THOMAS CARLYLE

[Carlyle’s Portraits of His Contemporaries]¹

[American Visitors]

[DANIEL WEBSTER AT 57]

We have a whole cargo of American celebrities here in these days. * * * Yesterday Milnes² gave us breakfast in honour of Webster, the Washington Senator. * * * I will warrant him one of the stiffest logic-buffers and Parliamentary athletes anywhere to be met with in our world at present. A grim, tall, broad-bottomed, yellow-skinned man, with brows like precipitous cliffs, and huge black dull wearied unwearable-looking eyes under them; amorphous, projecting nose; and the angriest shut mouth I have anywhere seen;—a droop on the sides of the upper lip is quite mastiff-like, magnificent to look upon, it is so quiet withal. I guess I should like ill to be that man’s nigger! However, he is a right clever man in his way; and has a husky sort of fun in him too;—drawls, in a handfast,³ didactic manner, about “our republican institutions,” &c., &c., and so plays his part.

[From a letter to John Sterling, June 19, 1839]

[RALPH WALDO EMERSON AT 30]

Emerson, Your Presentee,⁴ rolled up hither, one still Sunday afternoon while we sat at dinner. A most gentle, recommendable, amiable, whole-hearted man; whom we thank for one of the pleasantest interruptions to our solitude. He staid with us four-and-twenty hours; and was thro’ the whole Encyclopedia with us in that time. A good “Socinian”⁵ understanding, the clearest heart; above all, what I loved in the man was his health, his unity with himself; all people and all things seemed to find their quite peaceable adjustment with him, not a proud domineering one, as after doubtful contest, but a

1. Carlyle once said that “human Portraits, faithfully drawn, are of all pictures the welcomest on human walls.” With his pen, rather than with brush, he himself has created a strikingly colorful gallery of his contemporaries.

A few of the following selections (all of them excerpted by the present editor) were written for publication, in particular the elaborate portrait of Coleridge; the majority of them, however, are from his letters. They are thus sketches rather than portraits—sometimes, in fact, caricatures. As Charles Sanders, a biographer, has shown, Carlyle has earned the title of the Victorian Rembrandt. But with his sharp eye for absurdities he is often the Victorian Daumier or Rowlandson. This element of caricature can be partly explained in terms of difference of age. It will be noted that most of the celebrities described were men older than Carlyle, and he had the customary determination of youth to make fun of the pretensions of an older and established generation. In Carlyle’s case there was the additional urge to be irreverent in that he was a provincial in a great metropolis with the provincial’s need to assert his independence of judgment.

The portraits are not presented chronologically. They are grouped in three sections: American Visitors, Royalty, and English Men of Letters. The titles for each portrait have been assigned by the editor.

2. Richard Monckton Milnes (1809–85), poet and Member of Parliament.

3. Tightfisted.

4. John Stuart Mill had provided Emerson with a letter of introduction to the Carlyles at Craigentinneputtock.

5. A Unitarian, a follower of the 16th-century theologian Laelius Socinus, who professed to be Christian but denied to Christ some of the attributes ascribed to Him by orthodox theologians.
spontaneous-looking, peaceable, even humble one. I should henceforth learn to see, or see better, that Unitarians are not hollow men, but at worst limited men, and otherwise of the fairest conditions. Their very need of a religion, strongly evinced in that creed of theirs, should recommend them. One seems to believe almost all that they believe; and when they stop short and call it a Religion, and you pass on, and call it only a reminiscence of one, should you not part with the kiss of peace?

[From a letter to J. S. Mill, September 10, 1833]

[EMERSON AT 44]

I was torn to pieces, talking with him; for his sad Yankee rule seemed to be, that talk should go on incessantly except when sleep interrupted it: a frightful rule. The man, as you have heard, is not above a bargain; nor, if one will be candid, is he fairly much below it. A pure-minded elevated man; elevated but without breadth, as a willow is, as a reed is; no fruit at all to be gathered from him. A delicate, but him pinched triangular face, no jaws nor lips, lean-hooked nose; face of a cock: by none such was the Thames ever burnt! A proud man too; a certain sensitive fastidious stickishness, which reminded me of a miniature Washington’s, very exotic, tho’ Anglo-Saxon enough; rather curious to think of. No getting into any intimacy with him, talk as you will. You have my leave to fall in love with him if you can! And so he plays his part: gone to lecture in Lancashire; to return hither he knows not when: it is privately hoped he may go to Rome! I wish him honestly well, do as I am bound respect him honestly; but Friends, it is clear, we can never in this world, to any real purpose, be.

[From a letter to Mrs. Baring, November 3, 1847]

[BRONSON ALCOTT AT 42]

You made a real escape in the case of Bronson Alcott. He is a Yankee Don Quixote, who guesses that he will bring back the Saturnian Kingdoms to this forlorn Earth by a life of simplicity, and diet of vegetables. For the first two times, I got good fun out of him; for he is an ingenious, honest-hearted kind of Quixote,—a long lean man, very like the Don, even in figure, who drawls terribly, and “guesses,” and has a kind of rustic dignity and tolerability about him: but the second time, discerning my hopeless unbelief in vegetables, he expressed real affliction; and tho’ we kept him all night, and fed him with Scotch porridge, and unimaginable messes according to our best understanding, he refused to be comforted, and has not come again.

[From a letter to John Sterling, July 23, 1842]
[Carlyle’s Portraits of His Contemporaries] 1

[QUEEN VICTORIA AT EIGHTEEN]

Yesterday, going through one of the Parks, I saw the poor little Queen. She was in an open carriage, preceded by three or four swift red-coated troopers; all off for Windsor just as I happened to pass. Another carriage or carriages followed with maids-of-honour, etc.: the whole drove very fast. It seemed to me the poor little Queen was a bit modest, nice sonsy 2 little lassie; blue eyes, light hair, fine white skin; of extremely small stature: she looked timid, anxious, almost frightened; for the people looked at her in perfect silence; one old liv- eryman alone touched his hat to her: I was heartily sorry for the poor bairn,— tho’ perhaps she might have said as Parson Swan did, “Greet 3 not for me brethren; for verily, yea verily, I greet not for mysel’.” It is a strange thing to look at the fashion of this world!

[From a letter to his mother, April 12, 1838]

[SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE AT FIFTY-THREE] 4

Coleridge sat on the brow of Highgate Hill, in those years, looking down on London and its smoke-tumult, like a sage escaped from the inanity of life’s battle; attracting towards him the thoughts of innumerable brave souls still engaged there. His express contributions to poetry, philosophy, or any specific province of human literature or enlightenment, had been small and sadly intermittent; but he had, especially among young inquiring men, a higher than literary, a kind of prophetical or magician character. He was thought to hold, he alone in England, the key of German and other Transcendentalisms; knew the sublme secret of believing by “the reason” what “the understanding” had been obliged to fling out as incredible; and could still, after Hume and Voltaire had done their best and worst with him, profess himself an orthodox Christian, and say and print to the Church of England, with its singular old rubrics and surplices at Allhallowtide, Estop perpetua. 5 A sublime man; who, alone in those dark days, had saved his crown of spiritual manhood; escaping from the black

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The portraits are not presented chronologically. The first one is a sketch of royalty; the others are of English writers. Titles for each portrait have been assigned by the editors.

2. Sweet (Scottish).

3. Weep.

4. In 1816 Coleridge moved to a London suburb as a permanent guest in the home of James Gillman. Here he received visits from admirers of his philosophy such as Carlyle’s friend John Sterling, from whose biography, by Carlyle, this selection has been taken. Carlyle’s visits were made during his first residence in London in 1824–25.

5. Be thou everlasting (Latin)—the last words of Paolo Sarpi (1552–1623), theologian and historian, addressed to the city of Venice. “Allhallowtide”: November 1, a festival in honor of all the saints, celebrated by the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches.
materialisms, and revolutionary deluges, with “God, Freedom, Immortality” still his: a king of men. The practical intellects of the world did not much heed him, or carelessly reckoned him a metaphysical dreamer: but to the rising spirits of the young generation he had this dusky sublime character; and sat there as a kind of *Magus*, girt in mystery and enigma; his Dodona oak-grove (Mr. Gillman’s house at Highgate) whispering strange things, uncertain whether oracles or jargon.

The Gillmans did not encourage much company, or excitation of any sort, round their sage; nevertheless access to him, if a youth did reverently wish it, was not difficult. He would stroll about the pleasant garden with you, sit in the pleasant rooms of the place,—perhaps take you to his own peculiar room, high up, with a rearward view, which was the chief view of all. A really charming outlook, in fine weather. Close at hand, wide sweep of flowery leafy gardens, their few houses mostly hidden, the very chimney-pots veiled under blossomy umbrage, flowed gloriously down hill, gloriously issuing in wide-tufted undulating plain-country, rich in all charms of field and town. Waving blooming country of the brightest green; dotted all over with handsome villas, handsome groves; crossed by roads and human traffic, here inaudible or heard only as a musical hum: and behind all swam, under olive-tinted haze, the illimitable liminary ocean of London, with its domes and steeples definite in the sun, big Paul’s and the many memories attached to it hanging high over all. Nowhere, of its kind, could you see a grander prospect on a bright summer day, with the set of the air going southward,—southward, and so draping with the city-smoke not you but the city. Here for hours would Coleridge talk, concerning all conceivable or inconceivable things; and liked nothing better than to have an intelligent, or failing that, even a silent and patient human listener. He distinguished himself to all that ever heard him as at least the most surprising talker extant in this world,—and to some small minority, by no means to all, as the most excellent.

The good man, he was now getting old, towards sixty perhaps; and gave you the idea of a life that had been full of sufferings; a life heavy-laden, half-vanquished, still swimming painfully in seas of manifold physical and other bewilderment. Brow and head were round, and of massive weight, but the face was flabby and irresolute. The deep eyes, of a light hazel, were as full of sorrow as of inspiration; confused pain looked mildly from them, as in a kind of mild astonishment. The whole figure and air, good and amiable otherwise, might be called flabby and irresolute; expressive of weakness under possibility of strength. He hung loosely on his limbs, with knees bent, and stooping attitude; in walking, he rather shuffled than decisively stept; and a lady once remarked, he never could fix which side of the garden walk would suit him best, but continually shifted, in corkscrew fashion, and kept trying both. A heavy-laden, high-aspiring and surely much-suffering man. His voice, naturally soft and good, had contracted itself into a plaintive snuffle and singsong; he spoke as if preaching,—you would have said, preaching earnestly and also hopelessly the weightiest things. I still recollect his “object” and “subject,” terms of continual recurrence in the Kantean province; and how he sang and snuffled them into “om-m-mject” and “sum-m-mject,” with a kind of solemn

6. An oracle in Greece. Prophecies were voiced by priests who interpreted the rustling sounds made by oak leaves stirred by the wind. “Magus”: an Asian magician or sorcerer.
shake or quaver, as he rolled along. No talk, in his century or in any other, could be more surprising.

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Nothing could be more copious than his talk; and furthermore it was always, virtually or literally, of the nature of a monologue; suffering no interruption, however reverent; hastily putting aside all foreign additions, annotations, or most ingenuous desires for elucidation, as well-meant superfluities which would never do. Besides, it was talk not flowing anywhither like a river, but spreading everywhither in inextricable currents and regurgitations like a lake or sea; terribly deficient in definite goal or aim, nay often in logical intelligibility; what you were to believe or do, on any earthly or heavenly thing, obstinately refusing to appear from it. So that, most times, you felt logically lost; swamped near to drowning in this tide of ingenious vocables, spreading out boundless as if to submerge the world.

To sit as a passive bucket and be pumped into, whether you consent or not, can in the long-run be exhilarating to no creature; how eloquent soever the flood of utterance that is descending. But if it be withal a confused unintelligible flood of utterance, threatening to submerge all known landmarks of thought, and drown the world and you!—I have heard Coleridge talk, with eager musical energy, two stricken hours, his face radiant and moist, and communicate no meaning whatsoever to any individual of his hearers,—certain of whom, I for one, still kept eagerly listening in hope; the most had long before given up, and formed (if the room were large enough) secondary humming groups of their own. He began anywhere: you put some question to him, made some suggestive observation; instead of answering this, or decidedly setting out towards answer of it, he would accumulate formidable apparatus, logical swim-bladders, transcendental life-preservers and other precautionary and vehiculatory gear, for setting out; perhaps did at last get under way,—but was swiftly solicited, turned aside by the glance of some radiant new game on this hand or that, into new courses; and ever into new; and before long into all the Universe, where it was uncertain what game you would catch, or whether any.

