

Tucholsky Wagner Zola Scott
Turgenev Wallace Fonatne Sydon Freud Schlegel
Twain Walther von der Vogelweide Fouqué Friedrich II. von Preußen
Weber Freiligrath Frey
Fechner Fichte Weiße Rose von Fallersleben Kant Ernst Richthofen Frommel
Engels Fielding Hölderlin Eichendorff Tacitus Dumas
Fehrs Faber Flaubert Eliasberg Eliot Zweig Ebner Eschenbach
Feuerbach Maximilian I. von Habsburg Fock Ewald Vergil
Goethe Elisabeth von Österreich London
Mendelssohn Balzac Shakespeare Lichtenberg Rathenau Dostojewski Ganghofer
Trackl Stevenson Lenz Hambrecht Doyle Gjellerup
Mommssen Thoma Tolstoi Hanrieder Droste-Hülshoff
Dach Thoma Verne Hägele Hauptmann Humboldt
Karrillon Reuter Rousseau Hagen Hauff Baudelaire Gautier
Garschin Defoe Hebbel Hegel Kussmaul Herder
Damaschke Descartes Schopenhauer George
Wolfram von Eschenbach Darwin Melville Grimm Jerome Rilke Bebel Proust
Bronner Campe Horváth Aristoteles Voltaire Federer Herodot
Bismarck Vigny Gengenbach Barlach Heine Grillparzer Georgy
Storm Casanova Lessing Tersteegen Gilm Gryphius
Chamberlain Langbein Lafontaine Iffland Sokrates
Brentano Claudius Schiller Bellamy Schilling Kralik Raabe Gibbon Tschchow
Katharina II. von Rußland Gerstäcker Raabe Gleim Vulpius
Löns Hesse Hoffmann Gogol Morgenstern Goedicke
Luther Heym Hofmannsthal Klee Hölty Kleist
Roth Heyse Klopstock Puschkin Homer Mörike Musil
Luxemburg La Roche Horaz Kraus
Machiavelli Kierkegaard Kraft Kraus
Navarra Aurel Musset Lamprecht Kind Kirchhoff Hugo Moltke
Nestroy Marie de France
Nietzsche Nansen Laotse Ipsen Liebknecht
Marx Lassalle Gorki Klett Leibniz Ringelnatz
von Ossietzky May vom Stein Lawrence Irving
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Pages from a Journal with Other Papers

Mark Rutherford

Imprint

This book is part of the TREDITION CLASSICS series.

Author: Mark Rutherford
Cover design: toepferschumann, Berlin (Germany)

Publisher: tredition GmbH, Hamburg (Germany)
ISBN: 978-3-8491-7122-3

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A VISIT TO CARLYLE IN 1868

On Saturday, the 22nd of March, 1868, my father and I called on Carlyle at 5, Cheyne Row, Chelsea, with a message from one of his intimate friends.

We were asked upstairs at once, and found Carlyle at breakfast. The room was large, well-lighted, a bright fire was burning, and the window was open in order to secure complete ventilation. Opposite the fireplace was a picture of Frederick the Great and his sister. There were also other pictures which I had not time to examine. One of them Carlyle pointed out. It was a portrait of the Elector of Saxony who assisted Luther. The letters V.D.M.I.F. ("Verbum Dei Manet in Fternum") were round it. Everything in the room was in exact order, there was no dust or confusion, and the books on the shelves were arranged in perfect *evenness*. I noticed that when Carlyle replaced a book he took pains to get it level with the others. The furniture was solid, neat, and I should think expensive. I showed him the letter he had written to me eighteen years ago. It has been published by Mr. Froude, but it will bear reprinting. The circumstances under which it was written, not stated by Mr. Froude, were these. In 1850, when the Latter-day Pamphlets appeared - how well I remember the eager journey to the bookseller for each successive number! - almost all the reviews united in a howl of execration, criticism so called. I, being young, and owing so much to Carlyle, wrote to him, the first and almost the only time I ever did anything of the kind, assuring him that there was at least one person who believed in him. This was his answer:-

"CHELSEA, 9th March, 1850.

"MY GOOD YOUNG FRIEND, - I am much obliged by the regard you entertain for me; and do not blame your enthusiasm, which well enough beseems your young years. If my books teach you anything, don't mind in the least whether other people believe it or not; but do you for your own behoof lay it to heart as a real acquisition

you have made, more properly, as a real message left with you, which *you* must set about fulfilling, whatsoever others do! This is really all the counsel I can give you about what you read in my books or those of others: *practise* what you learn there; instantly and in all ways begin turning the belief into a fact, and continue at that - till you get more and ever more beliefs, with which also do the like. It is idle work otherwise to write books or to read them.

