No Cromwell will ever come out of me in this world. I dare not even try Cromwell.¹

Carlyle was to try Cromwell, and was to clothe the ghost with body again, impossible as the operation seemed; but he had to raise another ghost first—an old Catholic ghost—before he could practise on the Puritans.

Events move so fast in this century, one crowding another out of sight, that most of us who were alive in 1842 have forgotten how menacing public affairs were looking in the autumn of that year. Trade was slack, owing, it was said, to the corn-laws, and hundreds of thousands of operatives were out of work. Bread was dear, owing certainly to the corn-laws, and actual famine was in the northern towns; while the noble lords and gentlemen were shooting their grouse as usual. There was no insurrection, but the “hands,” unwillingly idle, gathered in the streets in dumb protest. The poor-houses overflowed, and could hold no more; local riots brought out the yeomanry, landowners and farmers, to put down the artisans, who were short of bread for their families, lest foreign competition should bring down rents and farmers’ profits. Town and country were ranked against each other for the last time. Never any more was such a scene to be witnessed in England.

In his Suffolk ride Carlyle had seen similar scenes of misery. Indignation blazed up in him at the sight of England with its enormous wealth and haggard poverty; the earth
THE YEARS 1842-1843

would not endure it, he thought. The rage of famished millions, held in check only by the invisible restraints of habit and traditional order, would boil over at last. In England, as in France, if the favoured classes did not look better to their ways, revolution would and must come; and if it could create nothing, might at least shatter society to pieces. His Chartism had been read and wondered over, but his prophecies had been laughed at, and the symptoms had grown worse. The corn-laws, it is to be remembered, were still standing. If they had continued to stand, if the growl of the hungry people had not been heard and the meaning of it discerned, most of us think that revolution would have come, and that Carlyle’s view of the matter was right.

Between him and all other work, dragging off his mind from it, lay this condition of England question. Even if the dread of revolution was a chimaera, the degradation of the once great English people, absorbed, all of them, in a rage for gold and pleasure, was itself sufficient to stir his fury. He believed that every man had a special duty to do in this world. If he had been asked what specially he conceived his own duty to be, he would have said that it was to force men to realise once more that the world was actually governed by a just God; that the old familiar story acknowledged everywhere in words on Sundays, and disregarded or denied openly on week-days, was, after all, true. His writings, every one of them, his essays, his lectures, his History of the French Revolution, his Cromwell, even his Frederick, were to the same purpose and on the same text—that truth must be spoken and justice must be done; on any other conditions no real commonwealth, no common welfare, is permitted or possible. Political economy maintained that the distribution of the profits of industry depended on natural laws, with which morality had nothing to do. Carlyle insisted that morality was everywhere, through the whole range of human action. As long as men were allowed to believe that their business in this world was each to struggle for as large a share as he could get of earthly good things, they were living in a delusion with hearts poisoned and intellect misled. Those who seemed to prosper under such methods, and piled up huge fortunes, would gather no good out of them. The multitude whose own toil produced what they were for-
Men say that he was an idle croaker, and that events have proved it. All was really going well. The bubbles on the surface were only the signs of the depth and power of the stream. There has been no revolution, no anarchy; wealth has enormously increased; the working men are better off than ever they were, etc. etc.

In part, yes. But how much has been done meanwhile of what he recommended? and how much of that is due to the effect which he himself produced? The corn-laws have been repealed, and this alone he said at the time would give us a respite of thirty years to set our house in order. *Laissez-faire* has been broken in upon by factory acts, education acts, land acts, emigration schemes, schemes and acts on all sides of us, that patience and industry may be snatched from the "grinding" of "natural laws." The "dismal science" has been relegated to "Jupiter and Saturn"; and these efforts have served as lightning-conductors. If we are safe now, we should rather thank him who, more than any other man, forced open the eyes of our legislators.