His talk, alas, was distinguished, like himself, by irresolution: it disliked to be troubled with conditions, abstinences, definite fulfilments;—loved to wander at its own sweet will, and make its auditor and his claims and humble wishes a mere passive bucket for itself! He had knowledge about many things and topics, much curious reading; but generally all topics led him, after a pass or two, into the high seas of theosophic philosophy, the hazy infinitude of Kantean transcendentalism, with its “sum-m-mjects” and “om-m-mjects.” Sad enough; for with such indolent impatience of the claims and ignorances of others, he had not the least talent for explaining this or anything unknown to them; and you swam and fluttered in the mistiest wide unintelligible deluge of things, for most part in a rather profitless uncomfortable manner.

Glorious islets, too, I have seen rise out of the haze; but they were few, and soon swallowed in the general element again. Balmy sunny islets, islets of the blest and the intelligible:—on which occasions those secondary humming groups would all cease humming, and hang breathless upon the eloquent words; till once your islet got wrapt in the mist again, and they could recommence humming. . . . Coleridge was not without what talkers call wit, and there were touches of prickly sarcasm in him, contemptuous enough of the world and its idols and popular dignitaries; he had traits even of poetic humour: but in general he seemed deficient in laughter; or indeed in sympathy for concrete human things either on the sunny or on the stormy side. One right peal
of concrete laughter at some convicted flesh-and-blood absurdity, one burst of
noble indignation at some injustice or depravity, rubbing elbows with us on this
solid Earth, how strange would it have been in that Kantean haze-world, and how
infinitely cheering amid its vacant air-castles and dim-melting ghosts and
shadows! None such ever came. His life had been an abstract thinking and
dreaming, idealistic, passed amid the ghosts of defunct bodies and of unborn
ones. The meaning singsong of that theosophico-metaphysical monotony left
on you, at last, a very dreary feeling.

But indeed, to the young ardent mind, instinct with pious nobleness, yet
driven to the grim deserts of Radicalism for a faith, his speculations had a
charm much more than literary, a charm almost religious and prophetic. The
constant gist of his discourse was lamentation over the sunk condition of the
world; which he recognised to be given-up to Atheism and Materialism, full of
mere sordid misbeliefs, mispursuits and misresults. All Science had become
mechanical; the science not of men, but of a kind of human beavers. Churches
themselves had died away into a godless mechanical condition; and stood there
as mere Cases of Articles, mere Forms of Churches; like the dried carcasses of
once-swift camels, which you find left withering in the thirst of the universal
desert,—ghastly portents for the present, beneficent ships of the desert no
more. Men’s souls were blinded, hebetated, and sunk under the influence of
Atheism and Materialism, and Hume and Voltaire: the world for the present
was as an extinct world, deserted of God, and incapable of welldoing till it
changed its heart and spirit. This, expressed I think with less of indignation and
with more of long-drawn querulousness, was always recognisable as the
ground-tone:—in which truly a pious young heart, driven into Radicalism and
the opposition party, could not but recognise a too sorrowful truth; and ask of
the Oracle, with all earnestness, What remedy, then?

The remedy, though Coleridge himself professed to see it as in sunbeams,
could not, except by processes unspeakably difficult, be described to you at all.
On the whole, those dead Churches, this dead English Church especially, must
be brought to life again. Why not? It was not dead; the soul of it, in this
 parched-up body, was tragically asleep only. Atheistic Philosophy was true on
its side, and Hume and Voltaire could on their own ground speak irrefragably
for themselves against any Church: but lift the Church and them into a higher
sphere of argument, they died into inanition, the Church revivified itself into
pristine florid vigour,—became once more a living ship of the desert, and invin-
cibly bore you over stock and stone. But how, but how! By attending to the “rea-
son” of man, said Coleridge, and duly chaining-up the “understanding” of man:
the Vernunft (Reason) and Verstand (Understanding) of the Germans, it all
turned upon these, if you could well understand them,—which you couldn’t.
For the rest, Mr. Coleridge had on the anvil various Books, especially was about
to write one grand Book On the Logos, which would help to bridge the chasm
for us. So much appeared, however: Churches, though proved false (as you had
imagined), were still true (as you were to imagine): here was an Artist who
could burn you up an old Church, root and branch; and then as the Alchymists
professed to do with organic substances in general, distil you an “Astral Spirit”
from the ashes, which was the very image of the old burnt article, its airdrawn counterpart,—this you still had, or might get, and draw uses from, if you could. Wait till the Book on the Logos were done;—alas, till your own terrene eyes, blind with conceit and the dust of logic, were purged, subtilised and spiritu-alised into the sharpness of vision requisite for discerning such an “om-m-m-ject.”—The ingenuous young English head, of those days, stood strangely puzzled by such revelations; uncertain whether it were getting inspired, or getting infatuated into flat imbecility; and strange effulgence, of new day or else of deeper meteoric night, coloured the horizon of the future for it.

[From Life of John Sterling, 1851]

[William Wordsworth in His Seventies]

On a summer morning (let us call it 1840 then) I was apprised by Taylor that Wordsworth had come to town, and would meet a small party of us at a certain tavern in St. James’s Street, at breakfast, to which I was invited for the given day and hour. We had a pretty little room, quiet though looking streetward (tavern’s name is quite lost to me); the morning sun was pleasantly tinting the opposite houses, a balmy, calm and sunlight morning. Wordsworth, I think, arrived just along with me; we had still five minutes of sauntering and miscellaneous talking before the whole were assembled. I do not positively remember any of them, except that James Spedding was there, and that the others, not above five or six in whole, were polite intelligent quiet persons, and, except Taylor and Wordsworth, not of any special distinction in the world. Breakfast was pleasant, fairly beyond the common of such things. Wordsworth seemed in good tone, and, much to Taylor’s satisfaction, talked a great deal; about “poetic” correspondents of his own (i.e. correspondents for the sake of his poetry; especially one such who had sent him, from Canton, an excellent chest of tea; correspondent grinningly applauded by us all); then about rural-ties and miscellanies. * * * These were the first topics. Then finally about litera-terature, literary laws, practices, observances, at considerable length, and turning wholly on the mechanical part, including even a good deal of shallow enough etymology, from me and others, which was well received. On all this Wordsworth enlarged with evident satisfaction, and was joyfully reverent of the “wells of English undefiled”;1 though stone dumb as to the deeper rules and wells of Eternal Truth and Harmony, which you were to try and set forth by said undefiled wells of English or what other speech you had! To me a little disappointing, but not much; though it would have given me pleasure had the robust veteran man emerged a little out of vocables into things, now and then, as he never once chanced to do. For the rest, he talked well in his way; with veracity, easy brevity and force, as a wise tradesman would of his tools and workshop,—and as no unwise one could. His voice was good, frank and sonorous, though practically clear distinct and forcible rather than melodious; the tone of him businesslike, sedately confident; no discourtesy, yet no anxiety about being courteous. A fine wholesome rusticity, fresh as his mountain breezes, sat well on the stalwart veteran, and on all he said and did. You would

8. Henry Taylor, contemporary playwright.
9. Editor of the works of Francis Bacon.
1. Spenser, Faerie Queene 4.2.32, referring to Chaucer.
have said he was a usually taciturn man; glad to unlock himself to audience sympathetic and intelligent, when such offered itself. His face bore marks of much, not always peaceful, meditation; the look of it not bland or benevolent so much as close impregnable and hard: a man multa tacere loquive paratus,\(^2\) in a world where he had experienced no lack of contradictions as he strode along! The eyes were not very brilliant, but they had a quiet clearness; there was enough of brow and well shaped; rather too much of cheek (“horse face” I have heard satirists say); face of squarish shape and decidedly longish, as I think the head itself was (its “length” going horizontal); he was large-boned, lean, but still firm-knit tall and strong-looking when he stood, a right good old steel-grey figure, with rustic simplicity and dignity about him, and a vivacious strength looking through him which might have suited one of those old steel-grey markgrafs; whom Henry the Fowler set up to ward the “marches”\(^3\) and do battle with the intrusive heathen in a stalwart and judicious manner.

On this and other occasional visits of his, I saw Wordsworth a number of times, at dinner, in evening parties; and we grew a little more familiar, but without much increase of real intimacy or affection springing up between us. He was willing to talk with me in a corner, in noisy extensive circles, having weak eyes, and little loving the general babble current in such places. One evening, probably about this time, I got him upon the subject of great poets, who I thought might be admirable equally to us both; but was rather mistaken, as I gradually found. Pope’s partial failure I was prepared for; less for the narrowish limits visible in Milton and others. I tried him with Burns, of whom he had sung tender recognition; but Burns also turned out to be a limited inferior creature, any genius he had for one’s pathos rather; even Shakespeare himself had his blind sides, his limitations; gradually it became apparent to me that of transcendent unlimited there was, to this critic, probably but one specimen known, Wordsworth himself! He by no means said so, or hinted so, in words; but on the whole it was all I gathered from him in this considerable tête-\(-\)a-tête\(^4\) of ours; and it was not an agreeable conquest. New notion as to poetry or poet I had not in the smallest degree got; but my insight into the depths of Wordsworth’s pride in himself had considerably augmented; and it did not increase my love of him; though I did not in the least hate it either, so quiet was it, so fixed, unappealing, like a dim old lichened crag on the wayside, the private meaning of which, in contrast with any public meaning it had, you recognised with a kind of not wholly melancholy grin.

* * *

During the last seven or ten years of his life, Wordsworth felt himself to be a recognised lion, in certain considerable London circles, and was in the habit of coming up to town with his wife for a month or two every season, to enjoy his quiet triumph and collect his bits of tribute tales quales.\(^5\) * * * Wordsworth took his bit of lionism very quietly, with a smile sardonic rather than triumphant, and certainly got no harm by it, if he got or expected little good. His wife, a small, withered, puckered, winking lady, who never spoke, seemed to be more in earnest about the affair, and was visibly and sometimes ridiculously assiduous

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2. Prepared to speak out or to pass over much in silence (Latin).
4. Private conversation between two people.
5. Of such a sort (Latin).
to secure her proper place of precedence at table. * * * The light was always
afflictive to his eyes; he carried in his pocket something like a skeleton brass
candlestick, in which, setting it on the dinner-table, between him and the most
afflictive or nearest of the chief lights, he touched a little spring, and there
flirted out, at the top of his brass implement, a small vertical green circle which
prettily enough threw his eyes into shade, and screened him from that sorrow.
In proof of his equanimity as lion I remember, in connection with this green
shade, one little glimpse. * * * Dinner was large, luminous, sumptuous; I sat a
long way from Wordsworth; dessert I think had come in, and certainly there
reigned in all quarters a cackle as of Babel (only politer perhaps), which far up
in Wordsworth’s quarter (who was leftward on my side of the table) seemed to
have taken a sententious, rather louder, logical and quasi-scientific turn, heartily
unimportant to gods and men, so far as I could judge of it and of the other bab-
ble reigning. I looked upwards, leftwards, the coast being luckily for a moment
clear; there, far off, beautifully screened in the shadow of his vertical green cir-
cle, which was on the farther side of him, sate Wordsworth, silent, slowly but
steadily gnawing some portion of what I judged to be raisins, with his eye and
attention placidly fixed on these and these alone. The sight of whom, and of his
rock-like indifference to the babble, quasi-scientific and other, with attention
turned on the small practical alone, was comfortable and amusing to me, who
felt like him but could not eat raisins. This little glimpse I could still paint, so
clear and bright is it, and this shall be symbolical of all.

In a few years, I forget in how many and when, these Wordsworth appear-
ances in London ceased; we heard, not of ill-health perhaps, but of increasing
love of rest; at length of the long sleep’s coming; and never saw Wordsworth
more. One felt his death as the extinction of a public light, but not otherwise.

[From Reminiscences, 1867, 1881]

[ALFRED TENNYSON AT THIRTY-FOUR]

Alfred is one of the few British or Foreign Figures (a not increasing number
I think!) who are and remain beautiful to me;—a true human soul, or some
authentic approximation thereto, to whom your own soul can say, Brother!—
However, I doubt he will not come; he often skips me, in these brief visits to
Town; skips everybody indeed; being a man solitary and sad, as certain men are,
dwelling in an element of gloom,—carrying a bit of Chaos about him, in short,
which he is manufacturing into Cosmos!

