob Böhme. Decay of German Literature: ANTON ULRICH, Duke of Brunswick; OPITZ; Loga; Hoffmannswaldau; Thomasius. LEIBNITZ; Maskov; Liskov.

IV. Resuscitation of German Literature: LESSING; KLOPSTOCK. Leipsig: Rabener, Gellert, Ramler, Gleim; Schubart, Kleist. The Swiss: Haller; Bodmer; Gessner; Lavater. Efflorescence of German Literature: Werter; GÖTZ von BERLICHINGEN. Bürger; Voss; the Stollbergs. HEYNE; WINKELMANN.

V. Characteristics of new German Literature: Growth and Decay of Opinions; Faust. Philosophy: Mendelsohn, Hamann: KANT; FICHTE; SCHELING. Art and Belief: GOETHE.

VI. The Drama: SCHILLER. The Robbers; Wilhelm Tell.
A copious bill of fare! A more experienced hand would have spread the subjects of any one of these lectures into the necessary six, watering them duly to the palate of fashionable audiences. But Carlyle, if he undertook anything, chose to do it in a way that he could think of without shame. He was sulky and even alarmed, for he did not intend to read. He had undertaken to speak, and speak he would, or else fail altogether.

There was additional anxiety. Mrs. Carlyle in the cold spring weather had caught an influenza, and was seriously ill again. The alarm passed off; a change of weather carried away the influenza; Mrs. Welsh came up, and was most welcome, though the occasion of the summons was gone.

All thoughts in Cheyne Row were now directed to the lectures. Carlyle had never spoken in public, save a few words once at a dinner at Dumfries. With all his self-assertion he was naturally a shy man, and only those who are either perfectly un-selfconscious or perfectly impudent can look without alarm to a first appearance on a platform. As the appointed day approached, there was a good deal of anxiety among his friends. Men of high sincerity seldom speak well. It was an art to which they do not incline, being careful about truth, and knowing how difficult it is to adhere to truth in rapid and excited delivery. With skill and training even a sincere man can speak tolerably without telling many lies; but he is weighted heavily against competitors who care for nothing but effect. Carlyle, quoting Goethe, compared speech-making to swimming. It is more like skating. When a man stands on skates upon ice for the first time, his feet seem to have no hold under him; he feels that if he stirs he will fall; he does fall; the spectators laugh; he is ashamed and angry at himself; he plunges off somehow, and finds soon that if he is not afraid he can at least go forward. This much the sincere man arrives at on the
platform without extraordinary difficulty; and if he has any truth to utter he can contrive to utter it, so that wise hearers will understand him. The curving and winding, the graceful sweeps this way and that way in endless convolutions, he leaves to the oratorical expert, with whom he has no desire to put himself in competition.

Nobody could feel assured that something strange might not happen. One acquaintance was afraid he would spoil all by beginning with “Gentlemen and ladies,” putting the ladies last. It was more likely, his wife said, that he would begin with “Men and women,” or with “Fool creatures come hither for diversion.”

In point of fact, Carlyle acted like himself—not like other people, for that he could not do. He had the usual difficulties. Even when he was at ease, his speech, if he was in earnest, was not smooth and flowing, but turbid like a river in a flood. In the lecture-room he had the invariable preliminary fear of breaking down. He had to pause often before words would come, for he was scrupulous to say nothing which he did not mean. When he became excited, he spoke with a broad Annandale accent and with the abrupt manners which he had learnt in his father’s house. But the end of it was that the lectures were excellent in themselves and delivered with strange impressiveness. Though unpolished, he was a gentleman in every fibre of him, never to be mistaken for anything else; and the final effect was the same as that which was produced by his writings, that here was a new man with something singular to say which well deserved attention. Of the first lecture Carlyle writes:

It was a sad planless jumble . . . but full enough of new matter, and of a furious determination on the poor Lecturer’s part not to break down. Plenty of incondite stuff, accordingly, there was; new, and in a strangely new dialect and tone: the audience intelligent, partly fashionable, was very good to me; and seemed, in spite of the jumbled state of things, to feel it entertaining, even interesting. I pitied myself, so agitated, terrified, driven desperate and furious! But I found I had no remedy, necessity compelling.  