Forty years ago people were saying with Jeffrey that it was true that there were many lies in the world, and much injustice, but then it had always been so. Our forefathers had been as ill off as we, and probably—nay, certainly—worse off. Carlyle had insisted that no nation could have grown at all, still less have grown to England's stature, unless truer theories of man's claims on man had once been believed and acted on. Whigs and Radicals assured him that the older methods, so far as they differed from ours, were less just and less wise; that, although the artisans and labourers might be ill off occasionally, they were freer, happier, better clothed, better lodged, more enlightened, than in any previous age, and they challenged him to point to a time in English history which could honestly be preferred to the present. Jocelyn's Chronicle coming accidentally across him, with its singularly vivid picture of English life in the twelfth century, gave him the impulse which he needed to answer them, and *Past and Present* was written off with singular ease in the first seven weeks of 1843. His heart was in his subject. He got the book completed, strange to say, without
THE YEARS 1842-1843

preliminary labour-pangs, and without leaving in his correspondence, during the process of birth, a single cry of complaint. The style shows no trace of rapid composition, unless in the white-heat intensity of expression, nor is it savage and scornful anywhere, but rather (for Carlyle) candid and considerate. The arrangement is awkward—as awkward as that of Sartor—for indeed there is no arrangement at all; and yet, as a whole, the book made a more immediate mark than anything which Carlyle had hitherto written. Prophetic utterances seldom fall into harmonious form; they do not need it, and they will not bear it.

Past and Present appeared at the beginning of April 1843, and created at once admiration and a storm of anger. It was the first public protest against the “Sacred Science” which its chief professors have since discovered to be no science, yet which then was accepted, even by the very clergy, whose teaching it made ridiculous, as being irrefragable as Euclid. The idol is dead now, and may be laughed at with impunity. It was then in its shrine above the altar, and to doubt was to be damned—by all the newspapers. In Chartism Carlyle had said that the real aim of all modern revolutionary movements was to recover for the free working man the condition which he had lost when he ceased to be a serf. The present book was a fuller insistence upon the same truth. The world’s chief glory was the having ended slavery, the having raised the toiler with his hands to the rank and dignity of a free man; and Carlyle had to say that, under the gospel of political economy and free contract, the toiler in question had lost the substance and been fooled with the shadow. Gurth, born thrall of Cedric the Saxon, had his share of the bacon. The serf was, at least, as well cared for by his master as a horse or a cow. Under free contract he remained the slave of nature, which would kill him if he could not feed himself; he was as much as ever forced to work under the whip of hunger; while he was an ownerless vagrant, to be employed at competitive wages, the lowest that would keep him alive, as long as employment was to be had, and to be turned adrift to pine in a workhouse when it was no longer any one’s interest to employ him. A cow, a horse, a pig, even a canary bird, was worth a price in the market, was worth feeding and preserving. The free labourer, except at such times as there
happened to be a demand for him, was worth nothing. The rich, while this gospel was believed in, might grow richer; but the poor must remain poor always, without hope for themselves, without prospect for their children, more truly slaves, in spite of their freedom, and even in consequence of their freedom, in a country so densely peopled as England, than the Carolina nigger. The picture was set out with the irony of which Carlyle was so unrivalled a master, with the indignation of which irony is the art.

With the existing state of things the book begins; with the existing state of things, and the only possible remedies for it, the book ends; in the middle stands in contrast the ancient English life under the early Plantagenet kings, before freedom in the modern sense had begun to exist; and the picture of St. Edmund's Abbey and its monks, which is thus drawn, is without a rival in modern literature. As to the relative merits of that age and ours there will be different opinions. We know so well where the collar galls our own necks, that we think anyone better off whose shoulder does not suffer at that particular point. Nor did Carlyle insist on drawing comparisons, being content to describe real flesh-and-blood human beings as they were then, and as they are now, and to leave us to our own reflections.