“And be not surprised that ‘people have no sympathy with you’; that is an accompaniment that will attend you all your days if you mean to lead an earnest life. The ‘people’ could not save you with their ‘sympathy’ if they had never so much of it to give; a man can and must save himself, with or without their sympathy, as it may chance.

“And may all good be with you, my kind young friend, and a heart stout enough for this adventure you are upon; that is the best ‘good’ of all.

“I remain, yours very sincerely,

“T. CARLYLE.”

Carlyle had forgotten this letter, but said, “It is undoubtedly mine. It is what I have always believed . . . it has been so ever since I was at college. I do not mean to say I was not loved there as warmly by noble friends as ever man could be, but the world tumbled on me, and has ever since then been tumbling on me rubbish, huge wagon-loads of rubbish, thinking to smother me, and was surprised it did not smother me - turned round with amazement and said, ‘What, you alive yet?’ . . . While I was writing my *Frederick* my best friends, out of delicacy, did not call. Those who came were those I did not want to come, and I saw very few of them. I shook off everything to right and left. At last the work would have killed me, and I was obliged to take to riding, chiefly in the dark, about fourteen miles most days, plunging and floundering on. I ought to have been younger to have undertaken such a task. If they were to offer me all Prussia, all the solar system, I would not write *Frederick* again. No bribe from God or man would tempt me to do it.”

He was re-reading his *Frederick*, to correct it for the stereotyped edition. "On the whole I think it is very well done. No man perhaps in England could have done it better. If you write a book though now, you must just pitch it out of window and say, 'Ho! all you jackasses, come and trample on it and trample it into mud, or go on till you are tired.'" He laughed heartily at this explosion. His laughter struck me - humour controlling his wrath and in a sense *above* it, as if the final word were by no means hatred or contempt, even for the jackass. ". . . No piece of news of late years has gladdened me like the victory of the Prussians over the Austrians. It was the triumph of Prussian over French and Napoleonic influence. The Prussians were a valiant, pious people, and it was a question which should have the most power in Germany, they or Napoleon. The French are sunk in all kinds of filth. Compare what the Prussians did with what we did in the Crimea. The English people are an incredible people. They seem to think that it is not necessary that a general should have the least knowledge of the art of war. It is as if you had the stone, and should cry out to any travelling tinker or blacksmith and say, 'Here, come here and cut me for the stone,' and he *would* cut you! Sir Charles Napier would have been a great general if he had had the opportunity. He was much delighted with *Frederick*. 'Frederick was a most extraordinary general,' said Sir Charles, and on examination I found out that all that Sir Charles had read of *Frederick* was a manual for Prussian officers, published by him about 1760, telling them what to do on particular occasions. I was very pleased at this admiration of *Frederick* by Sir Charles . . .

"Sir John Bowring was one of your model men; men who go about imagining themselves the models of all virtues, and they are models of something very different. He was one of your patriots, and the Government to quiet him sent him out to China. When he got there he went to war with a third of the human race! He, the patriot, he who believed in the greatest-happiness principle, immediately went to war with a third of the human race!" (Great laughter from T.C.) "And so far as I can make out he was all wrong.

"The *Frederick* is being translated into German. It is being done by a man whose name I have forgotten, but it was begun by one of the most faithful friends I ever had, Neuberg. I could not work in the rooms in the offices where lay the State papers I wanted to use, it

brought on such a headache, but Neuberger went there, and for six months worked all day copying. He was taken ill, and a surgical operation was badly performed, and then in that wild, black weather at the beginning of last year, just after I came back from Mentone, the news came to me one night he was dead."

On leaving Carlyle shook hands with us both and said he was glad to have seen us. "It was pleasant to have friends coming out of the dark in this way."