When all was over, he sent a full account to his brother:

As to the Lectures . . . the thing went off not without effect; and I have great cause to be thankful that I am so handsomely
THE YEARS 1837-1838

quit of it. The audience, composed of mere quality and notabilities, was very humane to me; they seemed indeed to be not a little astonished at the wild Annandale voice which occasionally got high and earnest; in these cases they sat as still under me as stones. I had, I think, 200 and odd. The pecuniary net-result is £135, the expenses being great. . . . But the ulterior issues of it may by possibility be less inconsiderable. It seems possible I may get into [a] kind of way of lecturing or otherwise speaking direct to my fellow-creatures; and so get delivered out of this awful quagmire of difficulties in which you have so long seen me struggle and wriggle.9

Mrs. Carlyle adds a P.S.

I do not find that my husband has given you any adequate notion of the success of his lectures; but you will make large allowances for the known modesty of the man. Nothing that he has ever tried seems to me to have carried such conviction to the public heart that he is a real man of genius and worth being kept alive at a moderate rate. Lecturing were surely an easier profession than authorship. We shall see. My cough is quite gone and there is no consumption about me at present—I expect to grow strong now that he has nothing more to worry him.10

Miss Wilson and Miss Martineau had done well for Carlyle with their lecture adventure. They had brought him directly under the public eye at an important moment of his life; but far more than that, they had solved the problem whether it was possible for him to continue in London and follow his trade. £135, to the modest household in Cheyne Row, was not only, as Carlyle called it, “financial safety” for a year to come, but it was wealth and luxury. Another course had been promised for the season following, the profits of which could hardly be less, and with a safe income of £150 a year the thrifty pair would feel superior to fortune. At all events the heavy veil on the future had now lifted. There would be no more talk of the American backwoods, or of a walk over Europe like Teufelsdröckh. No “roup” (heavy mist) need be feared in Cheyne Row, or even such pinch of penury as had been already experienced there. Life and labour were now made possible on honest terms, and literary recognition, if it was to come at all, could be waited for without starvation. It was as if some cursed enchanter’s spell had been broken. How the fetters had galled, Carlyle hardly knew till he began to stretch his limbs in freedom. The French Revolution was published immediately after-

363
It was not “subscribed for” among the booksellers. The author’s name was unknown to most of them, and the rest had no belief in him. The book itself, style and matter, was so new, so unlike anything that had ever been seen before, that the few who read it knew not what to say or think. The reviewers were puzzled. Such a fabric could not be appraised at once like a specimen from a familiar loom. The sale at first was slow, almost nothing; but Carlyle was not dissatisfied with the few opinions which reached him. “Some,” he said, “condemn me, as is very natural, for ‘affectation.’ Others are hearty, even passionate (as Mill) in their estimation. On the whole it strikes me as not unlikely that the Book may take some hold of the English People, and do them and itself a little good.”¹¹ One letter especially pleased him. “Jeffrey,” he said, “writes me . . . full of good augury, of praise and blame, and how I shall infallibly be much praised and much blamed, and on the whole carry my point; really a kind hearty Letter from the little man.”¹² This was well enough, but months would pass before anything could be gathered like a general verdict; and Carlyle, after the long strain, was sinking into lassitude.

[On 21 June] Carlyle fled to Scotland fairly broken down. He had fought and won his long battle. The reaction had come, and his strangely organised nervous system was shattered. He went by sea from Liverpool to Annan. His brother Alick had come to meet him at Annan pier, and together they walked up to Ecclefechan. The view from the road across the Solway to the Cumberland mountains is one of the most beautiful in the island. The brother having some business in a cottage, Carlyle was left alone leaning on a milestone and looking back on the scene. “Tartarus itself,” he says, “and the pale kingdoms of Dis could not have been more preternatural to me. . . . Most stern, gloomy, sad, grand, yet terrible, yet steeped in woe!”¹³ The spot had been familiar to him from childhood. The impression was not a momentary emotion, but abode with him for many years. Let not the impatient reader call it affectation or exaggeration. If he does, he will know nothing of Carlyle. These spectral visions were part of his nature, and always haunted him when his mind had been overstrained. He stayed at Scotsbrig two months, wholly idle, reading novels, smoking
pipes in the garden with his mother, hearing notices of his book from a distance, but not looking for them or caring about them. "The weather," he says in a letter,  

