There is a condition familiar to men of letters, and I suppose to artists of all descriptions, which may be called a moulting state. The imagination, exhausted by long efforts, sheds its feathers, and mind and body remain sick and dispirited till they grow again. Carlyle was thus moulting after the *Latter-Day Pamphlets*. He was eager to write, but his ideas were shapeless. His wings would not lift him. He was chained to the ground. Unable to produce anything, he began to read voraciously; he bought a copy of the *Annual Register*; he worked entirely through it, finding there "a great quantity of agreeable and not quite useless reading." He read Sophocles with profound admiration. His friends came about Cheyne Row, eager to see him after his absence. They were welcome in a sense, but "alas!" he confessed, "nobody comes whose talk is half so good to me as silence; I fly out of the way of everybody, and would much rather smoke a pipe of wholesome tobacco than talk to any one in London just now! Nay their talk is often rather an offence to me; and I murmur to myself, 'Why open one's lips for such a purpose?'"

The autumn quarterlies were busy upon the *Pamphlets*, and the shrieking tone was considerably modified. A review of them by Masson in the *North British Review* distinctly pleased Carlyle. A review in the *Dublin* he found "excellently serious," and conjectured that it came from some Anglican pervert or convert. It was written, I believe, by Dr. Ward. The Catholics naturally found points of sym-
pathy in so scornful a denunciation of modern notions about liberty. Carlyle and they believed alike in the divine right of wisdom to govern folly. "The wise man's eyes are in his head; but the fool walketh in darkness." This article provided him "with interesting reflexions . . . for a day or two." But books were his chief resource in these months.

At intervals he thought of writing something. "Ireland" came back upon him occasionally as still a possibility. A theory of education on the plan of Goethe's Wanderjahre would give him scope to say something not wholly useless. These were the two subjects which looked least contemptible. There was English history too: "the Conqueror, the Battle of Towton, Sir Simon de Montfort." "What," he asked himself, "can be done with a British Museum under Gorgons and fat Pedants, with a world so sunk as ours, and alas with a soul so sunk and subdued to its element as mine seems to be! Voyons, voyons (on another Paper); au moins taisons-nous [Let us see, let us see . . . at least let us be silent]!"

Notwithstanding the hopes and resolutions which Carlyle had brought back with him from Scotland, the domestic atmosphere was not clear in Cheyne Row, and had not been clear since his return. Nothing need be said about this. It added to his other discomforts—that was all.

At the end of January he went off again to the Grange, alone this time, to meet an interesting party there; Thirlwall, Milnes, the Stanleys, Sir John Simeon, Trench, then Dean of Westminster, and several others. He might have enjoyed himself if his spirits had been in better order; "the conversation is a thought more solid (thanks chiefly to the Bishop) than is usual." One evening it took a remarkable form, and as he more than once described the scene to me, I quote what he says about it in a letter.

Last night there was a dreadful onslaught made on, what shall I say? properly the Church in presence of Trench and the Bishop: Trench affected to be very busy reading, and managed extremely well; the Bishop was also grand and rationally manful,—intrinsically agreeing with almost everything I said. Poor fat Simeon, a gentleman in search of a religion, sate stupent in the whirlpool of heterodox hail, and seemed to feel if his head were on his shoulders. This is an extraordinary epoch of the world, with a witness!