On the whole, perhaps we shall agree with what Lockhart answered, when Carlyle sent his book to him. Lockhart said he could accept none of his friend's inferences, except one, "that we are all wrong and all like to be damned. . . . Thou hast done a book such as no other living man could do or dream of doing"; that it had made him conscious of life and feeling as he had never been before; and that, finally, he wished Carlyle would write something more about the middle ages, write some romance, if he liked. He had more power of putting life into the dry bones than anyone but Scott; and that, as nothing could be less like Scott's manner of doing it than Carlyle's, there could be no suspicion of imitation. 4

But it is unnecessary for me to review or criticise further a work which has been read so universally, and as to which no two persons are likely entirely to think alike. I shall endeavour rather at this point to describe something of the effect which Carlyle was producing among his contem-
poraries. *Past and Present* completes the cycle of writings which were in his first style, and by which he most influenced the thought of his time. He was a Bedouin, as he said of himself, a rough child of the desert. His hand had been against every man, and every man’s hand against him. He had offended men of all political parties, and every professor of a recognised form of religion. He had offended Tories by his Radicalism, and Radicals by his scorn of their formulas. He had offended High Churchmen by his Protestantism, and Low Churchmen by his evident unorthodoxy. No sect or following could claim him as belonging to them; if they did, some rough utterance would soon undeceive them. Yet all had acknowledged that here was a man of extraordinary intellectual gifts and of inflexible veracity. If his style was anomalous, it was brilliant. No such humourist had been known in England since Swift; and the humour, while as searching as the great Dean’s, was infinitely more genial. Those who were most angry with Carlyle could not deny that much that he said was true. In spite of political economy, all had to admit there was such a thing as justice; that it was the duty of men to abstain from lying a great deal more than they did. “A new thinker,” in Emerson’s phrase, “had been let loose upon the planet”; the representatives of the Religiones Licitae, the conventional varieties of permitted practice and speculation, found themselves encountered by a novel element which would assimilate with none of them, which disturbed all their digestions, yet which they equally could not ignore.

This on the surface. But there were circumstances in the time which made Carlyle’s mode of thought exceptionally interesting, to young men especially whose convictions were unformed and whose line of life was yet undetermined for them. It was an era of new ideas, of swift if silent spiritual revolution. Reform in Parliament was the symbol of a general hope for the introduction of a new and better order of things. The Church had broken away from her old anchorage. The squire parsons, with their sleepy services, were to serve no longer. Among the middle classes there was the Evangelical revival. The Catholic revival at Oxford had convulsed the University, and had set half the educated men and women in England speculating on the authority of the priest-
hood, and the essential meaning of Christianity. All were agreed to have done with compromise and conventionalities. Again the critical and inquiring spirit which had been checked by the French Revolution had awakened from the sleep of half a century. Physical science, now that it was creating railroads, bridging the Atlantic with steamships, and giving proof of capacity which could no longer be sneered at, was forming a philosophy of the earth and its inhabitants, agitating and inconvenient to orthodoxy, yet difficult to deal with. Benthamism was taking possession of dominions which religion had claimed hitherto as its own, was interpreting morality in a way of its own, and directing political action. Modern history, modern languages and literature, with which Englishmen hitherto had been contented to have the slightest acquaintance, were pushing their way into school and college and private families, forcing us into contact with opinions as to the most serious subjects entirely different from our own. We were told to inquire; but to inquire like Descartes with a preconceived resolution that the orthodox conclusion must come out true—an excellent rule for those who can follow it, which all unhappily cannot do. To those who inquired with open minds it appeared that things which good and learned men were doubting about must be themselves doubtful. Thus all round us, the intellectual lightships had broken from their moorings, and it was then a new and trying experience. The present generation which has grown up in an open spiritual ocean, which has got used to it and has learned to swim for itself, will never know what it was to find the lights all drifting, the compasses all awry, and nothing left to steer by except the stars.