after a long miserable spring, is the beautifullest I ever saw; the trees wave peaceful music in front of my window here, which is shoved up to the very top; Mother is washing in the kitchen apartment to my left; the sound of Jamie building his Peat-stack is audible; and they are stirring beat-potatoes down below. . . . My souls one wish is to be left alone; to hear the rustle of the trees, the gushing of the burn, and lie vacant as ugly and stupid as I like. There is soothing and healing for me in the green solitude of these simple spaces. I bless myself that the broiling horror of London is far, far . . . "A favourable review in the Chronicle," . . . a "favourable review in the L. and Westminster," &c&c: no one of them have I yet set eye on. I find it, a bottom, hurtful to look after the like: one has a prurient titillability in that kind; extremely despicable; which it is better wholly to steer clear of.\textsuperscript{14}  

To his wife he wrote regularly, but in a tone somewhat constrained. Spenser’s knight, sorely wounded in his fight with the dragon, fell back under the enchanted tree whence  

flowd, as from a well,  
A trickling streame of Balme, most soveraine . . .  
Life and long health that gratious ointment gave,  
And deadly woundes could heale, and reare againe  
The senselesse corse appointed for the grave.  
Into that same he fell: which did from death him save.\textsuperscript{15}  

What that tree was to the bleeding warrior, the poor Annan­dale farmhouse, its quiet innocence, and the affectionate kindred there, proved then as always to Carlyle, for he too had been fighting dragons and been heavily beaten upon.  

Autumn, as usual, brought back the migratory London flocks, and among them Carlyle. He found his wife better in health, delighted to have him again at her side, and in light­ened humour altogether. She knew, though he, so little vain was he, had failed as yet to understand it, that he had returned to a changed position, that he was no longer lonely and neglected, but had taken his natural place among the great writers of his day. Popular he might not be. Popularity with the multitude he had to wait for many a year; but he was acknowledged by all whose judgement carried weight with it to have become actually what Goethe had long ago foretold
that he would be—a new moral force in Europe, the extent of which could not be foreseen, but must be great and might be immeasurable. He was still poor, wretchedly poor according to the modern standard. But the Carlyles did not think about standards, and on that score had no more anxieties. He had no work on hand or immediate desire for any. He was able to tell his brother John that, "having no Book to write this year, I shall not feel so fretted, shall not fret any one: there will be a cheerfuller household than of old." §16 An article on Sir Walter Scott had been promised to Mill, and a subject had to be thought of for the next Spring's lectures. Both of these would be easy tasks. Meanwhile, he discovered that his wife was right. "I am to be considered as a kind of successful man. The poor Book has done me real service; and in very truth had been abundantly reviewed and talked about and belauded far more than I had any expectation of. Neither, apparently, is it yet done." §17 He sent to Scotsbrig cheery accounts of himself. "I find John Sterling here," he said, "and many friends; all kinder each than the other to me[;] with talk and locomotion the days pass cheerfully till I rest, and gird myself together again. They make a great talk about the Book; which seems to have succeeded in a far higher degree than I looked for. . . . Everybody is astonished at every other bodys being pleased with this wonderful performance!" §18

The Scott article was written as it appears unaltered in the Miscellanies. Carlyle was not himself pleased with it, and found the task at one moment disgusting. §19 He began it with indifference. The "steam got . . . up," and he fell into what he called "the old sham-happy nervously excited mood,—too well known to me!" §20 The world was satisfied, and what such a man as Carlyle had deliberately to say about Scott will always be read with interest; but he evidently did not take to the subject with cordial sympathy. A man so sternly in earnest could never forgive Sir Walter for squandering such splendid gifts on amusing people, and for creating a universal taste for amusement of that description. He did not perhaps improve his humour by reading, while he was writing the paper, the strongest imaginable contrast to the "Waverley Novels," Dante's Inferno. He found Dante "up-hill work," "but a great and enduring thing." It is "worth
noting,” he says with a glance at Scott, “how loth we are to read great works; how much more willingly we cross our legs, back to candles, feet to fire, over some Pickwick or lowest trash of that nature! The reason is, we are very indolent, very wearied forlorn; and read oftenest chiefly that we may forget ourselves. Consider what Popularity, in that case, must mean!”