It was perhaps as an effect of this singular piece of talk, at
any rate in discharge of a long-recognised duty, that Carlyle, on returning home, set about his long-meditated life of John Sterling. To leave Sterling any longer as an anatomical subject for the religious newspapers was treason to his friend's memory. He had waited, partly from want of composure, partly that the dust might settle a little; and now, having leisure on his hands, and being otherwise in the right mood, he re-read Sterling's letters, collected information from surviving relatives, and without difficulty—indeed, with entire ease and rapidity—he produced in three months what is perhaps the most beautiful biography in the English language. His own mind for the past year had been restless and agitated, but no restlessness can be traced in the Life of Sterling. The scorn, the pride, the indignation of the Pamphlets lie hushed down under a stream of quiet affection. The tone is calm and tender. Here, more than in any of the rest of his writings, he could give play, without a jarring note, to the gentlest qualities of his heart and intellect. It was necessary for him to express himself more plainly than he had hitherto done on the received religious creeds; but he wrote without mockery, without exasperation, as if his angry emotions were subdued to the element in which he was working. A friend's grave was no place for theological controversy, and though he allowed his humour free play, it was real play, nowhere savagely contemptuous. Sterling's life had been a short one. His history was rather that of the formation of a beautiful character than of accomplished achievement; at once, the most difficult to delineate, yet the most instructive if delineated successfully. The aim of the biographer was to lift the subject beyond the sordid element of religious exasperations; yet it was on Sterling's "religion," in the noble meaning of the word, that the entire interest turned. Growing to manhood in an atmosphere of Radicalism, political and speculative, Sterling had come in contact with the enthusiasts of European revolution. He had involved himself in a movement in which accident only prevented him from being personally engaged, and which ended in the destruction of his friends. In the depression which followed he had fallen under the influence of Coleridge. He had learnt from Coleridge that the key of the mystery of the universe lay, after all, with the Church creed rightly understood, and that, by an intellectual leger
demain, uncertainties could be converted into certainties. The process by which the wonderful transformation was to be effected, Carlyle himself had heard from the prophet’s own lips, and had heard without conviction when Irving long before had taken him to Highgate to worship.

Carlyle for himself had refused to follow Coleridge into these airy speculations. He for one dared not play with truth, and he regarded his metaphysical conjuring as cowardly unmanliness, fatal to honesty of heart, and useful only to enable cravens, who in their souls knew better, to close their eyes to fact.

He held sternly to what his conscience told him, and would not listen to the Coleridgean siren. But many did listen, and ran upon the fatal shore. Intellectual clergymen especially, who had been troubled in their minds, imagined that they found help and comfort there. If, as they had been told, it was a sin to disbelieve the Church’s creed, then the creed itself must rest on something beyond probability and the balance of evidence. Why not, then, on Coleridge’s “reason”? It was a serious thing, besides, to have a profession to which they were committed for the means of living, and which the law forbade them to change. Thus, at the time when Carlyle was writing this book, a whole flight of clergy, with Frederick Maurice at their head and Kingsley for lieutenant, were preaching regeneration on Coleridge’s principles, and persuading themselves that “the sacred river could run backwards after all.”

Sterling, before them, had been carried away by the same illusion. In his enthusiasm, he took orders; a few months’ experience sufficed to show so true an intelligence that the Highgate philosophy was “bottled moonshine”; and Carlyle draws the picture of him, not, like Julius Hare, as of “a vanquished doubter,” but as “a victorious believer,” resolutely shaking himself clear of artificial spider-webs—holding fast with all his powers to what he knew to be true and good, and living for that, and that only.

Something of the high purpose which Carlyle assigns to Sterling was perhaps reflected from himself, as with a lover’s portrait of his mistress; yet his account of him is essentially as true as it is affectionate. He did not give his esteem easily, and when it was given it was nobly deserved.
I well remember the effect which the book produced when it appeared. He himself valued it little, and even doubted whether it was worth publishing. As a piece of literary work it was more admired than anything which he had yet written. The calmness was a general surprise. He had a tranquil command of his subject, and his treatment of it was exquisitely delicate. He was no longer censuring the world as a prophet, but delighting it as an artist. The secular part of society pardoned the fierceness with which he had trampled on them for so beautiful an evidence of the tenderness of his real heart. The religious world was not so well satisfied. Anglicans, Protestants, Catholics had hoped from Cromwell, and even from the Pamphlets, that, as against spiritual Radicalism, he would be on their side. They found themselves entirely mistaken. "Does not believe in us either, then?" was the cry. "Not one of the religiones lictae [accepted observances] will this man acknowledge." Frederick Maurice's friends were the most displeased of all. The irreverence with which he had treated Coleridge was not to be forgiven. From all that section of Illuminati who had hitherto believed themselves his admirers, he had cut himself off for ever, and, as a teacher, he was left without disciples, save a poor handful who had longed for such an utterance from him. He himself gathered no conscious pleasure from what he had done. "A poor tatter of a thing," he called it, valuable only as an honest tribute of affection to a lost friend. It was so always. The execution of all his work fell so far short of his intention that when completed it seemed to be worth nothing.