Alfred is the son of a Lincolnshire Gentleman Farmer, I think; indeed, you
see in his verses that he is a native of “moated granges,” and green, fat pastures,
not of mountains and their torrents and storms. He had his breeding at Cam-
bridge, as if for the Law or Church; being master of a small annuity on his
Father’s decease, he preferred clubbing with his Mother and some Sisters, to
live unpromoted and write Poems. In this way he lives still, now here, now
there; the family always within reach of London, never in it; he himself mak-
ing rare and brief visits, lodging in some old comrade’s rooms. I think he must
be under forty, not much under it. One of the finest-looking men in the world.
A great shock of rough dusty-dark hair; bright-laughing hazel eyes; massive
aquiline face, most massive yet most delicate; of sallow-brown complexion,
almost Indian-looking; clothes cynically loose, free-and-easy;—smokes infinite
tobacco. His voice is musical metallic,—fit for loud laughter and piercing wail,
and all that may lie between; speech and speculation free and plenteous: I do not meet, in these late decades, such company over a pipe!—We shall see what he will grow to. He is often unwell; very chaotic,—his way is through Chaos and the Bottomless and Pathless; not handy for making out many miles upon.

[From a letter to Emerson, August 5, 1844]

Carlyle's Portraits of His Contemporaries

Charles Lamb I sincerely believe to be in some considerable degree insane. A more pitiful, ricketty, gasping, staggering, stammering Tom fool I do not know. He is witty by denying truisms, and abjuring good manners. His speech wriggles hither and thither with an incessant painful fluctuation; not an opinion in it or a fact or even a phrase that you can thank him for: more like a convulsion fit than natural systole and diastole.—Besides he is now a confirmed shameless drunkard: asks vehemently for gin-and-water in strangers’ houses; tipples until he is utterly mad, and is only not thrown out of doors because he is too much despised for taking such trouble with him. Poor Lamb! Poor England where such a despicable abortion is named genius!—He said: There are just two things I regret in English History; first that Guy Faux’s plot did not take effect (there would have been so glorious an explosion); second that the Royalists did not hang Milton (then we might have laughed at them); etc., etc.

[From Notebooks, November 2, 1831]

Thackeray has very rarely come athwart me since his return: he is a big fellow, soul and body; of many gifts and qualities (particularly in the Hogarth line, with a dash of Sterne superadded), of enormous appetite withal, and very uncertain and chaotic in all points except his outer breeding, which is fixed enough, and perfect according to the modern English style. I rather dread explosions in his history. A big, fierce, weeping, hungry man; not a strong one.

[From a letter to Emerson, September 9, 1853]
From Characteristics

The healthy know not of their health, but only the sick: this is the Physician’s Aphorism; and applicable in a far wider sense than he gives it. We may say, it holds no less in moral, intellectual, political, poetical, than in merely corporeal therapeutics; that wherever, or in what shape soever, powers of the sort which can be named vital are at work, herein lies the test of their working right or working wrong.

In the Body, for example, as all doctors are agreed, the first condition of complete health is, that each organ perform its function unconsciously, unheeded; let but any organ announce its separate existence, were it even boastfully, and for pleasure, not for pain, then already has one of those unfortunate “false centres of sensibility” established itself, already is derangement there. The perfection of bodily well-being is, that the collective bodily activities seem one; and be manifested, more-over, not in themselves, but in the action they accomplish.

However, without venturing into the abstruse, or too eagerly asking Why and How, in things where our answer must needs prove, in great part, an echo of the question, let us be content to remark farther, in the merely historical way, how that Aphorism of the bodily Physician holds good in quite other departments. Of the Soul, with her activities, we shall find it no less true than of the Body: nay, cry the Spiritualists, is not that very division of the unity, Man, into a dualism of Soul and Body, itself the symptom of disease; as, perhaps, your frightful theory of Materialism, of his being but a Body, and therefore, at least, once more a unity, may be the paroxysm which was critical, and the beginning of cure! But omitting this, we observe, with confidence enough, that the truly strong mind, view it as Intellect, as Morality, or under any other aspect, is nowise the mind acquainted with its strength; that here as before the sign of health is Unconsciousness. In our inward, as in our outward world, what is mechanical lies open to us; not what is dynamical and has vitality. Of our Thinking, we might say, it is but the mere upper surface that we shape into articulate Thoughts;—underneath the region of argument and conscious discourse, lies the region of meditation; here, in its quiet mysterious depths, dwells what vital force is in us; here, if aught is to be created, and not merely manufactured and communicated, must the work go on. Manufacture is intelligible, but trivial; Creation is great, and cannot be understood. Thus if the Debater and Demonstrator, whom we may rank as the lowest of true thinkers, knows what he has done, and how he did it, the Artist, whom we rank as the highest, knows not; must speak of Inspiration, and in one or the other dialect, call his work the gift of a divinity.

1. First published in the Edinburgh Review; ostensibly as a review of two books of philosophy that had appeared in 1830 and 1831: An Essay on the Origin and Prospects of Man by Thomas Hope, and Philosophical Lectures by Friedrich von Schlegel. Hope was a Utilitarian writer, and his analytical treatise may have inspired the first half of the essay, in which Carlyle exposes what seems to him the most characteristic symptom of modern humanity’s diseased state of mind and spirit: self-consciousness. Schlegel’s book, an example of the German transcendental philosophy, which Carlyle admired, may have inspired the second half of his essay, in which he points out the encouraging prospects for the future if mankind can find a new religious faith. Yet it is only near the end of Characteristics that Carlyle finally refers directly to these two books as such, for his real object, as his title suggests, is not to write a mere book review but to describe the state of mind and society characteristic of the age. This early essay, even in the necessarily abridged form adopted here, contains in embryo all the basic religious and political ideas that Carlyle was to develop in his later writings.
But on the whole “genius is ever a secret to itself”; of this old truth we have, on all sides, daily evidence. The Shakespeare takes no airs for writing *Hamlet* and the *Tempest*, understands not that it is anything surprising: Milton, again, is more conscious of his faculty, which accordingly is an inferior one. On the other hand, what cackling and strutting must we not often hear and see, when, in some shape of academical prolusion, maiden speech, review article, this or the other well-fledged goose has produced its goose-egg, of quite measurable value, were it the pink of its whole kind; and wonders why all mortals do not wonder!

Foolish enough, too, was the College Tutor’s surprise at Walter Shandy: how, though unread in Aristotle, he could nevertheless argue; and not knowing the name of any dialectic tool, handled them all to perfection. Is it the skilfullest anatomist that cuts the best figure at Sadler’s Wells? or does the boxer hit better for knowing that he has a *flexor longus* and a *flexor brevis*? But indeed, as in the higher case of the Poet, so here in that of the Speaker and Inquirer, the true force is an unconscious one. The healthy Understanding, we should say, is not the Logical, argumentative, but the Intuitive; for the end of Understanding is not to prove and find reasons, but to know and believe. Of logic, and its limits, and uses and abuses, there were much to be said and examined; one fact, however, which chiefly concerns us here, has long been familiar: that the man of logic and the man of insight; the Reasoner and the Discoverer, or even Knower, are quite separable,—indeed, for most part, quite separate characters. In practical matters, for example, has it not become almost proverbial that the man of logic cannot prosper? This is he whom business-people call Systematic and Theoriser and Word-monger; his *vital* intellectual force lies dormant or extinct, his whole force is mechanical, conscious: of such a one it is foreseen that, when once confronted with the infinite complexities of the real world, his little compact theorem of the world will be found wanting; that unless he can throw it overboard and become a new creature, he will necessarily founder. * * *

Never since the beginning of Time was there, that we hear or read of, so intensely self-conscious a Society. Our whole relations to the Universe and to our fellow-man have become an Inquiry, a Doubt; nothing will go on of its own accord, and do its function quietly; but all things must be probed into, the whole working of man’s world be anatomically studied. Alas, anatomically studied, that it may be medically aided! Till at length indeed, we have come to such a pass, that except in this same *medicine*, with its artifices and appliances, few can so much as imagine any strength or hope to remain for us. The whole Life of Society must now be carried on by drugs: doctor after doctor appears with his nostrum, of Cooperative Societies, Universal Suffrage, Cottage-and-Cow systems, Repression of Population, Vote by Ballot. To such height has the dyspepsia of Society reached; as indeed the constant grinding internal pain, or from time to time the mad spasmodic throes, of all Society do otherwise too mournfully indicate.

2. From an essay by the German poet J. C. F. von Schiller (1759–1805).
5. Technical terms for bodily muscles.
Far be it from us to attribute, as some unwise persons do, the disease itself to this unhappy sensation that there is a disease! The Encyclopedists did not produce the troubles of France; but the troubles of France produced the Encyclopedists, and much else. The Self-consciousness is the symptom merely; nay, it is also the attempt towards cure. We record the fact, without special censure; not wondering that Society should feel itself, and in all ways complain of aches and twinges, for it has suffered enough.

But leaving this, let us rather look within, into the Spiritual condition of Society, and see what aspects and prospects offer themselves there.

To begin with our highest Spiritual function, with Religion, we might ask, Whither has Religion now fled? Of Churches and their establishments we here say nothing; nor of the unhappy domains of Unbelief, and how innumerable men, blinded in their minds, have grown to “live without God in the world”; but, taking the fairest side of the matter, we ask, What is the nature of that same Religion, which still lingers in the hearts of the few who are called, and call themselves, specially the Religious? Is it a healthy religion, vital, unconscious of itself; that shines forth spontaneously in doing of the Work, or even in preaching of the Word? Unhappily, no. Instead of heroic martyr Conduct, and inspired and soul-inspiring Eloquence, whereby Religion itself were brought home to our living bosoms, to live and reign there, we have “Discourses on the Evidences,” endeavouring, with smallest result, to make it probable that such a thing as Religion exists. The most enthusiastic Evangelicals do not preach a Gospel, but keep describing how it should and might be preached: to awaken the sacred fire of faith, as by a sacred contagion, is not their endeavour; but, at most, to describe how Faith shows and acts, and scientifically distinguish true Faith from false. Religion, like all else, is conscious of itself, listens to itself; it becomes less and less creative, vital; more and more mechanical. Considered as a whole, the Christian Religion of late ages has been continually dissipating itself into Metaphysics; and threatens now to disappear, as some rivers do, in deserts of barren sand.

Of Literature, and its deep-seated, wide-spread maladies, why speak? Literature is but a branch of Religion, and always participates in its character: however, in our time, it is the only branch that still shows any greenness; and, as some think, must one day become the main stem.

Nay, is not the diseased self-conscious state of Literature disclosed in this one fact, which lies so near us here, the prevalence of Reviewing! Sterne’s wish for a reader “that would give-up the reins of his imagination into his author’s hands, and be pleased he knew not why, and cared not wherefore,” might lead him a long journey now. Indeed, for our best class of readers, the chief pleasure, a very stinted one, is this same knowing of the Why; which many a Kames and Bossu has been, ineffectually enough, endeavouring to teach us: till at last

6. Diderot, Voltaire, and other critics of the established order in France who were contributors to the Encyclopédie (1751–52, 1776–80).
8. Evidences of Christianity (1794) by William Paley, a Rationalist theologian.
these also have laid down their trade; and now your Reviewer is a mere taster; who tastes, and says, by the evidence of such palate, such tongue, as he has got, It is good, It is bad. Was it thus that the French carried out certain inferior creatures on their Algerine Expedition, to taste the wells for them, and try whether they were poisoned? Far be it from us to disparage our own craft, whereby we have our living! Only we must note these things: that Reviewing spreads with strange vigour; that such a man as Byron reckons the Reviewer and the Poet equal; that at the last Leipzig Fair, there was advertised a Review of Reviews. By and by it will be found that all Literature has become one boundless self-devouring Review; and, as in London routs,1 we have to do nothing, but only to see others do nothing.—Thus does Literature also, like a sick thing, superabundantly “listen to itself.”

No less is this unhealthy symptom manifest, if we cast a glance on our Philosophy, on the character of our speculative Thinking. Nay already, as above hinted, the mere existence and necessity of a Philosophy is an evil. Man is sent hither not to question, but to work: “the end of man,” it was long ago written, “is an Action, not a Thought.”2 In the perfect state, all Thought were but the picture and inspiring symbol of Action; Philosophy, except as Poetry and Religion, would have no being. And yet how, in this imperfect state, can it be avoided, can it be dispensed with? Man stands as in the centre of Nature; his fraction of Time encircled by Eternity, his handbreadth of Space encircled by Infinitude: how shall he forbear asking himself, What am I; and Whence; and Whither? How too, except in slight partial hints, in kind asseverations and assurances, such as a mother quiets her fretfully inquisitive child with, shall he get answer to such inquiries?

The disease of Metaphysics, accordingly, is a perennial one. In all ages, those questions of Death and Immortality, Origin of Evil, Freedom and Necessity, must, under new forms, anew make their appearance; ever, from time to time, must the attempt to shape for ourselves some Theorem of the Universe be repeated. And ever unsuccessfully: for what Theorem of the Infinite can the Finite render complete? We, the whole species of Mankind, and our whole existence and history, are but a floating speck in the illimitable ocean of the All; yet in that ocean; indissoluble portion thereof; partaking of its infinite tendencies; borne this way and that by its deep-swelling tides, and grand ocean currents;—of which what faintest chance is there that we should ever exhaust the significance, ascertain the goings and comings? A region of Doubt, therefore, hovers forever in the background; in Action alone can we have certainty. Nay properly Doubt is the indispensable inexhaustible material whereon Action works, which Action has to fashion into Certainty and Reality; only on a canvas of Darkness, such is man's way of being, could the many-coloured picture of our Life paint itself and shine.