In this condition the best and bravest of my own contemporaries determined to have done with insincerity, to find ground under their feet, to let the uncertain remain uncertain, but to learn how much and what we could honestly regard as true, and believe that and live by it. Tennyson became the voice of this feeling in poetry; Carlyle in what was called prose, though prose it was not, but something by itself, with a form and melody of its own. Tennyson's poems, the group of poems which closed with *In Memoriam*, became to many of us what *The Christian Year* was to orthodox

418
Churchmen. We read them, and they became part of our minds, the expression in exquisite language of the feelings which were working in ourselves. Carlyle stood beside him as a prophet and teacher; and to the young, the generous, to everyone who took life seriously, who wished to make an honourable use of it, and could not be content with sitting down and making money, his words were like the morning reveille. The middle-aged and experienced who have outgrown their enthusiasm, who have learnt what a real power money is, and how inconvenient the absence of it, may forego a higher creed; may believe without much difficulty that utilitarianism is the only basis of morals; that mind is a product of organised matter; that our wisest course is to make ourselves comfortable in this world, whatever may become of the next. Others of nobler nature who would care little for their comforts may come at last, after long reflection on this world, to the sad conclusion that nothing can be known about it; that the external powers, whatever they may be, are indifferent to human action or human welfare.

For there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool.

. . . And how dieth the wise man? as the fool.  

To such an opinion some men, and those not the worst, may be driven after weary observation of life. But the young will never believe it; or, if they do, they have been young only in name. Young men have a conscience, in which they recognise the voice of God in their hearts. They have hope. They have love and admiration for generous and noble actions, which tell them that there is more in this world than material things which they can see and handle. They have an intellect, and they cannot conceive that it was given to them by a force which had none of its own. Amidst the controversies, the arguments, the doubts, the crowding uncertainties of forty years ago, Carlyle’s voice was to the young generation of Englishmen like the sound of “ten thousand trumpets” in their ears, as the Knight of Grange said of John Knox. They had been taught to believe in a living God. Alas! it had seemed as if the life might be other moods and tenses, but not in the present indicative. They heard of what He had done in the past, of what He would do in the future, of what it was wished that He might do, of what we were to pray to Him that He would do. Carlyle was the first to make us see
His actual and active presence *now* in this working world, not in rhetoric and fine sentiments, not in problematic miracles at Lourdes or La Salette, but in clear letters of fire which all might read, written over the entire surface of human experience. To him God's existence was not an arguable probability, a fact dependent for its certainty on Church authority, or on Apostolic succession, or on so-called histories which might possibly prove to be no more than legends; but an awful reality to which the fates of nations, the fate of each individual man, bore perpetual witness. Here and only here lay the sanction and the meaning of the word duty. We were to do our work, not because it would prove expedient and we should be rewarded for doing it, but because we were bound to do it by our Master's orders. We were to be just and true, because God abhorred wrong and hated lies, and because an account of our deeds and words was literally demanded and exacted from us. And the lesson came from one who seemed "to speak with authority and not as the Scribes," as if what he said was absolute certainty beyond question or cavil.

Religious teachers, indeed, had said the same thing, but they had so stifled the practical bearing of their creed under their doctrines and traditions, that honest men had found a difficulty in listening to them. In Carlyle's writings dogma and tradition had melted like a mist, and the awful central fact burnt clear once more in the midst of heaven. Nor could anyone doubt Carlyle's power, or Carlyle's sincerity. He was no founder of a sect bent on glorifying his own personality. He was no spiritual janissary maintaining a cause which he was paid to defend. He was simply a man of high original genius and boundless acquirements, speaking out with his whole heart the convictions at which he had himself arrived in the disinterested search after truth. If we asked who he was, we heard that his character was like his teaching; that he was a peasant's son, brought up in poverty, and was now leading a pure, simple life in a small house in London, seeking no promotion for himself, and content with the wages of an artisan.

I am speaking chiefly of the effect of Carlyle in the circles in which I was myself moving. To others he was recommended by his bold attitude on the traditionary formulas, the
defenders of which, though they could no longer use stake or gibbet, yet could still ruin their antagonists’ fortunes and command them to submit or starve. Mere negations, whether of Voltaire or Hume or David Strauss, or whoever it might be, he valued little. To him it was a small thing comparatively to know that this or that theory of things was false. The important matter was not to know what was untrue, but what was true. He never put lance in rest simply for unorthodoxy. False as the priestly mummeries at Bruges might be, he could not wish them away to make room for materialism which was falser than they. Yet he had not concealed that he had small faith in bishops, small faith in verbal inspirations or articles of religion, small concern for the baptismal or other controversies then convulsing the Church of England; and such side cuts and slashes were welcome to the Theological Liberals, who found him so far on their side.