[Carlyle's chief] uneasiness was about the "immense masses of things" on which he wanted to write, and project after project rose and faded before he could see his way. The "Exodus from Houndsditch" was still one of them; ought he, or ought he not, to be explicit in that great matter, and sketch the outlines of a creed which might hereafter be sincerely believed?

Attempt to work it out Carlyle did in the two fragments on "Spiritual Optics" which I printed in the second volume of his early life. He there seems to say that something of the sort was expected of him, and even obligatory upon him. But either he felt that the age was not ripe, or he could
not develop the idea satisfactorily, and he left what he had written to mature in some other mind. "Few men," he says at this time, "were ever more puzzled to find their road than I am just now. Be silent! Look and seek!" His test of progress—of the moral worth of his own or any other age—was the men that it produced. He admired most of all things in this world single-minded and sincere people, who believed honestly what they professed to believe, and lived it out in their actions. Properly, he admired nothing else, and his special genius lay in depicting such ages and persons.

A new cant came up at this epoch to put him out of patience—Prince Albert's Grand Industrial Exhibition and Palace of Aladdin in Hyde Park, a temple for the consecration of commerce, etc., with the Archbishop of Canterbury for fugleman, a contrivance which was to bring in a new era, and do for mankind what Christianity had tried and failed to do. For such a thing as this Carlyle could have no feeling but contempt.

When summer came, and the Exhibition opened, London grew intolerable. The enthusiasm for this new patent invention to regenerate the human race was altogether too much for him. He fled to Malvern for the water-cure, and became, with his wife, for a few weeks the guest of Dr. Gully, who, long years afterwards, was brought back so terribly to his remembrance. After long wavering he was beginning seriously to think of Frederick the Great as his next subject; if not a hero to his mind, yet at heart a man who had played a lofty part in Europe without stooping to conventional cant. With Frederick looming before him he went to cool his fever in the Malvern waters. The disease was not in his body, loudly as he complained of it. The bathing, packing, drinking proved useless—worse, in his opinion, than useless. He "found by degrees that water, taken as medicine, was the most destructive drug he had ever tried." He "had paid his tax to contemporary stupor." That was all. Gully himself, who would take no fees from him, he had not disliked, and was grateful for his hospitality. He stayed a month in all. His wife went to her friends in Manchester; he hastened to hide himself in Scotsbrig, full of gloom and heaviness, and totally out of health.
He found his mother not ill, but visibly sinking. She had divined that all was not as well in Cheyne Row as it ought to be. Why had not Mrs. Carlyle come too, to see her before she died? She said over and over again, “I wad ha’ liked well to see Janie ance mair!” All else was still and peaceful. The air, the home faces, the honest, old-fashioned life, did for him what Malvern and Gully could not do. The noise of the outside world reached him only as an echo, and he was only provoked a little when its disturbances came into his close neighbourhood.

Scotsbrig lasted three weeks. There had been an old arrangement that Carlyle should spend a few days at Paris with the Ashburtons. Lord and Lady Ashburton were now there, and wrote to summon him to join them. At such a command the effort seemed not impossible. He went to London, joined Browning at the South Eastern Railway station, and the same evening found him at Meurice’s. The first forty-eight hours were tolerable: “nothing to do in Paris except ‘amuse’ myself,” which he thought could be borne for a day or two. Lord Ashburton of course saw everyone that was worth seeing. Thiers came the second afternoon “and talked immense quantities of watery enough vain matter.” Thiers was followed by two other “‘Men of Letters,’ ‘one Mérimée, one Laborde: nichts zu bedeuten [of no consequence].’” The third and fourth nights sleep unfortunately failed, with the usual consequences. He grew desperate, found that he had “never made such a fruitless jump into a red-sea of mud before.” The last remains of his patience vanished when Mérimée dared to say that he thought “Goethe an inferior French apprentice.” This was enough of literature. He packed his bag and fled home to Chelsea.