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Now this is specially the misery which has fallen on man in our Era. Belief, Faith has well-nigh vanished from the world. The youth on awakening in this wondrous Universe no longer finds a competent theory of its wonders. Time was, when if he asked himself, What is man, What are the duties of man? the answer stood ready written for him. But now the ancient “ground-plan of the All” belies itself when brought into contact with reality; Mother Church has,
to the most, become a superannuated Step-mother, whose lessons go disregarded; or are spurned at, and scornfully gainsaid. For young Valour and thirst of Action no ideal Chivalry invites to heroism, prescribes what is heroic: the old ideal of Manhood has grown obsolete, and the new is still invisible to us, and we grope after it in darkness, one clutching this phantom, another that; Werterism, Byronism, even Brummelism, each has its day. For Contemplation and love of Wisdom, no Cloister now opens its religious shades; the Thinker must, in all senses, wander homeless, too often aimless, looking up to a Heaven which is dead for him, round to an Earth which is deaf. Action, in those old days, was easy, was voluntary, for the divine worth of human things lay acknowledged; Speculation was wholesome, for it ranged itself as the handmaid of Action; what could not so range itself died out by its natural death, by neglect. Loyalty still hallowed obedience, and made rule noble; there was still something to be loyal to: the Godlike stood embodied under many a symbol in men’s interests and business; the Finite shadowed forth the Infinite; Eternity looked through Time. The Life of man was encompassed and overcanopied by a glory of Heaven, even as his dwelling-place by the azure vault.

How changed in these new days! Truly may it be said, the Divinity has withdrawn from the Earth; or veils himself in that widewasting Whirlwind of a departing Era, wherein the fewest can discern his goings. Not Godhead, but an iron, ignoble circle of Necessity embraces all things; binds the youth of these times into a sluggish thrall, or else exasperates him into a rebel. Heroic Action is paralysed; for what worth now remains unquestionable with him? At the fervid period when his whole nature cries aloud for Action, there is nothing sacred under whose banner he can act; the course and kind and conditions of free Action are all but undiscoverable. Doubt storms-in on him through every avenue; inquiries of the deepest, painfulest sort must be engaged with; and the invincible energy of young years waste itself in sceptical, suicidal cavillings; in passionate “questionings of Destiny,” whereto no answer will be returned.

For men, in whom the old perennial principle of Hunger (be it Hunger of the poor Day-drudge who stills it with eighteenpence a-day, or of the ambitious Place-hunter who can nowise still it with so little) suffices to fill-up existence, the case is bad; but not the worst. These men have an aim, such as it is; and can steer towards it, with chagrin enough truly; yet, as their hands are kept full, without desperation. Unhappier are they to whom a higher instinct has been given; who struggle to be persons, not machines; to whom the Universe is not a warehouse, or at best a fancy-bazaar, but a mystic temple and hall of doom. For such men there lie properly two courses open. The lower, yet still an estimable class, take up with worn-out Symbols of the Godlike; keep trimming and trucking between these and Hypocrisy, purblindly enough, miserably enough. A numerous intermediate class end in Denial; and form a theory that there is no theory; that nothing is certain in the world, except this fact of Pleasure being pleasant; so they try to realise what trifling modicum of Pleasure they can come at, and to live contented therewith, winking hard. Of these we speak not here; but only of the second nobler class, who also have dared to say No and cannot yet say Yea; but feel that in the No they dwell as in a Golgotha, where life enters not, where peace is not appointed them.

4. A fad for wearing elegant clothes in the manner of Beau Brummel, a dandy of George IV’s time. “Werterism”: the cultivation of melancholy based on the model of Goethe’s novel The Sorrows of Young Werther.
Hard, for most part, is the fate of such men; the harder the nobler they are. In dim forecastings, wrestles within them the “Divine Idea of the World” yet will nowhere visibly reveal itself. They have to realise a Worship for themselves, or live unworshipping. The Godlike has vanished from the world; and they, by the strong cry of their soul’s agony, like true wonder-workers, must again evoke its presence. This miracle is their appointed task; which they must accomplish, or die wretchedly: this miracle has been accomplished by such; but not in our land; our land yet knows not of it. Behold a Byron, in melodious tones, “cursing his day”: he mistakes earthborn passionate Desire for heaven-inspired Freewill; without heavenly load-star, rushes madly into the dance of meteoric lights that hover on the mad Mahlstrom; and goes down among its eddies. Hear a Shelley filling the earth with inarticulate wail; like the infinite, inarticulate grief and weeping of forsaken infants. A noble Friedrich Schlegel,5 stupefied in that fearful loneliness, as of a silenced battle-field, flies back to Catholicism; as a child might to its slain mother’s bosom, and cling there. In lower regions, how many a poor Hazlitt must wander on God’s verdant earth, like the Unblest on burning deserts; passionately dig wells, and draw up only the dry quicksand; believe that he is seeking Truth, yet only wrestle among endless Sophisms, doing desperate battle as with spectre-hosts; and die and make no sign!

To the better order of such minds any mad joy of Denial has long since ceased: the problem is not now to deny, but to ascertain and perform. Once in destroying the False, there was a certain inspiration; but now the genius of Destruction has done its work, there is now nothing more to destroy. The doom of the Old has long been pronounced, and irrevocable; the Old has passed away: but, alas, the New appears not in its stead; the Time is still in pangs of travail with the New. Man has walked by the light of conflagrations, and amid the sound of falling cities; and now there is darkness, and long watching till it be morning. The voice even of the faithful can but exclaim: “As yet struggles the twelfth hour of the Night: birds of darkness are on the wing, spectres uproar, the dead walk, the living dream.—Thou, Eternal Providence, wilt cause the day to dawn!”6

Such being the condition, temporal and spiritual, of the world at our Epoch, can we wonder that the world “listens to itself,” and struggles and writhes, everywhere externally and internally, like a thing in pain? Nay, is not even this unhealthy action of the world’s Organisation, if the symptom of universal disease, yet also the symptom and sole means of restoration and cure? The effort of Nature, exerting her medicative force to cast-out foreign impediments, and once more become One, become whole? In Practice, still more in Opinion, which is the precursor and prototype of Practice, there must needs be collision, convulsion; much has to be ground away. Thought must needs be Doubt and Inquiry before it can again be Affirmation and Sacred Precept. Innumerable “Philosophies of Man,” contending in boundless hubbub, must annihilate each other, before an inspired Poesy and Faith for Man can fashion itself together.

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For ourselves, the loud discord which jars in these two Works,7 in innumerable works of the like import, and generally in all the Thought and Action of this period, does not any longer utterly confuse us. Unhappy who, in such a time, felt

5. German literary critic and leader of the Romantic school (1772–1829). In 1808 he joined the Roman Catholic church.
6. “Jean Paul’s Hesperus” [Carlyle’s note]. Jean Paul Richter (1763–1825) was a German humorist.
7. Books by Hope and Schlegel.
not, at all conjunctures, ineradicably in his heart the knowledge that a God made
this Universe, and a Demon not! And shall Evil always prosper, then? Out of all
Evil comes Good; and no Good that is possible but shall one day be real. Deep
and sad as is our feeling that we stand yet in the bodeful Night; equally deep, inde-
structible is our assurance that the Morning also will not fail. Nay already, as we
look round, streaks of a dayspring are in the east; it is dawning; when the time
shall be fulfilled, it will be day. The progress of man towards higher and nobler
developments of whatever is highest and noblest in him, lies not only prophesied
to Faith, but now written to the eye of Observation, so that he who runs may read.

One great step of progress, for example, we should say, in actual circum-
stances, was this same; the clear ascertainment that we are in progress. About
the grand Course of Providence, and his final Purposes with us, we can know
nothing, or almost nothing: man begins in darkness, ends in darkness; mystery
is everywhere around us and in us, under our feet, among our hands. Neverthe-
less so much has become evident to every one, that this wondrous Mankind is
advancing somewhither; that at least all human things are, have been and for-
ever will be, in Movement and Change;—as, indeed, for beings that exist in Time,
by virtue of Time, and are made of Time, might have been long since understood.
In some provinces, it is true, as in Experimental Science, this discovery is an old
one; but in most others it belongs wholly to these latter days. How often, in for-
mer ages, by eternal Creeds, eternal Forms of Government and the like, has it
been attempted, fiercely enough, and with destructive violence, to chain the
Future under the Past; and say to the Providence, whose ways with man are mys-
terious, and through the great deep: Hitherto shalt thou come, but no farther! A
wholly insane attempt; and for man himself, could it prosper, the frightfulest of
all enchantments, a very Life-in-Death. Man's task here below, the destiny of
every individual man, is to be in turns Apprentice and Workman; or say rather,
Scholar, Teacher, Discoverer: by nature he has a strength for learning, for imi-
tating; but also a strength for acting, for knowing on his own account. Are we not
in a world seen to be Infinite; the relations lying closest together modified by
those latest discovered and lying farthest asunder? Could you ever spell-bind man
into a Scholar merely, so that he had nothing to discover, to correct; could you
ever establish a Theory of the Universe that were entire, unimprovable, and
which needed only to be got by heart; man then were spiritually defunct, the
Species we now name Man had ceased to exist. But the gods, kinder to us than
we are to ourselves, have forbidden such suicidal acts. As Phlogiston\(^8\) is displaced
by Oxygen, and the Epicycles of Ptolemy by the Ellipses of Kepler,\(^9\) so does
Paganism give place to Catholicism, Tyranny to Monarchy, and Feudalism to
Representative Government,—where also the process does not stop. Perfection
of Practice, like completeness of Opinion, is always approaching, never arrived;
Truth, in the words of Schiller, immer wird, nie ist; never
is, always a-being.

Sad, truly, were our condition did we know but this, that Change is univer-
sal and inevitable. Launched into a dark shoreless sea of Pyrrhonism, what
would remain for us but to sail aimless, hopeless; or make madly merry, while
the devouring Death had not yet ingulfed us? As indeed, we have seen many,
and still see many do. Nevertheless so stands it not. The venerator of the Past

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8. A hypothetical substance that, according to older theories of chemistry, was part of all com-
bustible objects and was released in burning.
9. Johannes Kepler (1571–1630), German astronomer whose theories of planetary orbits (together with the earlier discoveries of Coperni-
cus) supplanted the Ptolemaic theories. “Ptolemy”: an astronomer of Alexandria, 2nd century C.E.
(and to what pure heart is the Past, in that “moonlight of memory,” other than sad and holy?) sorrows not over its departure, as one utterly bereaved. The true Past departs not, nothing that was worthy in the Past departs; no Truth or Goodness realised by man ever dies, or can die; but is all still here, and, recognised or not, lives and works through endless changes. If all things, to speak in the German dialect, are discerned by us, and exist for us, in an element of Time, and therefore of Mortality and Mutability; yet Time itself repose on Eternity: the truly Great and Transcendental has its basis and substance in Eternity; stands revealed to us as Eternity in a vesture of Time. Thus in all Poetry, Worship, Art, Society, as one form passes into another, nothing is lost: it is but the superficial, as it were the body only, that grows obsolete and dies; under the mortal body lies a soul which is immortal; which anew incarnates itself in fairer revelation; and the Present is the living sum total of the whole Past.

In change, therefore, there is nothing terrible, nothing supernatural: on the contrary, it lies in the very essence of our lot and life in this world. To-day is not yesterday: we ourselves change; how can our Works and Thoughts, if they are always to be the fittest, continue always the same? Change, indeed, is painful; yet ever needful; and if Memory have its force and worth, so also has Hope. Nay, if we look well to it, what is all Derangement, and necessity of great Change, in itself such an evil, but the product simply of increased resources which the old methods can no longer administer; of new wealth which the old coffers will no longer contain? What is it, for example, that in our own day bursts asunder the bonds of ancient Political Systems, and perplexes all Europe with the fear of Change, but even this: the increase of social resources, which the old social methods will no longer sufficiently administer? The new omnipotence of the Steam-engine is hewing asunder quite other mountains than the physical. Have not our economical distresses, those barnyard Conflagrations® themselves, the frightfullest madness of our mad epoch, their rise also in what is a real increase: increase of Men; of human Force; properly, in such a Planet as ours, the most precious of all increases? It is true again, the ancient methods of administration will no longer suffice. Must the indomitable millions, full of old Saxon energy and fire, lie cooped-up in this Western Nook, choking one another, as in a Blackhole of Calcutta,® while a whole fertile untenanted Earth, desolate for want of the ploughshare, cries: Come and till me, come and reap me? If the ancient Captains can no longer yield guidance, new must be sought after: for the difficulty lies not in nature, but in artifice; the European Calcutta-Blackhole has no walls but air ones and paper ones.—So too, Scepticism itself, with its innumerable mischiefs, what is it but the sour fruit of a most blessed increase, that of Knowledge; a fruit too that will not always continue sour?