The Radicals, again, might resent his want of reverence for liberty, for political economy, and such like; but he could denounce corn-laws and game-preserving aristocrats with a scorn which the most eloquent of them might envy. In the practical objects at which he was aiming, he was more Radical than they were. They feared him, but they found him useful.

There were others again who were attracted by the quality which Jeffrey so much deprecated. That he was so “dreadfully in earnest,” that he could not sit down quietly and enjoy himself “without a theory of the universe in which he could believe,” was not an offense, but a recommendation. Some people cannot help being in earnest, cannot help requiring a real belief, if life is not to become intolerable to them. Add to this the novelty of Carlyle’s mode of speech, his singularly original humour and imagery; add also the impressiveness of his personal presence, as reported by those who had been privileged to see him, and we have an explanation of the universal curiosity which began to be felt about the Prophet of Cheyne Row, and the fascination which he exercised over a certain class of minds in the days of the Melbourne Ministry and the agitation over the Tracts for the Times.

I, for one (if I may so far speak of myself), was saved by Carlyle’s writings from Positivism, or Romanism, or Atheism, or any other of the creeds or no creeds which in those
ERASMUS DARWIN. Darwin was frequently in the Carlyles' company in the 1840s and 1850s. Carlyle described him in his *Reminiscences* as "one of the sincerest, naturally truest, and most modest of men. Elder brother of Charles Darwin . . . to whom I rather prefer him for intellect, had not his health quite doomed him to silence and patient idleness." This photograph is dated 8 June 1856. (Courtesy of the Columbia University Libraries.)
years were whirling us about in Oxford like leaves in an autumn storm. The controversies of the place had unsettled the faith which we had inherited. The alternatives were being thrust upon us of believing nothing, or believing everything which superstition, disguised as Church authority, had been pleased to impose; or, as a third course, and a worse one, of acquiescing, for worldly convenience, in the established order of things, which had been made intellectually incredible. Carlyle taught me a creed which I could then accept as really true; which I have held ever since, with increasing confidence, as the interpretation of my existence and the guide of my conduct, so far as I have been able to act up to it. Then and always I looked, and have looked, to him as my master. In a long personal intimacy of over thirty years, I learnt to reverence the man as profoundly as I honoured the teacher. But of this I need say no more, and can now go on with the story.

John Carlyle was in Cheyne Row when *Past and Present* came out, and was a stay and comfort to his brother in the lassitude which always followed the publication of a book. He had left the Duke of Buccleuch. Lady Clare had wished him to go back with her to Italy, but for this he had no inclination. An opening had presented itself in London. Lord Jeffrey had recommended him to Lady Holland as physician in attendance, and that distinguished lady had been favourably inclined; but Carlyle, when John consulted him, considered “that she was a wretched, unreasonable, tyrannous old creature,” of whom it would be wise for John to steer clear. As a guest at Chelsea he was welcome always, both to his brother and his sister-in-law: good humoured, genial, always a sunny presence in a house where sunshine was needed. The book sold fast.

*Cromwell*, however, was still not immediately executable. Tired as he was with the efforts of the winter, he was less than ever able to face the London season, especially as increasing popularity increased people’s eagerness to see him. An admirer—a Mr. [Charles] Redwood, a solicitor—living at Llandough, a few miles from Cardiff, had long humbly desired that Carlyle would pay him a visit. An invitation coming at the same time from Bishop Thirlwall, at St.
David's, which could be fitted in with the other, he decided to lay his work by for the present, and make acquaintance with new friends and a new part of the country. Mr. Redwood, who had no literary pretensions, engaged that he should not be made a show of, promised perfect quiet, sea-bathing, a horse if he wished to ride, and the absence of all society, except of himself and his old mother. These temptations were sufficient. On July 3 he left London by train from Paddington to Bristol. A day or two were to be given to acquaintances at Clifton, and thence he was to proceed by a Cardiff steamer. All was strange to him. He had never before been in the South or West of England; and his impressions, coming fresh, formed themselves into pictures, which he threw down in his letters to his wife. The house in Cheyne Row was cleaned and painted during his absence, his wife superintending. On such occasions he was himself better out of the way.