Perhaps a reflection or two which occurred to me after this interview may not be out of place. Carlyle was perfectly frank, even to us of whom he knew but little. He did not stand off or refuse to talk on any but commonplace subjects. What was offered to us was his best. And yet there is to be found in him a singular reserve, and those shallow persons who taunt him with inconsistency because he makes so much of silence, and yet talks so much, understand little or nothing of him. In half a dozen pages one man may be guilty of shameless garrulity, and another may be nobly reticent throughout a dozen volumes. Carlyle feels the contradictions of the universe as keenly as any man can feel them. He knows how easy it is to appear profound by putting anew the riddles which nobody can answer; he knows how strong is the temptation towards the insoluble. But upon these subjects he also knows how to hold his tongue; he does not shriek in the streets, but he bows his head. He has found no answer - he no more than the feeblest of us, and yet in his inmost soul there is a shrine, and he worships.

Carlyle is the champion of morals, ethics, law - call it what you like - of that which says we must not always do a thing because it is pleasant. There are two great ethical parties in the world, and, in the main, but two. One of them asserts the claims of the senses. Its doctrine is seductive because it is so right. It is necessary that we should in a measure believe it, in order that life may be sweet. But nature has heavily weighted the scale in its favour; its acceptance requires no effort. It is easily perverted and becomes a snare. In our day nearly all genius has gone over to it, and preaching it is rather superfluous. The other party affirms what has been the soul of all religions worth having, that it is by repression and self-negation that men and States live.

It has been said that Carlyle is great because he is graphic, and he is supposed to be summed up in "mere picturesqueness," the silliest of verdicts. A man may be graphic in two ways. He may deal with his subject from the outside, and by dint of using strong language may "graphically" describe an execution or a drunken row in the streets. But he may be graphic by ability to penetrate into essence, and to express it in words which are worthy of it. What higher virtue than this can we imagine in poet, artist, or prophet?

Like all great men, Carlyle is infinitely tender. That was what struck me as I sat and looked in his eyes, and the best portraits in some degree confirm me. It is not worth while here to produce passages from his books to prove my point, but I could easily do so, specially from the *Life of Sterling* and the *Cromwell*. {10} Much of his fierceness is an inverted tenderness.

His greatest book is perhaps the *Frederick*, the biography of a hero reduced more than once to such extremities that apparently nothing but some miraculous intervention could save him, and who did not yield, but struggled on and finally emerged victorious. When we consider Frederick's position during the last part of the Seven Years' War, we must admit that no man was ever in such desperate circumstances or showed such uncrushable determination. It was as if the Destinies, in order to teach us what human nature can do, had ordained that he who had the most fortitude should also encounter the severest trial of it. Over and over again Frederick would have been justified in acknowledging defeat, and we should have said that he had done all that could be expected even of such a temper as that with which he was endowed. If the struggle of the will with the encompassing world is the stuff of which epics are made, then no greater epic than that of *Frederick* has been written in prose or verse, and it has the important advantage of being true. It is interesting to note how attractive this primary virtue of which Frederick is such a remarkable representative is to Carlyle, how *moral* it is to him; and, indeed, is it not the sum and substance of all morality? It should be noted also that it was due to no religious motive: that it was bare, pure humanity. At times it is difficult not to believe that Carlyle, notwithstanding his piety, loves it all the more on that account. It is strange that an example so salutary and stimulating to the poorest and meanest of us should be set by an unbelieving king, and that

my humdrum existence should be secretly supported by "Frederick II. Roi de Prusse."

* * *

Soon after Carlyle died I went to Ecclefechan and stood by his grave. It was not a day that I would have chosen for such an errand, for it was cold, grey, and hard, and towards the afternoon it rained a slow, persistent, wintry rain. The kirkyard in Ecclefechan was dismal and depressing, but my thoughts were not there. I remembered what Carlyle was to the young men of thirty or forty years ago, in the days of that new birth, which was so strange a characteristic of the time. His books were read with excitement, with tears of joy, on lonely hills, by the seashore and in London streets, and the readers were thankful that it was their privilege to live when he also was alive. All that excitement has vanished, but those who knew what it was are the better for it. Carlyle now is almost nothing, but his day will return, he will be put in his place as one of the greatest souls who have been born amongst us, and his message will be considered as perhaps the most important which has ever been sent to us. This is what I thought as I stood in Ecclefechan kirkyard, and as I lingered I almost doubted if Carlyle *could* be dead. Was it possible that such as he could altogether die? Some touch, some turn, I could not tell what or how, seemed all that was necessary to enable me to see and to hear him. It was just as if I were perplexed and baffled by a veil which prevented recognition of him, although I was sure he was behind it.