In fact, much as we have said and mourned about the unproductive prevalence of Metaphysics, it was not without some insight into the use that lies in them. Metaphysical Speculation, if a necessary evil, is the forerunner of much good. The fever of Scepticism must needs burn itself out, and burn out thereby the Impurities that caused it; then again will there be clearness, health. The principle of life, which now struggles painfully, in the outer, thin and barren domain of the Conscious or Mechanical, may then withdraw into its inner sanctuaries, its abysses of mystery and miracle; withdraw deeper than ever into

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1. Rick burning in the 1820s and 1830s by disgruntled farm laborers in England.
2. A small room in which 146 European men and women were imprisoned by the Indians in 1756. After one night only 23 remained alive.
3. Carlyle often urged emigration to America as a solution to the overcrowding of Europe. One of his brothers did emigrate and became a farmer in Ontario.
that domain of the Unconscious, by nature infinite and inexhaustible; and crea-
tively work there. From that mystic region, and from that alone, all wonders,
all Poesies, and Religions, and Social Systems have proceeded: the like won-
ders, and greater and higher, lie slumbering there; and, brooded on by the spirit
of the waters, will evolve themselves, and rise like exhalations from the Deep.

Remarkable it is, truly, how everywhere the eternal fact begins again to be
recognised, that there is a Godlike in human affairs; that God not only made
us and beholds us, but is in us and around us; that the Age of Miracles, as it
ever was, now is. Such recognition we discern on all hands and in all countries:
in each country after its own fashion. In France, among the younger nobler
minds, strangely enough; where, in their loud contention with the Actual and
Conscious, the Ideal or Unconscious is, for the time, without exponent; where
Religion means not the parent of Polity, as of all that is highest, but Polity itself;
and this and the other earnest man has not been wanting, who could audibly
whisper to himself: “Go to, I will make religion.” In England still more
strangely; as in all things, worthy England will have its way: by the shrieking of
hysterical women,\footnote{An allusion to followers of Carlyle’s friend, the
preacher Edward Irving. Women in Irving’s congregation asserted that they had acquired the gift
of tongues.} casting out of devils, and other “gifts of the Holy Ghost.”
Well might Jean Paul say, in this his twelfth hour of the Night, “the living
dream”; well might he say, “the dead walk.”\footnote{Richter, \textit{Hesperus}} Meanwhile let us rejoice rather
that so much has been seen into, were it through never so diffracting media,
and never so madly distorted; that in all dialects, though but half-articulately,
this high Gospel begins to be preached: Man is still Man. The genius of Mech-
nanism, as was once before predicted, will not always sit like a choking incubus
on our soul; but at length, when by a new magic Word the old spell is broken,
become our slave, and as familiar-spirit do all our bidding. “We are near awak-
ening when we dream that we dream.”\footnote{From a work by the German poet Novalis
(1772–1801).}

He that has an eye and a heart can even now say: Why should I falter? Light
has come into the world; to such as love Light, so as Light must be loved, with
a boundless all-doing, all-enduring love. For the rest, let that vain struggle to
read the mystery of the Infinite cease to harass us. It is a mystery which, through
all ages, we shall only read here a line of, there another line of. Do we not
already know that the name of the Infinite is GOOD, is GOD? Here on Earth we
are as Soldiers, fighting in a foreign land; that understand not the plan of the
campaign, and have no need to understand it; seeing well what is at our hand
to be done. Let us do it like Soldiers; with submission, with courage, with a
heroic joy. “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might.”\footnote{Ecclesiastes 9.10.}
Behind us, behind each one of us, lie Six Thousand Years of human effort, human con-
quest: before us is the boundless Time, with its as yet uncreated and uncon-
quered Continents and Eldorados, which we, even we, have to conquer, to
create; and from the bosom of Eternity there shine for us celestial guiding stars.

“My inheritance how wide and fair!
Time is my fair seed-field, of Time I’m heir.”\footnote{From Goethe’s romance \textit{Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre} (1821).}

\textbf{1831}
It is in his stupendous Section, headed Natural Supernaturalism, that the Professor first becomes a Seer; and, after long effort, such as we have witnessed, finally subsides under his feet this refractory Clothes-Philosophy, and takes victorious possession thereof. Phantasms enough he has had to struggle with; “Clothwebs and Cobwebs,” of Imperial Mantles, Superannuated Symbols, and what not: yet still did he courageously pierce through. Nay, worst of all, two quite mysterious, world-embracing Phantasms, Time and Space, have ever hovered round him, perplexing and bewildering: but with these also he now resolutely grapples, these also he victoriously rends asunder. In a word, he has looked fixedly on Existence, till one after the other, its earthly hulls and garnitures have all melted away; and now, to his rapt vision, the interior celestial Holy of Holies lies disclosed.

Here, therefore, properly it is that the Philosophy of Clothes attains to Transcendentalism; this last leap, can we but clear it, takes us safe into the promised land, where Palingenesia, in all senses, may be considered as beginning. “Courage, then!” may our Diogenes exclaim, with better right than Diogenes the First once did. This stupendous Section we, after long painful meditation, have found not to be unintelligible; but, on the contrary, to grow clear, nay radiant, and all-illuminating.

"Deep has been, and is, the significance of Miracles," thus quietly begins the Professor; “far deeper perhaps than we imagine. Meanwhile, the question of questions were: What specially is a Miracle? To that Dutch King of Siam, an icicle had been a miracle; whoso had carried with him an air-pump, and vial of vitriolic ether, might have worked a miracle. To my Horse, again, who unhappily is still more unscientific, do not I work a miracle, and magical ‘Open sesame!’ every time I please to pay twopence, and open for him an impassable Schlagbaum, or shut Turnpike?

"But is not a real Miracle simply a violation of the Laws of Nature?’ ask several. Whom I answer by this new question: What are the Laws of Nature? To

1. Book 3, chap. 8. The characteristically paradoxical title of this chapter can best be understood by reference to the chapter on miracles in David Hume’s An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding (1748), to which Carlyle makes several direct and indirect allusions in his own exposition of the nature of the miraculous. In his skeptical analysis of miracles (Christian miracles in particular), Hume asserts: “A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature... It is no miracle that a man, seemingly in good health, should die on a sudden... But it is a miracle that a dead man should come to life, because that has never been observed in any age or country.” The young Carlyle seems to have been impressed by Hume’s arguments, as he had also been impressed (and depressed) by Gibbon’s relentless exposure of traditional Christianity in The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire. In his later resolution of his dilemma, he bypassed Hume’s arguments. Instead of arguing whether miracles in the traditional sense (such as the resurrection of Christ) have occurred, he contends that everything in our experience is a miracle of a supernatural and inexplicable order, hence an appropriate cause for wonder and joy. The natural is supernatural.
2. Rebirth. “Transcendentalism”: a term loosely used here to refer to any philosophy that opposes materialism or empiricism and that asserts the domination of the intuitive or spiritual over the material [C.F. Harrold].
3. A philosopher of the Cynic school; near the end of a dull lecture he called out to his fellow listeners: “Courage, friends! I see land.”
4. In his chapter on miracles, Hume cites an incident of an Indian prince refusing to believe that water can be turned into ice. Carlyle notes that anybody could do so by treating a flask of vitriolic ether with an air pump.
5. The magic password for opening a door in the cavern in the story Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves, in The Arabian Nights.
me perhaps the rising of one from the dead were no violation of these Laws, but a confirmation; were some far deeper Law, now first penetrated into, and by Spiritual Force, even as the rest have all been, brought to bear on us with its Material Force.

"Here too may some inquire, not without astonishment: On what ground shall one, that can make Iron swim, come and declare that therefore he can teach Religion? To us, truly, of the Nineteenth Century, such declaration were inept enough; which nevertheless to our fathers, of the First Century, was full of meaning.

"But is it not the deepest Law of Nature that she be constant? cries an illumined class: 'Is not the Machine of the Universe fixed to move by unalterable rules?' Probable enough, good friends: nay I, too, must believe that the God, whom ancient inspired men assert to be 'without variableness or shadow of turning,' does indeed never change; that Nature, that the Universe, which no one whom it so pleases can be prevented from calling a Machine, does move by the most unalterable rules. And now of you, too, I make the old inquiry: What those same unalterable rules, forming the complete Statute-Book of Nature, may possibly be?

"They stand written in our Works of Science, say you; in the accumulated records of Man’s Experience?—Was Man with his Experience present at the Creation, then, to see how it all went on? Have any deepest scientific individuals yet dived down to the foundations of the Universe, and gauged everything there? Did the Maker take them into His counsel; that they read His ground-plan of the incomprehensible All; and can say, This stands marked therein, and no more than this? Alas, not in anywise! These scientific individuals have been nowhere but where we also are; have seen some handbreadths deeper than we see into the Deep that is infinite, without bottom as without shore.

"Laplace’s Book on the Stars, wherein he exhibits that certain Planets, with their Satellites, gyrate round our worthy Sun, at a rate and in a course, which, by greatest good fortune, he and the like of him have succeeded in detecting,—is to me as precious as to another. But is this what thou namest ‘Mechanism of the Heavens,’ and ‘System of the World’; this, wherein Sirius and the Pleiades, and all Herschel’s Fifteen-thousand Suns per minute, being left out, some paltry handful of Moons, and inert Balls, had been—looked at, nicknamed, and marked in the Zodiacal Way-bill; so that we can now prate of their Whereabout; their How, their Why, their What, being hid from us, as in the signless Inane?

"System of Nature! To the wisest man, wide as is his vision, Nature remains of quite infinite depth, of quite infinite expansion; and all Experience thereof limits itself to some few computed centuries and measured square-miles. The course of Nature’s phases, on this our little fraction of a Planet, is partially known to us: but who knows what deeper courses these depend on; what infinitely larger Cycle (of causes) our little Epicycle revolves on? To the Minnow
every cranny and pebble, and quality and accident, of its little native Creek may
have become familiar: but does the Minnow understand the Ocean Tides and
periodic Currents, the Tradewinds, and Monsoons, and Moon’s Eclipses; by all
which the condition of its little Creek is regulated, and may, from time to time
(unnaturally enough), be quite overset and reversed? Such a minnow is
Man; his Creek this Planet Earth; his Ocean the immeasurable All; his Mon-
soons and periodic Currents the mysterious Course of Providence through
Aeons of Aeons.

“We speak of the Volume of Nature: and truly a Volume it is,—whose Author
and Writer is God. To read it! Dost thou, does man, so much as well know the
Alphabet thereof? With its Words, Sentences, and grand descriptive Pages,
poetical and philosophical, spread out through Solar Systems, and Thousands
of Years, we shall not try thee. It is a Volume written in celestial hieroglyphs,
in the true Sacred-writing; of which even Prophets are happy that they can read
here a line and there a line. As for your Institutes, and Academies of Science,
they strive bravely; and, from amid the thick-crowded, inextricably intertwisted
hieroglyphic writing, pick out, by dextrous combination, some Letters in the
vulgar Character, and therefrom put together this and the other economic
Recipe, of high avail in Practice. That Nature is more than some boundless
Volume of such Recipes, or huge, well-nigh inexhaustible Domestic-Cookery
Book, of which the whole secret will in this manner one day evolve itself,
the fewest dream.

“Custom,” continues the Professor, “doth make dotards of us all.4 Consider
well, thou wilt find that Custom is the greatest of Weavers; and weaves air
raiment for all the Spirits of the Universe; whereby indeed these dwell with
us visibly, as ministering servants, in our houses and workshops; but their
spiritual nature becomes, to the most, forever hidden. Philosophy complains
that Custom has hoodwinked us, from the first; that we do everything by Cus-
tom, even Believe by it; that our very Axioms, let us boast of Freethinking as
we may, are oftenest simply such Beliefs as we have never heard questioned.
Nay, what is Philosophy throughout but a continual battle against Custom;
an ever-renewed effort to transcend the sphere of blind Custom, and so become
Transcendental?