Signs appeared, nevertheless, that the public could now find something, either amusement or instruction, or pleasure of some kind, in Carlyle’s own writings. The French Revolution had made an alteration in this respect. The publishers spoke to him about reprinting Sartor, about “an edition of his collected articles.” The question had become one of terms only, for the risk could be ventured. “Changed times,” as he half-bitterly observed to his mother.

Fraser the other day sent for me, to propose that he should reprint Teufelsdrockh and my Review Articles collected into volumes. The wind is changed there, at any rate! The last time he heard of Teufelsdrockh and the proposal to print it, he shrieked at the very notion. Seriously, it is good news this; an infallible sign that the other Book, the F. Revolution, prospers: nay still better, a sign that I shall either now or some time get a little cash by these poor scattered Papers. I have resolved that Fraser, for his old scream’s sake, and for my own sake, shall not have the printing of the volumes without some very respectable sum of money now:—he should have done it formerly, and not screamed!

Internally at his own home things were going brightly with Carlyle. It was the coldest winter remembered in England, Murphy’s winter, when the Thames was frozen from Oxford to Reading; but his wife remained well without signs of cough, and from all sides came signs of goodwill for the “great writer” who was now become famous. Scotsbrig sent its barrels of meal and butter. “Alick,” who, farming having gone ill with him, had started a shop in Ecclefechan, sent an offering of first-rate tobacco. “Poor Alick,” his brother said, “the first of his shop-goods; we received them with a most wistful thankfulness, glad and wae.” This was no more than usual; but Peers and Cabinet Ministers began to show a wish for a nearer acquaintance with a man who was so much talked of, and a singular compliment was paid him which later history makes really remarkable. “Some people here,” he said, “are beginning to imitate my style,
and such like. The French Revolution I knew from the first to be savage, an orson of a book; but the people have seen that it has a genuineness in it; and in consideration of that, have pardoned all the rest."  

Among the established "great," the first who held out a hand was Mr. Spring Rice, Lord Monteagle, afterwards Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Liberal Ministry. Spring Rice was a statesman of the strict official school, not given to Carlylean modes of thinking; but he was ready to welcome a man of genius, however little he might agree with him. His eldest son, Stephen Spring Rice, who died before his father, being untied to officiality, could admire more freely; and one at least of his sisters had been a subscriber to the lectures on German literature. Accordingly there came an invitation to Cheyne Row to an evening party. Carlyle would have refused, but his wife insisted that he should go. "It was a brilliant-looking thing," he said; "all very polite; marchionesses &c, 'with feelings exactly like ours (as my dear Mother said of the Foreign persons in Wilhelm Meister)."  

"Literature," so the fates had decided, was to remain Carlyle's profession. He had meant to abandon it, but the cord which held him to his desk, though strained, had not broken. Yet it was a "bad best," he thought, for any man, more trying to the moral nature, and in his own case, so modestly he rated his powers, less likely to be useful, than any other honest occupation. He would still have gladly entered the public service if employment had been offered him, as offered it would have been, in any country but England, to a man who had shown ability so marked. He was acknowledged as a man of genius, and in England it is assumed that for a man of genius no place can be found. He is too good for a low situation. He is likely to be troublesome in a higher one, and is thus the one man distinctly un promotable. *Foenum habet in cornu* [i.e., he is dangerous]—avoid him above all men. Carlyle had to accept his lot, since such had been ordered for him. But his distaste continued, and extended to other members of the craft who were now courting his acquaintance. He found them bores, a class of persons for whom he had the least charity.