Almost a fortnight was given to Llandough. His friends were all kindness and attention, and their efforts were gratefully appreciated; but the truth must be told—Carlyle required more than simple, quiet people had to give him. He was bored. He reproached himself, but he could not help it. Mr. Redwood was engaged all day in his office at Cowbridge. His guest was left mainly to himself—to ride about the neighbourhood, to bathe, to lie under the trees on the lawn and smoke, precisely what he had fancied that he had desired. "The whole country is of a totally somnolent nature, not ill fitted for a man that has come out to see if he can find any sleep!" He amused himself tolerably with his wife's letters and with Tieck's *Vittoria Accorombona*, which she had provided him with, and begged him to read. He could not approve, however, of this singular book: "a dreadful piece of work on Tieck's part!" he called it. But occasionally his poor host, to show his respect, absented himself from his own work to do the honours of the country, and Carlyle required all his self-command not to be uncivil.

Occasional spurts of complaint over dulness lie scattered in these Llandough letters; but Carlyle knew good people when he saw them. The Redwoods had left him to himself with unobtrusive kindliness. They had not shown him off to their acquaintances. They had thought only what they could
THE YEARS 1842–1843

do for the comfort of an honoured guest—a mode of treatment very different from what he had sometimes experienced. "They are a terrible set of fellows," he said, "those open-mouthed wondering gawpies, who lodge you for the sake of looking at you: that is horrible." It was not, however, with alarm on this score that he entered on his next visiting adventure. He would have preferred certainly that such a man as Thirlwall should not have stooped to be made a bishop of, but he claimed no right to judge a man who was evidently of superior quality. How far he actually knew Thirlwall’s opinions about religion I cannot say. At all events, he thought he knew them. Thirlwall had sought Carlyle’s acquaintance, and had voluntarily conversed with him on serious subjects. Carlyle was looking forward now with curiosity to see how a man who, as he believed, thought much as he did himself, was wearing his anomalous dignities.

I was warmly welcomed; tho’ my Bishop did seem a little uneasy too, but how could he help it! I got with much pomp an extremely bad and late dish of tea; then plenty of good talk till midnight, and a room at the farther wing of the house, still as the heart of wildernesses, where after some smoking &c, I did at last sink into sleep. ... My Bishop, I can discern, is a right solid honest hearted man, full of knowledge and sense; excessively delicate withal, and in spite of his positive temper almost timid; no wonder he is a little embarrassed with me, till he feel gradually that I have not come here to eat him, or make scenes in his still house!14

With the Bishop himself I, keeping a strict guard on my mode of utterance, not mode of thinking, get on extremely well; find him ... very strangely swathed; on the whole right good company; and so we fare along, in all manner of discourse, and even laugh a good deal together. Could I but sleep!—but, then, I never can!15

The expression "strangely swathed" implies that he had found the Bishop not entirely sympathetic; and perhaps he had not remembered sufficiently how beliefs linger honestly in the ablest mind, though the mode of thought be fatally at variance with them.

However this may have been, the visit was over, and Carlyle went his way. His plan was to go first to Gloucester and Worcester to look at the battle-fields; afterwards to go to Scotland, through Liverpool, to see his mother; then to make a tour with his brother John in North Wales; and finally,
before returning to London, to examine the ground of Oliver’s great fight at Dunbar. The railway train carried him past the hills where “the Gloucester Puritans saw Essex’s signal fires and notice that help was nigh.” The scene of the last battle of the Civil War was to have a closer inspection. “Wor’ster,” he writes, “was three miles off the Station, westward. . . . From Severn Bridge I could see the ground of Oliver’s battle; it was a most brief survey: a poor labourer whom I consulted ‘had heerd of sitch a thing,’ wished to God ‘we had another Oliver, sir; times is dreadful bad!’ ”

At Liverpool Carlyle was warmly welcomed by his wife’s uncle, in Maryland Street. He found his brother John waiting for him there. They arranged to wait where they were for a day or two, and then to make their expedition into North Wales together before the days began to shorten.