For several years now, with the exception of the short interval when he wrote Sterling’s life, Carlyle had been growling in print and talk over all manner of men and things. The revolutions of 1848 had aggravated his natural tendencies. He had thought ill enough before of the modern methods of acting and thinking, and had foreseen that no good would come of them. The universal crash of European society had confirmed his convictions. He saw England hurrying
on to a similar catastrophe. He had lifted up his voice in
warning, and no one would listen to him, and he was irri-
tated, disappointed, and perhaps surprised at the impotence
of his own admonitions. To go on with them, to continue
railing like Timon, was waste of time and breath; and time
and breath had been given to him to use and not to waste.
His best resource, he knew, was to engage with some sub-
ject large enough and difficult enough to take up all his at-
tention, and he had fixed at last on Frederick of Prussia.
He had discerned for one thing that Prussia, in those days
of tottering thrones, was, or would be, the centre of Euro-
pean stability, and that it was Frederick who had made
Prussia what she was. It was an enormous undertaking; noth-
ing less than the entire history, secular and spiritual, of
the eighteenth century. He was not one of those easy writ-
ers who take without inquiry the accredited histories, and
let their own work consist in hashing and seasoning and
flavouring. He never stated a fact without having himself
gone to the original authority for it, knowing what facts
suffer in the cooking process. For Carlyle to write a book on
Frederick would involve the reading of a mountain of books,
memoirs, journals, letters, state papers. The work with
Cromwell would be child’s play to it. He would have to
travel over a large part of Germany, to see Berlin and Pots-
dam, to examine battlefields and the plans of campaigns.
He would have to make a special study, entirely new to
him, of military science and the art of war; all this he would
have to do, and do it thoroughly, for he never went into
any work by halves. He was now fifty-six years old, and
might well pause before such a plunge. Frederick himself,
too, was not a man after Carlyle’s heart. He had “no piety”
like Cromwell, no fiery convictions, no zeal for any “cause
of God,” real or imagined. He lived in an age when sincere
spiritual belief had become difficult, if not impossible. But
he had one supreme merit, that he was not a hypocrite:
what he did not feel he did not pretend to feel. Of cant—
either conscious cant, or the “sincere cant” which Carlyle
found to be so loathsome in England—there was in Fred-
erick absolutely none. He was a man of supreme intellec-
tual ability. One belief he had, and it was the explanation
of his strength—a belief in facts. To know the fact always ex-
actly as it was, and to make his actions conform to it, was the first condition with him; never to allow facts to be concealed from himself, or distorted, or pleasantly flavoured with words or spurious sentiments; and therefore Frederick, if not a religious man, was a true man, the nearest approach to a religious man that Carlyle believed perhaps to be in these days possible. He might not be true in the sense that he never deceived others. Politicians, with a large stake upon the board, do not play with their cards on the table. But he never, if he could help it, deceived himself; never hid his own heart from himself by specious phrases, or allowed voluntary hallucinations to blind his eyes, and thus he stood out an exceptional figure in the modern world. Whether at his age he could go through with such an enterprise was still uncertain to him; but he resolved to try, and on coming back from Paris sat down to read whatever would come first to hand.

Six months now followed of steady reading and excerpting. He went out little, except to ride in the afternoons, or walk at midnight when the day’s work was over. A few friends were admitted occasionally to tea. If any called before, he left them to his wife and refused to be disturbed. I was then living in Wales, and saw and heard nothing of him except in some rare note.

He had decided on going to Germany in August. With the exception of the yacht trip to Ostend, he had never been beyond Paris. Mrs. Carlyle had never been on the Continent at all; and the plan was for them to go both together. Repairs were needed in the house again. He was anxious to complete a portion of his reading before setting out, and fancied that this time he could stay and live through the noise; but the workmen when they came in were too much for him. She undertook to remain and superintend as usual. He had to fly if he would not be driven mad—fly to Scotland, taking his books with him; perhaps to his friend Mr. Erskine.17

Erskine, who loved Carlyle and delighted in his company, responded with a hearty invitation, and on July 21, the weather still flaming hot, Carlyle dropped down the river in a boat from Chelsea to the Dundee steamer, which was lying in the Pool, his wife and Nero accompanying to see him off. She was delighted that he should go, for her own sake as well
as for his. When he was clear off, she could go about her work with a lighter heart.