“Innumerable are the illusions and legerdemain-tricks of Custom: but of all
these, perhaps the cleverest is her knack of persuading us that the Miraculous,
by simple repetition, ceases to be Miraculous. True, it is by this means we live;
for man must work as well as wonder: and herein is Custom so far a kind nurse,
guiding him to his true benefit. But she is a fond foolish nurse, or rather we
are false foolish nursetings, when, in our resting and reflecting hours, we pro-
long the same deception. Am I to view the Stupendous with stupid indiffer-
ence, because I have seen it twice, or two-hundred, or two-million times?
There is no reason in Nature or in Art why I should: unless, indeed, I am a mere
Work-Machine, for whom the divine gift of Thought were no other than the
terrestrial gift of Steam is to the Steam-engine; a power whereby cotton might
be spun, and money and money’s worth realised.

“Notable enough too, here as elsewhere, wilt thou find the potency of
Names; which indeed are but one kind of such customwoven, wonder-hiding
Garments. Witchcraft, and all manner of Spectre-work, and Demonology, we

2. I.e., a law in economics, such as the law of supply and demand.
3. Cf. Shakespeare’s Hamlet 1.3.83: “Thus conscience does make cowards of us all.”
have now named Madness and Diseases of the Nerves. Seldom reflecting that still the new question comes upon us: What is Madness, what are Nerves? Ever, as before, does Madness remain a mysterious-terrific, altogether infernal boiling-up of the Nether Chaotic Deep, through this fair-painted Vision of Creation, which swims thereon, which we name the Real. Was Luther’s Picture of the Devil less a Reality, whether it were formed within the bodily eye, or without it? In every the wisest Soul lies a whole world of internal Madness, an authentic Demon-Empire; out of which, indeed, his world of Wisdom has been creatively built together, and now rests there, as on its dark foundations does a habitable flowery Earth-rind.

“But deepest of all illusory Appearances, for hiding Wonder, as for many other ends, are your two grand fundamental world-enveloping Appearances, SPACE and TIME. These, as spun and woven for us from before Birth itself, to clothe our celestial ME for dwelling here, and yet to blind it,—lie all-embracing, as the universal canvas, or warp and woof, whereby all minor Illusions, in this Phantasm Existence, weave and paint themselves. In vain, while here on Earth, shall you endeavour to strip them off; you can, at best, but rend them asunder for moments, and look through.

“Fortunatus had a wishing Hat, which when he put on, and wished himself Anywhere, behold he was There. By this means had Fortunatus triumphed over Space, he had annihilated Space; for him there was no Where, but all was Here. Were a Hatter to establish himself, in the Wahngasse of Weissenichtwo, and make felts of this sort for all mankind, what a world we should have of it! Still stranger, should, on the opposite side of the street, another Hatter establish himself; and, as his fellow-craftsman made Space annihilating Hats, make Time-annihilating! Of both would I purchase, were it with my last groschen; but chiefly of this latter. To clap-on your felt, and, simply by wishing that you were Anywhere, straightway to be There! Next to clap-on your other felt, and, simply by wishing that you were Anywhen, straightway to be Then! This were indeed the grander: shooting at will from the Fire-Creation of the World to its Fire-Consummation; here historically present in the First Century, conversing face to face with Paul and Seneca; there prophetically in the Thirty-first, conversing also face to face with other Pauls and Senecas, who as yet stand hidden in the depth of that late Time!

“Or thinkest thou it were impossible, unimaginable? Is the Past annihilated, then, or only past; is the Future non-extant, or only future? Those mystic faculties of thine, Memory and Hope, already answer: already through those mystic avenues, thou the Earth-blinded summonest both Past and Future, and communest with them, though as yet darkly, and with mute beckonings. The curtains of Yesterday drop down, the curtains of Tomorrow roll up; but Yesterday and Tomorrow both are. Pierce through the Time-element, glance into the Eternal. Believe what thou findest written in the sanctuaries of Man’s Soul, even as all Thinkers, in all ages, have devoutly read it there: that Time and Space are not God, but creations of God; that with God as it is a universal HERE, so is it an everlasting Now.

4. Martin Luther (1483–1546), German Reformation leader, threw his inkstand at an apparition of the devil that visited his study when he was translating the Psalms.
5. In the legend on which Thomas Dekker based his play Old Fortunatus (1600), a magic hat enabled the owner instantaneously to be anywhere he wished.
6. Small German coin.
7. Roman philosopher (4 B.C.E.—65 C.E.) who, according to legend, conversed with St. Paul.
“And seest thou therein any glimpse of IMMORTALITY?—O Heaven! Is the white Tomb of our Loved One, who died from our arms, and had to be left behind us there, which rises in the distance, like a pale, mournfully receding Milestone, to tell how many toilsome uncheered miles we have journeyed on alone,—but a pale spectral Illusion! Is the lost Friend still mysteriously Here, even as we are Here mysteriously, with God!—Know of a truth that only the Time-shadows have perished, or are perishable; that the real Being of whatever was, and whatever is, and whatever will be, is even now and forever. This, should it unhappily seem new, thou mayest ponder at thy leisure; for the next twenty years, or the next twenty centuries: believe it thou must; understand it thou canst not.

“That the Thought-forms, Space and Time, wherein, once for all, we are sent into this Earth to live, should condition and determine our whole Practical reasonings, conceptions, and imagings or imaginings, seems altogether fit, just, and unavoidable. But that they should, furthermore, usurp such sway over pure spiritual Meditation, and blind us to the wonder everywhere lying close on us, seems nowise so. Admit Space and Time to their due rank as Forms of Thought;8 nay even, if thou wilt, to their quite undue rank of Realities: and consider, then, with thyself how their thin disguises hide from us the brightest God-effulgences! Thus, were it not miraculous, could I stretch forth my hand and clutch the Sun? Yet thou seest me daily stretch forth my hand and therewith clutch many a thing, and swing it hither and thither. Art thou a grown baby, then, to fancy that the Miracle lies in miles of distance, or in pounds avoirdupois of weight; and not to see that the true inexplicable God-revealing Miracle lies in this, that I can stretch forth my hand at all; that I have free Force to clutch aught therewith? Innumerable other of this sort are the deceptions, and wonder-hiding stupefactions, which Space practices on us.

“Still worse is it with regard to Time. Your grand antimagician, and universal wonder-hider, is this same lying Time. Had we but the Time-annihilating Hat, to put on for once only, we should see ourselves in a World of Miracles, wherein all fabled or authentic Thaumaturgy,9 and feats of Magic, were outdone. But unhappily we have not such a Hat; and man, poor fool that he is, can seldom and scantily help himself without one.

“Were it not wonderful, for instance, had Orpheus, or Amphion,1 built the walls of Thebes by the mere sound of his Lyre? Yet tell me, Who built these walls of Weissnichtwo; summoning out all the sandstone rocks, to dance along from the Steinbruch (now a huge Trogloyte Chasm,2 with frightful green-mantled pools), and shape themselves into Doric and Ionic pillars, squared ashlar houses3 and noble streets? Was it not the still higher Orpheus, or Orpheuses, who, in past centuries, by the divine Music of Wisdom, succeeded

8. The idea that time and space are modes of perception rather than realities is derived from the philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), author of A Critique of Pure Reason (1781).
9. The working of miracles and magical occurrences.
1. Legendary musicians who effected miracles. Orpheus, with his lyre, could spellbind wild beasts. Amphion’s playing, during the building of Thebes, caused the stones for the walls to be drawn into place.
2. The emptied stone quarry of Steinbruch looks now like the site of primitive cave dwellers (“Troglodytes”).
3. Houses made of squared blocks of hewn stone.
in civilising Man? Our highest Orpheus walked in Judea, eighteen-hundred years ago: his sphere-melody, flowing in wild native tones, took captive the ravished souls of men; and, being of a true sphere-melody, still flows and sounds, though now with thousandfold accompaniments, and rich symphonies, through all our hearts; and modulates, and divinely leads them. Is that a wonder, which happens in two hours; and does it cease to be wonderful if happening in two million? Not only was Thebes built by the music of an Orpheus; but without the music of some inspired Orpheus was no city ever built, no work that man glories in ever done.

“Sweep away the Illusion of Time; glance, if thou have eyes, from the near moving-cause to its far-distant Mover: The stroke that came transmitted through a whole galaxy of elastic balls, was it less a stroke than if the last ball only had been struck, and sent flying? O, could I (with the Time-annihilating Hat) transport thee direct from the Beginnings to the Endings, how were thy eyesight unsealed, and thy heart set flaming in the Light-sea of celestial wonder! Then sawest thou that this fair Universe, were it in the meanest province thereof, is in very deed the star-domed City of God,⁴ that through every star, through every grass-blade, and most through every Living Soul, the glory of a present God still beams. But Nature, which is the Time-vesture of God, and reveals Him to the wise, hides Him from the foolish.

“Again, could anything be more miraculous than an actual authentic Ghost? The English Johnson longed, all his life, to see one; but could not, though he went to Cock Lane,⁵ and thence to the church-vaults, and tapped on coffins. Foolish Doctor! Did he never, with the mind’s eye as well as with the body’s, look round him into that full tide of human Life he so loved; did he never so much as look into Himself? The good Doctor was a Ghost, as actual and authentic as heart could wish; well-nigh a million of Ghosts were travelling the streets by his side. Once more I say, sweep away the illusion of Time; compress the threescore years into three minutes: what else was he, what else are we? Are we not Spirits, that are shaped into a body, into an Appearance; and that fade away again into air and Invisibility? This is no metaphor, it is a simple scientific fact; we start out of Nothingness, take figure, and are Apparitions; round us, as round the veriest spectre, is Eternity; and to Eternity minutes are as years and aeons. Come there not tones of Love and Faith, as from celestial harp-strings, like the Song of beatified Souls? And again, do not we squeak and jibber (in our discordant, screech-owlish debatings and recriminatings); and glide bodefuf, and feeble, and fearful; or uproad (poltern), and revel in our mad Dance of the Dead,—till the scent of the morning air⁶ summons us to our still Home; and dreamy Night becomes awake and Day? Where now is Alexander of Macedon: does the steel Host, that yelled in fierce battle-shouts at Issus and Arbela,⁷ remain behind him; or have they all vanished utterly, even as perturbed Goblins must? Napoleon too, and his Moscow Retreats and Austerlitz Campaigns! Was it all other than the veriest Spectre-hunt; which has now, with its howling tumult that made Night

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4. Title of St. Augustine’s famous work.
5. The Cock Lane ghost in London, which proved to be a fraud, was investigated by Samuel Johnson (see Boswell for the year 1763).
7. Sites of two victories won by the army of Alexander the Great against the Persians under Darius (333–31 B.C.E.).
hideous, flitted away?—Ghosts! There are nigh a thousand-million walking
the Earth openly at noontide; some half-hundred have vanished from it, some
half-hundred have arisen in it, ere thy watch ticks once.

“O Heaven, it is mysterious, it is awful to consider that we not only carry
each a future Ghost within Him; but are, in very deed, Ghosts! These Limbs,
whence had we them; this stormy Force; this life-blood with its burning Pas-
son? They are dust and shadow, a Shadow-system gathered round our Me;
wherein, through some moments or years, the Divine Essence is to be revealed
in the Flesh. That warrior on his strong war-horse, fire flashes through his eyes;
force dwells in his arm and heart: but warrior and war-horse are a vision; a
revealed Force, nothing more. Stately they tread the Earth, as if it were a firm
substance: fool! the Earth is but a film; it cracks in twain, and warrior and war-
horse sink beyond plummet’s sounding.a Plummet’s? Fantasy herself will not
follow them. A little while ago, they were not; a little while, and they are not,
their very ashes are not.

“So has it been from the beginning, so will it be to the end. Generation after
generation takes to itself the Form of a Body; and forth-issuing from Cim-
merianb Night, on Heaven’s mission appears. What Force and Fire is in each
he expends: one grinding in the mill of Industry; one hunter-like climbing the
giddy Alpine heights of Science; one madly dashed in pieces on the rocks of
Strife, in war with his fellow:—and then the Heaven-sent is recalled; his
earthly Vesture falls away, and soon even to sense becomes a vanished Shadow.
Thus, like some wild-flaming, wild-thundering train of Heaven’s Artillery, does
this mysterious MANKIND thunder and flame, in long-drawn, quick-succeeding
grandeur, through the unknown Deep. Thus, like a God-created, fire-
breathing Spirit-host, we emerge from the Inane; haste stormfully across the
astonished Earth; then plunge again into the Inane. Earth’s mountains are lev-
elled, and her seas filled up, in our passage: can the Earth, which is but dead
and a vision, resist Spirits which have reality and are alive? On the hardest
adamant some footprint of us is stamped-in; the last Rear of the host will read
traces of the earliest Van. But whence?—O Heaven, whither? Sense knows
not; Faith knows not; only that it is through Mystery to Mystery, from God and
to God.