It often strikes me as a question whether there ought to be any such thing as a literary man at all. He is surely the wretchedest of all sorts
of men. I wish with the heart occasionally I had never been one. I
cannot say I have ever seen a member of the guild whose life seems
to me enviable. A man, a Goethe, will be a man on paper too; but
it is a questionable life for him.28

Let young men who are dreaming of literary eminence as
the laurel wreath of their existence reflect on these words.
Let them win a place for themselves as high as Carlyle won,
they will find that he was speaking no more than the truth,
and will wish, when it is too late, that they had been wise in
time. Literature—were it even poetry—is but the shadow of
action; the action the reality, the poetry an echo. The
Odyssey is but the ghost of Ulysses—immortal, but a ghost
still; and Homer himself would have said in some moods
with his own Achilles—

Rather would I in the sun's warmth divine
Serve a poor churl who drags his days in grief,
Than the whole lordship of the dead were mine.29

Jeffrey, while congratulating his friend on the success of
The French Revolution, yet could see that the business of an
author was not the happiest or the most healthful for a per­
son of Carlyle's temper. Contact with the common things of
life would make him more tolerant of a world which if not
perfect was better than it had ever been before, and would
give him a better chance of mending it, while he despised it
less.30 But it was not to be, and even to Carlyle authorship
was better than idleness. When he was idle the acids ate
into the coating of his soul.31 The first set of lectures Car­
yle had been obliged to deliver out of his acquired knowl­
dge, having no leisure to do more. For the second he pre­
pared carefully, especially the Greek and Roman parts.
Classics are not the strong point of an Edinburgh education,
and the little which he had learned there was rusty. "I have
read Thucydides, Herodotus," he wrote in April; "part of
Niebuhr, Michelet &c.,—the latter two with small fruit and
much disappointment, the former two not. . . . I should
have several good things to say and do very well were I in
health, were I in brass [in a brazen mood]."32 But trouble
had come into Cheyne Row again. Without any definite
ailment, Mrs. Carlyle seemed unwell in mind and body.
There was even a thought of sending her to Italy when the
lectures were over, if there were means to do it. Carlyle even
thought of going thither himself, or at any rate of leaving London altogether.

[His letters of the time] indicate no pleasant condition of mind, not a condition in which it could have been agreeable to take to the platform again and deliver lectures. But Carlyle could command himself when necessary, however severe the burden that was weighing upon him. This time he succeeded brilliantly, far better than on his first experiment. The lectures were reported in the *Examiner* and other papers, and can be recovered there by the curious. He did not himself reprint them, attaching no importance to what he called "a detestable mixture of Prophecy and Playactorism."  

The course was of twelve lectures divided into four periods of three lectures each. The first lecture was "of literature in general"; the second, on the Greeks from Homer through "Aeschylus to Socrates," illustrated the "Decline of the Greeks"; the third, on the Romans, closed the first period. The fourth and fifth lectures were on the Middle Ages—particularly, as might be expected, on German literature—and on Dante. "Yesterday," wrote Carlyle in his Journal, "lectured on Cervantes and the Spaniards. A hurried, loose-flowing, but earnest, wide-reaching sort of thing; which the people liked better than I." On 31 May he wrote: "Lecture on Luther and the Reformation; then on Shakespeare and John Knox (my best hitherto); finally on Voltaire and French scepticism,—the worst, as I compute, of all. To-morrow is to be Lecture tenth on Johnson, &c: there are then but two remaining." The final two lectures treated "Consummation of Scepticism—Wertherism—The French Revolution" and "Of Modern German Literature—Goethe and His Works."

The lecture course was perhaps too prolonged. Twelve orations such as Carlyle was delivering were beyond the strength of any man who meant every word that he uttered. It ended, however, with a blaze of fireworks—people "weeping" at the passionately earnest tone in which for once they heard themselves addressed. The money result was nearly £300, after all expenses had been paid. "A great blessing," as Carlyle said, "for a man that has been hunted by the squalid spectre of Beggary." There were prospects of im-
proved finances from other quarters too. Notwithstanding all the talk about *The French Revolution*, nothing yet had been realised for it in England, but Emerson held out hopes of remittances on the American edition. *Sartor*, “poor beast,” as Mrs. Carlyle called it, was at last coming out in a volume, and there was still a talk of reprinting the essays. But Carlyle was worn out. Fame brought its accompaniments of invitations to dinner which could not be all refused; the dinners brought indigestions; and the dog days brought heat, and heat and indigestion together made sleep impossible.