The German problem seemed frightful as the time drew on. "Travelling, of all kinds, grows more and more horrible to me; nor do I yet quite see that there lies in Frederick alone sufficient motive to lead me into such a set of sufferings and expenses."¹⁸ Linlathen itself became tedious: he admitted
that all the circumstances were favourable—the kindest of hosts, the best of lodging; but "the wearisome is in permanence here, I think." They would make him talk, that was the offence; yet it was his own fault. His talk was so intensely interesting, so intensely entertaining. No one who heard him flowing on could have guessed at the sadness which weighed upon him when alone. Those bursts of humour, flashing out amidst his wild flights of rhetoric, spoke of anything but sadness; even the servants at places where he dined had to run out of the room, choking down their laughter. The comic and the tragic lie close together, inseparable like light and shadow, as Socrates long ago forced Aristophanes himself to acknowledge. He escaped to Scotsbrig after a fortnight with the Erskines, and there he hoped his wife would join him. But the work at Cheyne Row lingered on, and was far from completion. He felt that he ought to go to Germany; yet he was unwilling to leave her behind him. She had looked forward with some eagerness to seeing a foreign country, and Carlyle knew it. "You surely deserve this one little pleasure," he said; "there are so few you can get from me in this world!" To himself it would be no pleasure at all. "Curtainless beds, noisy sleepless nights" were frightful to contemplate. He, individually, was "disheartened, dyspeptical; and in fine contemptible . . . in some degree!" Still, for her sake, and for the little bit of duty he could get done, he was ready to encounter the thing. Especially he wished her to come to him at Scotsbrig. She had held aloof of late years, since things had gone awry. "My poor old Mother," he wrote, "comes in with her anxious sincere old face: 'Send my love to Jane, and tell her' (this with a waeish tone) 'I wad like richt weel to have a crack wi' her,'—'ance mair.' 

He concluded that he must go to Germany. She, if things were well, might come out afterwards, and join him in Silesia. He found that he did not "care much" for Frederick after all; but it would be "disgraceful to be driven away" by mere travelling annoyances. Letter followed letter, in the same strain. It was not jest, it was not earnest; it was a mere willfulness of humour. He told her not to mind what he said; "it is merely the grumbling incidental to dyspepsia and the load of life; it is on the whole the nature of the beast, and
Froude's Life of Carlyle

must be put up with as the wind and the rain." She had to decide, perhaps prudently, that she could not go, either with him or after him.

All was settled at last—resolution, passport, and everything else that was required; and on Sunday, August 29, Carlyle found himself "on board this greasy little wretch of a Leith Steamer (laden to the waters-edge with pig iron and herrings)," bound for the country whose writers had been the guides of his mind, and whose military hero was to be the subject of his own greatest work. He reached Rotterdam at noon on September 1. He was not to encounter the journey alone. Mr. Neuberg was to join him there, a German admirer, a gentleman of good private fortune, resident in London, who had volunteered his services to conduct Carlyle over the Fatherland, and afterwards to be his faithful assistant in the Frederick biography. In both capacities Neuberg was invaluable, and Carlyle never forgot his obligation to him. His letters are the diary of his adventures. He went first to Bonn, to study a few books before going farther.

Bonn, Sunday, 6 September, 1852—

Yesterday, as my first day's work, I went to the University Library here; found very many good books, unknown to me hitherto, on Vater Fritz; took down the titles of what, on inspection, promised to be useful; brought some 20 away with me,—and the plan at present is that Neuberg and I shall go with them to a rural place in the Siebengebirge, called Roland's Eck for one week, where sleep is much more possible, and there examine my 20 Books before going farther, and consider what is the best to be done farther.

[Unable to work or sleep at Roland's Eck, Carlyle decided to push on, via Frankfurt, to Homburg, Neuberg's home.]

Homburg (vor der Höhn) 15 September, 1852—

Of the Rhine you shall hear enough by and by: it is verily a "noble river": much broader than the Thames at full tide, and rolling along many feet in depth, with banks quite trim, at a rate of 4 or 5 miles an hour, without voice, but full of boiling eddies; the most magnificent image of silent power I have ever seen; and in fact one's first idea of a world-river. This broad swift sheet, rolling strong and calm (in silent rage) for 3 or 4 hundred miles is itself far the grandest thing I have seen here, or shall likely see.