We are such stuff
As dreams are made of, and our little Life
Is rounded with a sleep!”b

1830–31
1833–34

8. Shakespeare’s The Tempest 5.1.56. “Plummet”: a weight at the end of a line used to sound the
depth of water under a ship.
1. The formless void of infinite space [NED].
2. The Tempest 4.1.156–58, a favorite passage for Carlyle, here slightly misquoted (Shakespeare
wrote: “dreams are made on”).
From The French Revolution

September in Paris

The tocsin is pealing its loudest, the clocks inaudibly striking Three, when poor Abbé Sicard, with some thirty other Nonjurant Priests, in six carriages, fare along the streets, from their preliminary House of Detention at the Town-hall, westward towards the Prison of the Abbaye. Carriages enough stand deserted on the streets; these six move on,—through angry multitudes, cursing as they move. Accursed Aristocrat Tartuffes, this is the pass ye have brought us to! And now ye will break the Prisons, and set Capet Veto on horseback to ride over us? Out upon you, Priests of Beelzebub and Moloch; of Tartuffery, Mammon and the Prussian Gallows,—which ye name Mother-Church and God!—Such reproaches have the poor Nonjurants to endure, and worse; spoken in on them by frantic Patriots, who mount even on the carriage-steps; the very Guards hardly refraining. Pull up your carriageblinds?—No! answers Patriotism, clapping its horny paw on the carriageblind, and crushing it down again. Patience in oppression has limits: we are close on the Abbaye, it has lasted long; a poor Nonjurant, of quicker temper, smites the horny paw with his cane; nay, finding solacement in it, smites the unkempt head, sharply and again more sharply, twice over,—seen clearly of us and of the world. It is the last that we see clearly. Alas, next moment, the carriages are locked and blocked in endless raging tumults; in yells deaf to the cry for mercy, which answer the cry for mercy with sabre-thrusts through the heart. The thirty Priests are torn out, are massacred about the Prison-Gate, one after one,—only the poor Abbé Sicard, whom one Moton a watchmaker, knowing him, heroically tried to save and secrete in the Prison, escapes to tell;—and it is Night and Orcus, and Murder’s snaky-sparkling head has risen in the murk!—

From Sunday afternoon (exclusive of intervals and pauses not final) till Thursday evening, there follow consecutively a Hundred Hours. Which hundred hours are to be reckoned with the hours of the Bartholomew Butchery, of the Armagnac Massacres, Sicilian Vespers, or whatsoever is savagest in the annals of this world. Horrible the hour when man’s soul, in its paroxysm, spurns asunder the barriers and rules; and shows what dens and depths are in it! For Night and Orcus, as we say, as was long prophesied, have burst forth, here in this Paris, from their subterranean imprisonment: hideous, dim-confused;

1. In telling the story of the French Revolution Carlyle composes the history as if in the midst of the action. This method of day-to-day eyewitnessing of events contributes to the effect of immediacy that Carlyle sought in what he himself called his “wild savage Book, itself a kind of French Revolution.”

A second feature of his method is the device of weaving into the narrative a number of direct quotations from the sources he had consulted during the three years devoted to writing the history. Although later historians have been able to point out inaccuracies in The French Revolution, Carlyle did base his account on extensive research. G. M. Trevelyan has said of him that he was not only a great writer but also “in his own strange way, a great historian.” Perhaps the most satisfactory comment on The French Revolution is J. S. Mill’s statement in his 1837 review: “This is not so much a history as an epic poem, and notwithstanding... the truest of histories.”

2. Part 3, book I, chap. 4. In September 1792 the revolutionary party under George-Jacques Danton and Jean-Paul Marat urged desperate measures to defend Paris from the invading armies of Austria and Prussia. Hysterical fears of a counterrevolutionary “fifth column” in Paris led to the so-called September Massacres, in which fourteen hundred political prisoners were slaughtered in four days.

3. Priests who had refused to swear allegiance to the new church constitution established by the National Assembly in 1791. Sicard (d. 1822), head of a school for the deaf and dumb in Paris.

4. Hypocrites (from the title of Molière’s play).

5. I.e., the king (Louis XVI). The Nonjurant Priests were accused of favoring the restoration to the king of his power to veto legislation, a power he had lost after August 10, 1792. At the same time he had been stripped of his royal titles and was thereafter referred to simply as Louis Capet, the family name of an early dynasty of French kings (Louis XVI was a Bourbon).

6. Hades, the underworld of the dead.
which it is painful to look on; and yet which cannot, and indeed which should not, be forgotten.

The Reader, who looks earnestly through this dim Phantasmagory of the Pit, will discern few fixed certain objects; and yet still a few. He will observe, in this Abbaye Prison, the sudden massacre of the Priests being once over, a strange Court of Justice, or call it Court of Revenge and Wild-Justice, swiftly fashion itself, and take seat round a table, with the Prison-Registers spread before it;—Stanislas Maillard, Bastille-hero, famed Leader of the Menads, presiding. O Stanislas, one hoped to meet thee elsewhere than here; thou shifty Riding-Usher, with an inklng of Law! This work also thou hadst to do; and then—to depart for ever from our eyes. At La Force, at the Châtelet, the Conciergerie, the like Court forms itself, with the like accompaniments: the thing that one man does, other men can do. There are some Seven Prisons in Paris, full of Aristocrats with conspiracies;—nay not even Bicêtre and Salpêtrière shall escape, with their Forgers of Assignats: and there are seventy times seven hundred Patriot hearts in a state of frenzy. Scoundrel hearts also there are; as perfect, say, as the Earth holds,—if such are needed. To whom, in this mood, law is as no-law; and killing, by what name soever called, is but work to be done.

So sit these sudden Courts of Wild-Justice, with the Prison-Registers before them; unwonted wild tumult howling all round; the Prisoners in dread expectancy within. Swift: a name is called; bolts jingle, a Prisoner is there. A few questions are put; swiftly this sudden Jury decides: Royalist Plotter or not? Clearly not; in that case, Let the Prisoner be enlarged with Vive la Nation. Probably yea; then still, Let the Prisoner be enlarged, but without Vive la Nation; or else it may run. Let the Prisoner be conducted to La Force. At La Force again their formula is, Let the Prisoner be conducted to the Abbaye. —“To La Force then!” Volunteer bailiffs seize the doomed man; he is at the outer gate; “enlarged,” or “conducted,” not into La Force, but into a howling sea; forth, under an arch of wild sabres, axes and pikes; and sinks, hewn asunder. And another sinks, and another; and there forms itself a piled heap of corpses, and the kennels begin to run red. Fancy the yells of these men, their faces of sweat and blood; the crueller shrieks of these women, for there are women too; and a fellow-mortal hurled naked into it all! Jourgniac de Saint-Méard has seen battle, has seen an effervescent Regiment du Roi in mutiny; but the bravest heart may quail at this. The Swiss Prisoners, remnants of the Tenth of August, “clasped each other spasmodically, and hung back; grey veterans crying: ‘Mercy, Messieurs; ah, mercy!’ But there was no mercy. Suddenly, however, one of these men steps forward. He had on a blue frock coat; he seemed about thirty, his stature was above common, his look noble and martial. ‘I go first,’ said he, ‘since it must be so: adieu!’ Then dashing his hat sharply behind him: ‘Which way?’ cried he to the Brigands: ‘Show it me, then.’ They open the folding gate; he is announced to the multitude. He stands a moment motionless; then plunges forth among the pikes, and dies of a thousand wounds.”

Man after man is cut down; the sabres need sharpening, the killers refresh themselves from wine-jugs. Onward and onward goes the butchery; the loud

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7. Frenzied women of Greece, followers of Dionysus. Maillard had led a mob of women in the march to Versailles in October 1789.
8. Paper money issued by the French revolutionary government. Royalists accused of forging such currency were imprisoned.
9. The Swiss Guard, most of whom had been massacred on August 10, 1792, when defending the king’s palace from a mob.
yells wearing down into bass growls. A sombre-faced shifting multitude looks on; in dull approval, or dull disapproval; in dull recognition that it is Necessity. “An Anglais in drab greatcoat” was seen, or seemed to be seen, serving liquor from his own drambottle;—for what purpose, “if not set on by Pitt,” Satan and himself know best! Witty Dr. Moore grew sick on approaching, and turned into another street.—Quick enough goes this Jury-Court; and rigorous. The brave are not spared, nor the beautiful, nor the weak. Old M. de Montmorin, the Minister’s Brother, was acquitted by the Tribunal of the Seventeenth; and conducted back, elbowed by howling galleries; but is not acquitted here. Princess de Lamballe1 has lain down on bed: “Madame, you are to be removed to the Abbaye.” “I do not wish to remove; I am well enough here.” There is a need-be for removing. She will arrange her dress a little, then; rude voices answer, “You have not far to go.” She too is led to the hell-gate; a manifest Queen’s-Friend. She shivers back, at the sight of bloody sabres; but there is no return: Onwards! That fair hind head is cleft with the axe; the neck is severed. That fair body is cut in fragments; with indignities, and obscene horrors of moustachio grand-lèvres,2 which human nature would fain find incredible,—which shall be read in the original language only. She was beautiful, she was good, she had known no happiness. Young hearts, generation after generation, will think with themselves: O worthy of worship, thou king-descended, god-descended, and poor sister-woman! why was not I there; and some Sword Balmung3 or Thor’s Hammer in my hand? Her head is fixed on a pike; paraded under the windows of the Temple; that a still more hated, a Marie Antoinette, may see. One Municipal, in the Temple with the Royal Prisoners at the moment, said, “Look out.” Another eagerly whispered, “Do not look.” The circuit of the Temple is guarded, in these hours, by a long stretched tricolor riband: terror enters, and the clangour of infinite tumult; hitherto not regicide, though that too may come.

But it is more edifying to note what thrillings of affection, what fragments of wild virtues turn up in this shaking asunder of man’s existence; for of these too there is a proportion. Note old Marquis Cazotte: he is doomed to die; but his young Daughter clasps him in her arms, with an inspiration of eloquence, with a love which is stronger than very death: the heart of the killers themselves is touched by it; the old man is spared. Yet he was guilty, if plotting for his King is guilt: in ten days more, a Court of Law condemned him, and he had to die elsewhere; bequeathing his Daughter a lock of his old grey hair. Or note old M. de Sombreuil, who also had a Daughter:—My Father is not an Aristocrat: O good gentlemen, I will swear it, and testify it, and in all ways prove it; we are not; we hate Aristocrats! “Wilt thou drink Aristocrats’ blood?” The man lifts blood (if universal Rumour can be credited); the poor maiden does drink. “This Sombreuil is innocent then!” Yes, indeed,—and now note, most of all, how the bloody pikes, at this news, do rattle to the ground; and the tiger-yells become bursts of jubilee over a brother saved; and the old man and his daughter are clasped to bloody bosoms, with hot tears; and borne home in triumph of Vive la Nation, the killers refusing even money! Does it seem strange, this temper of theirs? It seems very certain, well proved by Royalist testimony in other instances; and very significant.

1. Great-granddaughter of the king of Sardinia. She had married a Bourbon; was early widowed; and later became a close friend of Queen Marie Antoinette, with whom she had been imprisoned.  
2. Thick lips (French); here a figure of speech to characterize the mob.  
3. The sharp sword of Siegfried, hero of the Nibelungenlied.
To this conclusion, then, hast thou come, O hapless Louis! The Son of Sixty Kings is to die on the Scaffold by form of Law. Under Sixty Kings this same form of Law, form of Society, has been fashioning itself together, these thousand years; and has become, one way and other, a most strange Machine. Surely, if needful, it is also frightful, this Machine; dead, blind; not what it should be; which, with swift stroke, or by cold slow torture, has wasted the lives and souls of innumerable men. And behold now a King himself, or say rather Kinghood in his person, is to expire here in cruel tortures;—like a Phalaris\(^5\) shut in the belly of his own red-heated Brazen Bull! It is ever so; and thou shouldst know it, O haughty tyrannous man: injustice breeds injustice; curses and falsehoods do verily return "always home," wide as they may wander. Innocent Louis bears the sins of many generations: he too experiences that man's tribunal is not in this Earth; that if he had no Higher one, it were not well with him.

A King dying by such violence appeals impressively to the imagination; as the like must do, and ought to do. And yet at bottom it is not the King dying, but the man! Kingship is a coat: the grand loss is of the skin. The man from whom you take his Life, to him can the whole combined world do more? Lally\(^6\) went on his hurdle; his mouth filled with a gag. Miserablest mortals, doomed for picking pockets, have a whole five-act Tragedy in them, in that dumb pain, as they go to the gallows, unregarded; they consume the cup of trembling down to the lees. For Kings and for Beggars, for the justly doomed and the unjustly, it is a hard thing to die. Pity them all: thy utmost pity, with all aids and appliances and throne-and-scaffold contrasts, how far short is it of the thing pitied!