EARLY MORNING IN JANUARY

A warm, still morning, with a clear sky and stars. At first the hills were almost black, but, as the dawn ascended, they became dark green, of a peculiarly delicate tint which is never seen in the daytime. The quietude is profound, although a voice from an unseen fishing-boat can now and then be heard. How strange the landscape seems! It is not a variation of the old landscape; it is a new world. The half-moon rides high in the sky, and near her is Jupiter. A little way further to the left is Venus, and still further down is Mercury, rare apparition, just perceptible where the deep blue of the night is yielding to the green which foretells the sun. The east grows lighter; the birds begin to stir in the bushes, and the cry of a gull rises from the base of the cliff. The sea becomes responsive, and in a moment is overspread with continually changing colour, partly that of the heavens above it and partly self-contributed. With what slow, majestic pomp is the day preceded, as though there had been no day before it and no other would follow it!

MARCH

It is a bright day in March, with a gentle south-west wind. Sitting still in the copse and facing the sun it strikes warm. It has already mounted many degrees on its way to its summer height, and is regaining its power. The clouds are soft, rounded, and spring-like, and the white of the blackthorn is discernible here and there amidst the underwood. The brooks are running full from winter rains but are not overflowing. All over the wood which fills up the valley lies a thin, purplish mist, harmonising with the purple bloom on the stems and branches. The buds are ready to burst, there is a sense of movement, of waking after sleep; the tremendous upward rush of life is almost felt. But how silent the process is! There is no hurry for achievement, although so much has to be done - such infinite intricacy to be unfolded and made perfect. The little stream winding down the bottom turns and doubles on itself; a dead leaf falls into it, is arrested by a twig, and lies there content.

JUNE

It is a quiet, warm day in June. The wind is westerly, but there is only just enough of it to waft now and then a sound from the far-off town, or the dull, subdued thunder of cannon-firing from ships or forts distant some forty miles or more. Massive, white-bordered clouds, grey underneath, sail overhead; there was heavy rain last night, and they are lifting and breaking a little. Softly and slowly they go, and one of them, darker than the rest, has descended in a mist of rain, blotting out the ships. The surface of the water is paved curiously in green and violet, and where the light lies on it scintillates like millions of stars. The grass is not yet cut, and the showers have brought it up knee-deep. Its gentle whisper is plainly heard, the most delicate of all the voices in the world, and the meadow bends into billows, grey, silvery, and green, when a breeze of sufficient strength sweeps across it. The larks are so multitudinous that no distinct song can be caught, and amidst the confused melody comes the note of the thrush and the blackbird. A constant under-running accompaniment is just audible in the hum of innumerable insects and the sharp buzz of flies darting past the ear. Only those who live in the open air and watch the fields and sea from hour to hour and day to day know what they are and what they mean. The chance visitor, or he who looks now and then, never understands them. While I have lain here, the clouds have risen, have become more aerial, and more suffused with light; the horizon has become better defined, and the yellow shingle beach is visible to its extremest point clasping the bay in its arms. The bay itself is the tenderest blue-green, and on the rolling plain which borders it lies intense sunlight chequered with moving shadows which wander eastwards. The wind has shifted a trifle, and comes straight up the Channel from the illimitable ocean.

AUGUST

A few days ago it was very hot. Afterwards we had a thunderstorm, followed by rain from the south-west. The wind has veered a point northerly, and the barometer is rising. This morning at half-past five the valley below was filled with white mist. Above it the tops of the trees on the highest points emerged sharply distinct. It was motionless, but gradually melted before the ascending sun, recalling Plutarch's "scenes in the beautiful temple of the world which the gods order at their own festivals, when we are initiated into their own mysteries." Here was a divine mystery, with initiation for those who cared for it. No priests were waiting, no ritual was necessary, the service was simple - solitary adoration and perfect silence.

As the day advances, masses of huge, heavy clouds appear. They are well defined at the edges, and their intricate folds and depths are brilliantly illuminated. The infinitude of the sky is not so impressive when it is quite clear as when it contains and supports great clouds, and large blue spaces are seen between them. On the hillsides the fields here and there are yellow and the corn is in sheaves. The birds are mostly dumb, the glory of the furze and broom has passed, but the heather is in flower. The trees are dark, and even sombre, and, where they are in masses, look as if they were in solemn consultation. A fore-feeling of the end of summer steals upon me. Why cannot I banish this anticipation? Why cannot I rest and take delight in what is before me? If some beneficent god would but teach me how to take no thought for the morrow, I would sacrifice to him all I possess.