The North Wales tour was brief. The brothers went in a steamer from Liverpool to Bangor, and thence to Llanberis, again in a “tub-gig,” or Welsh car. They travelled light, for Carlyle took no baggage with him except a razor, a shaving-brush, a shirt, and a pocket-comb; “tooth-brush” not mentioned, but we may hope forgotten in the inventory. They slept at Llanberis, and the next day went up Snowdon. The summit was thick in mist. They met two other parties there coming up from the other side of the mountain “like ghosts of parties escorted by their Charons.” They descended to Beddgelert, and thence drove down to Tremadoc, where they were entertained by a London friend, one of the Chorleys, who had a house at that place. Carlyle began to feel already that he had had enough of it, to tire of his “tumblings” and to find that he did not “at bottom care two-pence for all the picturesqueness in the world.” One night sufficed for Tremadoc. They returned thence straight to Liverpool, and were again in Maryland Street on August 1.

Mrs. Carlyle had been suffering from heat and her exertions in house repairs, and her husband thought it possible that he might take a seaside lodging at Formby, at the mouth of the Mersey, where they could remain together for the rest of the summer. Formby had the advantage of being near Seaforth, where the Paulets lived, with whom Mrs. Carlyle had already become intimate. Mr. Paulet was a merchant,
THE YEARS 1842–1843

a sensible, well-informed, good kind of man. Mrs. Paulet, young, gifted, and beautiful, was one of Carlyle's most enthusiastic admirers. The neighbourhood of such friends as these was an attraction; but the place when examined into was found desolate and shelterless. The experiment of lodgings at Newby had not been successful, so Mrs. Carlyle was left to take care of herself, which she was well able to do, and her husband made off for Scotland by his usual sea route to Annan. Misadventures continued to persecute him on his travels, or rather travelling itself was one persistent misadventure, for he could never allow for the necessities of things.

The steamer, to begin with, left Liverpool at three in the morning. When he went on board "it was . . . Chaos; cloudy, dim, bewildered . . . altogether like a nasty damp, clammy Dream of Confusion, dirt, impediment and general nightmare."19 In the morning there was some amendment. [After a journey of several days] he lay still for a month at Scotsbrig doing nothing save a little miscellaneous reading, and hiding himself from human sight.

Carlyle's time in the North was running out; he had still to see Dunbar battle-field, and he had arranged his movements that he should see it on Oliver's own 3rd of September, the day of the Dunbar fight, the day of the Worcester fight, and the day of his death. One or two small duties remained to be discharged first in Dumfriesshire. His wife had asked him to go once more to Thornhill and Templand to see after her mother's old servants, and to visit also the grave in Crawford Churchyard. To Crawford he was willing to go; from Templand he shrank as too painful. In leaving it, he thought that he had bid adieu to the old scenes for ever. Still this and anything he was ready to undertake if it would give her any pleasure. Most tender, most affectionate, were the terms in which he gave his promise to go. He did go. He distributed presents among the old people, who in Mrs. Welsh had lost their best friend. Finally, he went also to the churchyard.

The day was windless, the earth all still. Grey mist rested on the tops of the green hills, the vacant brown moors; silence as of Eternity rested over the world. It was like a journey thro' the Kingdoms of the Dead; one Hall of Spirits till I got past Crawford. . . . I was as a spirit, in the land of spirits, called land of the living.
At Crawford, Dearest,—I was on a sacred spot; one of the two sacredest in all the world: I was at Her Grave! . . . I mean to go and see your brave Father's Grave too; and I will speak no word about it; you shall hold it for done without my speaking.20

This was written from Edinburgh on September 2. The 3rd was to be given to Dunbar, and along with Dunbar was to be combined the pilgrimage to that last solemn spot to which he referred with so fine delicacy. Without staying to see any Edinburgh acquaintance except David Laing, he went on direct to Haddington, where he was to be the guest of his wife's old and dear friends, the Miss Donaldsons of Sunny Bank. The thoughts which he had brought from Crawford attended him still as he came among the scenes of Mrs. Carlyle's childhood, where he and she had first looked in each other's faces.