[Carlyle and Neuberg made an excursion to Bad Ems before proceeding up the Rhine.]
Next morning we left Ems; joined our Steamboat at Coblenz, and away again to the sublime portions of the Rhine country: very sublime indeed.—really worth a sight; say a 100 miles of a Loch Lomond (or half Loch Lomond) all rushing on at 5 miles an hour, and with queer old towers and ruined castles on the banks: a grand silence too; and gray day, adding to one's sadness of mood; for "a fine sorrow" (not coarse) is the utmost I can bring it too [sic] in this world usually!

[Carlyle journeyed down the Rhine to Mainz, where he took the train to Frankfurt, spending the night there.]

In shaving next morning, with my face to the Square, which was very lively and had trees in the middle, I caught with the corner of my eye sight of a face which was evidently Goethe's: ach Gott, merely in stone, in the middle of the Platz among the trees;—I had so longed to see that face alive, and here it was given to me at last, as if with huge world-irony, in stone! An emblem of so much that happens: this also gave me a moment's genial sorrow, or something of the sort. . . .

At Frankfurt yesterday, after breakfast and your Letter, we saw (weariedly I) all manner of things: Goethe's House (were in Goethe's room, a little garret, not much bigger than my dressing-room), and wrote our names "in silence"; the Judengasse, grimmest section of the Middle-Ages and their Pariar-hood I ever saw; the Römer, where old Kaisers all were elected;—on the whole, a stirring strange old-Teutonic Town, all bright with paint and busy trade. . . . I calculate there will but little good come to me from this journey: reading of Books I find to be impossible;—the thing that I can do is to see certain places, and to try if I can gather certain books. Wise people also to talk with, or inquire of, I as good as despair of seeing. All Germans, one becomes convinced, are not wise!— On the whole, however, one cannot but like this honest-hearted hardy population: very coarse of feature, for most part, yet seldom radically häßlich [ugly]; a sonsy [cheerful] look rather, and very frugal, goodhumouredly poor, in their way of life.

The next letter is to his mother dated from Weimar, September 19. She, he well knew, if she cared for nothing else, would care to hear about the Luther localities. She had a picture of Luther in her room at Scotsbrig. He was her chief Saint in the Christian calendar.

The next morning brought us from Cassel to Eisenach with its Wartburg, where Luther lay concealed translating the Bible; and there I spent one of the most interesting forenoons I ever got by travelling. . . . On the top of this Hill stands the old Wartburg, which it takes over 3/4 of an hour to reach. . . . an old Castle ("Watch-Castle" is the name of it) near 800 years old. . . . I heeded little of all else they had to shew except Junker Georg's
FROUDE’S LIFE OF CARLYLE

(Martin Luther’s) Chamber, which is in the nearest of the “Peat-stacks,” the one nearest Eisenach, and close by the Gate when you enter, on your right hand. A short stair of old-worn stone conducts you up; they open the door; you enter a little apartment, less than your best room at Scotsbrig, I almost think less than your smallest; a very poor low room, with one old ledged lattice-window: to me the most venerable of all rooms I ever entered. Luther’s old oak-table is there (about 3 feet square), and a huge fossil-bone (vertebra of a mammoth) which served him for footstool: nothing else now in the room did certainly belong to him, but these did. I kissed his old oak-table; looked out of his window (making them open it for me) down the sheer Castle-wall into deep chasms, over the great ranges of silent woody mountains, and thought to myself, Here once lived for a time one of God’s soldiers, be honour given him!

So far about Luther. [On to Gotha and Erfurt traveled Carlyle and his companion and finally reached Weimar.]

Weimar; a little bright enough place, smaller than Dumfries, with three steeples, and totally without smoke; standing amid dull undulating country, flat mostly, and tending towards ugliness, except for trees. . . .