A Confessor has come; Abbé Edgeworth, of Irish extraction, whom the King knew by good report, has come promptly on this solemn mission. Leave the Earth alone, then, thou hapless King; it with its malice will go its way, thou also canst go thine. A hard scene yet remains: the parting with our loved ones. Kind hearts, environed in the same grim peril with us; to be left here! Let the Reader look with the eyes of Valet Cléry,\(^7\) through these glass-doors, where also the Municipality watches; and see the cruellest of scenes:

“At half-past eight, the door of the ante-room opened: the Queen appeared first, leading her Son by the hand; then Madame Royale and Madame Elizabeth:\(^8\) they all flung themselves into the arms of the King. Silence reigned for some minutes; interrupted only by sobs. The Queen made a movement to lead his Majesty towards the inner room, where M. Edgeworth was waiting unknown to them: ‘No,’ said the King, ‘let us go into the dining-room, it is there only that I can see you.’ They entered there; I shut the door of it, which was of glass. The King sat down, the Queen on his left hand, Madame Elizabeth on his right, Madame Royale almost in front; the young Prince remained standing between his Father’s legs. They all leaned towards him, and often held him 

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5. Sicilian tyrant whose victims were roasted alive by being confined inside the brass figure of a bull under which a fire was lit.
6. French general who was accused unjustly of treachery and executed in 1766. He was gagged, presumably to prevent his protesting his innocence.
7. He attended the king during his imprisonment and later published a journal.
8. The king’s sister, guillotined a year later. Madame Royale (1778–1851), the king’s daughter, duchesse d’Angoulême.
embraced. This scene of woe lasted an hour and three quarters; during which we could hear nothing; we could see only that always when the King spoke, the sobbings of the Princesses redoubled, continued for some minutes; and then the King began again to speak.”—And so our meetings and our partings do now end! The sorrows we gave each other; the poor joys we faithfully shared, and all our lovings and our sufferings, and confused toilings under the earthly Sun, are over. Thou good soul, I shall never, never through all ages of Time, see thee any more!—NEVER! O Reader, knowest thou that hard word?

For nearly two hours this agony lasts; then they tear themselves asunder. “Promise that you will see us on the morrow.” He promises:—Ah yes, yes; yet once; and go now, ye loved ones; cry to God for yourselves and me!—It was a hard scene, but it is over. He will not see them on the morrow. The Queen, in passing through the ante-room, glanced at the Cerberus Municipals; and, with woman’s vehemence, said through her tears, “Vous êtes tous des scélérats.”

King Louis slept sound, till five in the morning, when Cléry, as he had been ordered, awoke him. Cléry dressed his hair: while this went forward, Louis took a ring from his watch, and kept trying it on his finger; it was his wedding-ring, which he is now to return to the Queen as a mute farewell. At half-past six, he took the Sacrament; and continued in devotion, and conference with Abbé Edgeworth. He will not see his Family: it were too hard to bear.

At eight, the Municipals enter: the King gives them his Will, and messages and effects; which they, at first, brutally refuse to take charge of: he gives them a roll of gold pieces, a hundred and twenty-five louis; these are to be returned to Malesherbes, who had lent them. At nine, Santerre says the hour is come. The King begs yet to retire for three minutes. At the end of three minutes, Santerre again says the hour is come. “Stamping on the ground with his right foot, Louis answers: ‘Partons, Let us go,’”—How the rolling of those drums comes in, through the Temple bastions and bulwarks, on the heart of a queenly wife; soon to be a widow! He is gone, then, and has not seen us? A Queen weeps bitterly; a King’s Sister and Children. Over all these Four does Death also hover: all shall perish miserably save one; she, as Duchesse d’Angoulême, will live,—not happily.

At the Temple Gate were some faint cries, perhaps from voices of Pitiful women: “Grâce! Grâce!” Through the rest of the streets there is silence as of the grave. No man not armed is allowed to be there: the armed, did any even pity, dare not express it, each man overawed by all his neighbors. All windows are down, none seem looking through them. All shops are shut. No wheel-carriage rolls, this morning, in these streets but one only. Eighty-thousand armed men stand ranked, like armed statues of men; cannons bristle, cannoners with match burning, but no word or movement: it is as a city enchanted into silence and stone: one carriage with its escort, slowly rumbling, is the only sound. Louis reads, in his Book of Devotion, the Prayers of the Dying: clatter of this death-march falls sharp on the ear, in the great silence; but the thought would fain struggle heavenward, and forget the Earth.

As the clocks strike ten, behold the Place de la Révolution, once Place de Louis Quinze: the Guillotine, mounted near the old Pedestal where once stood the Statue of that Louis! Far round, all bristles with cannons and armed men:

9. You are all scoundrels (French). “Cerberus Municipals”: local officers, likened to Cerberus, the three-headed dog that guarded the entrance to Hades.
1. A delegate who had defended the king. He was guillotined a year later.
spectators crowding in the rear; D’Orléans Égalité there in cabriolet. Swift messengers, hoquetons, speed to the Townhall, every three minutes: near by is the Convention sitting,—vengeful for Lepelletier. Headless of all, Louis reads his Prayers of the Dying; not till five minutes yet has he finished; then the Carriage opens. What temper he is in? Ten different witnesses will give ten different accounts of it. He is in the collision of all tempers; arrived now at the black Mahlstrom and descent of Death: in sorrow, in indignation, in resignation struggling to be resigned. “Take care of M. Edgeworth,” he straitly charges the Lieutenant who is sitting with them: then they two descend.

The drums are beating; “Taisez-vous, Silence!” he cries “in a terrible voice, d’une voix terrible.” He mounts the scaffold, not without delay; he is in puce coat, breeches of grey, white stockings. He strips off the coat; stands disclosed in a sleeve-waistcoat of white flannel. The Executioners approach to bind him: he spurns, resists; Abbé Edgeworth has to remind him how the Saviour, in whom men trust, submitted to be bound. His hands are tied, his head bare; the fatal moment is come. He advances to the edge of the Scaffold, “his face very red,” and says: “Frenchmen, I die innocent: it is from the Scaffold and near appearing before God that I tell you so. I pardon my enemies; I desire that France——” A General on horseback, Santerre or another, prances out, with uplifted hand: “Tambours!” The drums drown the voice. “Executioners, do your duty!” The Executioners, desperate lest themselves be murdered (for Santerre and his Armed Ranks will strike, if they do not), seize the hapless Louis: six of them desperate, him singly desperate, struggling there; and bind him to their plank. Abbé Edgeworth, stooping, bespeaks him: “Son of Saint Louis, ascend to Heaven.” The Axe clanks down; a King’s Life is shorn away. It is Monday the 21st of January 1793. He was aged Thirty-eight years four months and twenty-eight days.

Executioner Samson shows the Head: fierce shout of Vive la République rises, and swells; caps raised on bayonets, hats waving: students of the College of Four Nations take it up, on the far Quais; fling it over Paris. D’Orléans drives off in his cabriolet: the Townhall Councillors rub their hands, saying, “It is done, It is done.” There is dipping of handkerchiefs, of pike-points in the blood. Headsman Samson, though he afterwards denied it, sells locks of the hair: fractions of the puce coat are long after worn in rings.—And so, in some half-hour it is done; and the multitude has all departed. Pastry-cooks, coffee-sellers, milkmen sing out their trivial quotidian cries: the world wags on, as if this were a common day. In the coffee-houses that evening, says Prudhomme, Patriot shook hands with Patriot in a more cordial manner than usual. Not till some days after, according to Mercier, did public men see what a grave thing it was.

From Cause and Effect

Yes, Reader, here is the miracle. Out of that putrescent rubbish of Scepticism, Sensualism, Sentimentalism, hollow Machiavelism, such a Faith has

4. Equality (French); here the duc d’Orléans, a Royalist who had become a revolutionary leader. Despite his having voted for the king’s death, he was himself executed in 1793.
5. A delegate who had voted for the king’s death and was killed by a Royalist sympathizer.
6. Dull red.
7. Louis IX, king of France (reigned 1226–70).
8. Part 3, book 3, chap. 1. Between the execution of the king and the advent of Napoleon, the revolutionary movement in France suffered from disension and counterrevolutionary outbreaks that led to the Reign of Terror (1793–94). During this period most of the political leaders and thousands of their followers lost their lives. Before recommencing his narrative, Carlyle pauses, in this chapter, to consider some of the forces underlying these developments.
verily risen; flaming in the heart of a People. A whole People, awakening as it were to consciousness in deep misery, believes that it is within reach of a Fraternal Heaven-on-Earth. With longing arms, it struggles to embrace the Unspeakable; cannot embrace it, owing to certain causes.—Seldom do we find that a whole People can be said to have any Faith at all; except in things which it can eat and handle. Whenssoever it gets any Faith, its history becomes spirit-stirring, noteworthy. But since the time when steel Europe shook itself simultaneously at the word of Hermit Peter, and rushed towards the Sepulchre where God had lain, there was no universal impulse of Faith that one could note. Since Protestantism went silent, no Luther's voice, no Zisca's drum any longer proclaiming that God's truth was not the Devil's Lie; and the Last of the Cameronians (Renwick was the name of him; honour to the name of the brave!) sank, shot, on the Castle-hill of Edinburgh, there was no parital impulse of Faith among Nations. Till now, behold, once more, this French Nation believes! Herein, we say, in that astonishing Faith of theirs, lies the miracle. It is a Faith undoubtedly of the more prodigious sort, even among Faiths; and will embody itself in prodigies. It is the soul of that world-prodigy named French Revolution; whereby the world still gazes and shudders.

But, for the rest, let no man ask History to explain by cause and effect how the business proceeded henceforth. This battle of Mountain and Gironde, and what follows, is the battle of Fanaticisms and Miracles; unsuitable for cause and effect. The sound of it, to the mind, is as a hubbub of voices in distraction; little of articulate is to be gathered by long listening and studying; only battle-tumult, shouts of triumph, shrieks of despair. The Mountain has left no Memoirs; the Girondins have left Memoirs, which are too often little other than long-drawn Interjections, of Woe is me, and Cursed be ye. So soon as History can philosophically delineate the conflagration of a kindled Fireship, she may try this other task. Here lay the bitumen-stratum, there the brimstone one; so ran the vein of gunpowder, of nitre, terebinth and foul grease: this, were she inquisitive enough, History might partly know. But how they acted and reacted below decks, one fire-stratum playing into the other, by its nature and the art of man, now when all hands ran raging, and the flames lashed high over shrouds and topmast: this let not History attempt.

The Fireship is old France, the old French Form of Life; her crew a Generation of men. Wild are their cries and their ragings there, like spirits tormented in that flame. But, on the whole, are they not gone, O Reader? Their Fireship and they, frightening the world, have sailed away; its flames and its thunders quite away, into the Deep of Time. One thing therefore History will do: pity them all; for it went hard with them all. Not even the seagreen Incorruptible but shall have some pity, some human love, though it takes an effort. And now, so much once thoroughly attained, the rest will become easier. To the eye of equal brotherly pity, innumerable perversions dissipate themselves;

9. A leader of the First Crusade to Palestine in the late 11th century.
2. The Girondists were a party of moderate revolutionaries, often of middle-class backgrounds. They were overthrown by their opponents, the Jacobins, who were more adept in controlling the populace. Because the Jacobin delegates in the National Assembly sat in the most elevated place, the party was sometimes called the Mountain.
3. A ship filled with combustibles (such as gunpowder and brimstone) that is set adrift among enemy ships to create havoc.
4. Turpentine.
exaggerations and execrations fall off, of their own accord. Standing wistfully on the safe shore, we will look, and see, what is of interest to us, what is adapted to us.

1834–37

[Carlyle’s Portraits of His Contemporaries]¹

[KING WILLIAM IV AT 69]

The old King came driving to the ground, near where I was standing: he was in regimentals² with a most copious plume of feathers, so that while he sat all shrunk together in the open carriage, you saw little else but a lock of feathers, and might have taken our Defender of the Faith for some singular species of Clocker³ coming thither. On dismounting, he showed an innocent respectable old face; straddled out his legs greatly (which seemed weak), rested on his heels, stiddering⁴ himself, and looked round with much simplicity what they wanted next with him. The Review itself was a wheeling and marching of foot and horse, several thousands; a flaring and a blaring from trumpet and drum, with artillery-vollies, sham-charges, and then a continued explosion of musketry and cannon from the whole posse of them, like a long explosion of Mount Ætna: all very grand.

[From a letter to his mother, July 19, 1835]