These two days the image of my dear little Jeannie has hovered incessantly about me, waking and sleeping; in a sad, yet almost celestial manner; like the spirit, I might say, of a beautiful Dream. These were the streets and places where she ran about, a merry eager little fairy of a child;—and it is all gone away from her now, and she from it; and of all her possessions poor I am, as it were, all that remain to her! My Dearest, while I live, one soul to trust in shall not be wanting. My poor little Jeannie, how solemn is this Hall of the Past; beautiful and mournful; the miraculous River of Existence rolling its grand course here, as elsewhere in the most prophetic places; now ever as of old: godlike tho' dark with death.21

Carlyle feeling and writing with such exquisite tenderness, and Carlyle a fortnight later when he was in Cheyne Row making a domestic earthquake and driving his wife distracted because a piano sounded too loud in the adjoining house, are beings so different, that it seemed as if his soul was divided, like the Dioscuri, as if one part of it was in heaven, and the other in the place opposite to heaven.22 But the misery had its origin in the same sensitiveness of nature which was so tremulously alive to soft and delicate emotion. Men of genius have acuter feelings than common men; they are like the wind-harp, which answers to the breath that touches it, now low and sweet, now rising into wild swell or angry scream, as the strings are swept by some passing gust.

The rest of this letter describes the expedition to Dunbar, and is written at a more ordinary pitch.

428
At Dunbar I found the battleground much more recognisable than any I had yet seen; indeed altogether what one would call clear: it is at the foot, and farther eastward along the slope, of the Hill they call the Doun that the Scots stood, Cromwell at Broxmouth (Duke of Roxburgh’s place) and “saw the sun rise over the sea,” and quoted a certain Psalm. I had the conviction that I stood on the very ground.— Having time to spare (for dinner was at six) I surveyed the old castle, washed my feet in the sea (smoking the while), took an image of Dunbar with me as I could; and then set my face to the wind and the stour [dust-storm] which had by this time risen to a quite tempestuous pitch.

Duties all finished, there remained now to get back to Chelsea. The cheapest, and to Carlyle the pleasantest, way was by sea. A day could be given to Edinburgh, two to the Ferguses at Kirkcaldy. Thence he could go to Mr. Erskine and stay at Linlathen till the 15th, when a steamer would sail from Dundee. After the sight of the battle-fields, the “Cromwell” enterprise seemed no longer impossible. He was longing to be at home and at work; “at home with Goody and her new house and her old heart.” The boat would be forty-five hours on the way. He would be at Chelsea by the 19th, and “his long pilgrimage be ended.” He had seen many things in the course of it, but “nothing half as good as his own Goody.” In the most amiable mood he called on everyone that he knew in Edinburgh—called on his wife’s aunts at Morning-side, called on Jeffrey at Craigcrook, to whom he was always grateful as his first active friend. “I found the old phenomena somewhat in a deteriorated state. The little Duke had lamed his shin; sits lean, disconsolate, irritable, talkative and argumentative as ever, with his foot laid on a stool: poor old fellow, I talked with him, him chiefly, till two o’clock, and then they drove me off homewards in their carriage.”

The days with Erskine in his quiet house at Linlathen were an enjoyment and amusement. Erskine officiating as a country gentleman, as chief commander of a squire’s mansion, was a novel spectacle, the most gentle of men and yet obliged to put on the air of authority, and “doing it dreadfully ill.” But Carlyle’s thoughts were riveted on home. He had been irritable and troublesome before he went away in the summer. He was returning with the sense that in Cheyne Row only was paradise, where he would never be impatient again.