Goethe’s house (which was opened by favour) kept us occupied in a strange mood for 2 hours or more; Schiller’s for one ditto: everybody knows the Goethe’sche &c Haus, and poor Schiller and Goethe here are dangled about and multiplied in miserable little bustkins and other dilettantisms, till one is sick and sad! Goethe’s house is quite like the Picture, but 1/3 smaller: on the whole his effective lodging, I found, was small, low-roofed, and almost mean to what I had conceived.—hardly equal (nay not at all equal had my little Architect once done her work) to my own at Chelsea. On the Book shelves I found the last Book I ever sent Goethe (Taylor’s Survey of German Poetry), and a crum of Paper, torn from some scroll of my own (Johnson, as I conjectured) still sticking in it after 20 years! Schiller’s House was still more affecting: the room where he wrote, his old table (exactly like the model), the bed where he died (and a portrait of his dead face in it): a poor man’s house and a brave, who had fallen at his post there. Eheu, Eheu, what a world!

[A few days later he addressed his wife:]

Nieder-Rathen . . . near Dresden, 25 September . . . 1852—

I wrote to you from Weimar, some five days ago; and therefore there is nothing pressing me at present to write: but having a quiet hour here by the side of the Elbe river, at the foot of wild rock mountains in the queerest region you ever saw, I throw you another word, not knowing when I may have another chance as good. . . . I am on the second floor in a little German Country inn, literally
washed by the Elbe, which is lying in the moonshine as clear as a mirror and as silent: right above us is a high Peak called the Bastei (Bastion) a Kind of thing you are obliged to do (by Tourist law); this we have done, & are to go tomorrow towards Frederick's first battle field in the 7-Years' war; after which the second day (if all go well) will bring us into Berlin. We came by an Elbe steamer; go on tomorrow at nine . . . by another steamer, then by railway,—and hope to see, tho' alas in quiet confused circumstances and to little advantage, some of the actual footsteps of Father Fritz, for here too amid these rocks, as well as farther on at Lobositz, he did feats.32

Mrs. Carlyle was still in Chelsea with her workmen all this time. It had been a trying summer to her. But she had the comfort of knowing that her husband was achieving the part of the business which had fallen to his share, better than might have been looked for.

[From Bad Töplitz Carlyle wrote to Jane two days later.]

We have actually seen Lobositz, the first Battlefield of Fritz in the 7-Years War; and walked over it all, this morning before breakfast under the guidance of a Christian native, checked by my best memory of reading and maps; and found it do very tolerably well.33

[By 1 October he was in Berlin.]

Here you see we are; at the summit of these wanderings; from which, I hope, there is for me a swift perpendicular return before long, not a slow parabolic one as the ascent has been. We came four-and-twenty hours ago, latish last night, from Frankfurt on the Oder, from the field of Cunersdorf (a dreadful scraggy village, where Fritz received his worst defeat). . . .

Berlin is loud almost as London, but in no other way great [or] among the greatest. I should guess it about the size of Liverpool, and more like Glasgow in the straight openness of its streets. Many grand public edifices about this eastern end of the Town; but on the whole it looks in many quarters almost shabby, in spite of its noise and paint, so low are the houses for a Capital city; more like warehouses, or malt kilns with the very chimneys wanting (for within is nothing but stoves). This Unter den Linden (under the lime-trees) is the one good street of the place; as if another Princes-street at 300 yards distance and with tree-rows between them ran parallel to the Princes Street we know.34

[A week later he again wrote to Jane:]

We do leave Berlin tomorrow (Saturday the 9th); go by Brunswick, by Hanover, Cologne . . . and from thence on Tuesday evening at Ostend I find a steamer direct for London. . . . I have had a terrible tumbling week in Berlin,—O what a month
in general I have had; month of the profoundest, ghastliest solitude, in the middle of incessant talk and locomotion!—but here, after all, I have got my things not so intolerably done; and have accomplished what was reasonably possible. . . . Yesterday I saw old Tieck: beautiful old man; so serene, so calm, so sad. . . . You will see me (Deo volente) on Wednesday but not till noon or later.55

So was this terrible journey got done with, which to anyone but Carlyle would have been a mere pleasure trip; to him terrible in prospect, terrible in the execution, terrible in the retrospect. His wife said he could not conceal that he was pretty well, and had nothing really to complain of.