

## THE CORRESPONDENCE OF CARLYLE AND EMERSON.

In the deluge of "new books," in which so many of us at present are occupied in swimming for our lives, it is not often that there floats toward us a pair of volumes so well deserving to be arrested in their passage as this substantial record\* of a beautiful and distinguished friendship. The book has a high interest, and we have found it even more absorbing than we expected. It is only superficially, indeed, that it may be spoken of as new; for the persons and things it commemorates have already receded—so fast we move to-day—into a kind of historical perspective. The last letter that passed between the correspondents is of the date only of 1872; Carlyle died nine and Emerson ten years later. But we seem to see them from a distance; the united pair presents itself in something of the uplifted relief of a group on canvas or in marble. They have become, as I say, historical: so many of their emotions, their discussions, their interests, their allusions belong to a past which is already remote. It was, in fact, in the current of an earlier world that the Correspondence began. The first letter, which is from Emerson as the last is from Carlyle, is of the date of 1834. Emerson was the voice of New England in those days, and New England has changed not a little. There is something peculiarly young and tender in the social scene in which we see him engaged; for, in the interval that separates us from the period included in the whole of the first of these volumes and in the greater part of the second, a great many things have come and gone. The questions of those years are not the questions of these. There were more questions then, perhaps; at least, they made more show. It may seem to the reader of Emerson's early letters that at that time there was nothing in New England but questions. There were very few things, and even few persons. Emerson's personal references are rare. Bronson Alcott, W. E. Channing, Margaret Fuller, Thoreau, an occasional American about to go to Europe, carrying a letter or a book to Carlyle, constitute in this direction the chief objects of mention. Transcendentalism has come and gone, and the abolition of slavery, and the novelty of the Unitarian creed, and the revelation of Goethe, and the doctrine of a vegetable diet, and a

great many other reforms then deemed urgent. Carlyle's extraordinary personality has, moreover, thanks to recent publications, revealed itself with unlooked-for vividness. Of few distinguished men has the public come into such complete possession so soon after death has unlocked the cabinets. The deeply interesting volumes given to the world so promptly by Mr. Froude, have transmuted the great Scotch humorist from a remote and mysterious personage—however portentous, disclosing himself in dusky, smoky ejaculations and rumblings—into a definite and measurable, an almost familiar figure, with every feature marked and every peculiarity demonstrated. We know Carlyle, in short; we may look at him at our ease, and the advantage, though we have enjoyed it but for a year or two, has become part of our modern illumination. When we receive new contributions accordingly, we know what to do with them, and where, as the phrase is, to fit them in; they find us prepared. I should add that if we know Carlyle, we know him in a great measure because he was so rich, so original a letter-writer. The letters in Mr. Froude's volumes constituted the highest value of those memorials and led us to look for entertainment as great in the Correspondence which Mr. Charles Eliot Norton had had for some time in his keeping, and which, though his name does not appear on the title-page, he has now edited with all needful judgment and care. Carlyle takes his place among the first of English, among the very first of all letter-writers. All his great merits come out in this form of expression; and his defects are not felt as defects, but only as striking characteristics and as tones in the picture. Originality, nature, humor, imagination, freedom, the disposition to talk, the play of mood, the touch of confidence—these qualities, of which the letters are full, will, with the aid of an inimitable use of language—a style which glances at nothing that it does not render grotesque,—preserve their life for readers even further removed from the occasion than ourselves, and for whom possibly the vogue of Carlyle's published writings in his day will be to a certain degree a subject of wonder. The light thrown upon his character by the mass of evidence edited by Mr. Froude had not embellished the image nor made the reader's sympathy advance at the same pace as his curiosity. But the volumes that lie before us

\* The Correspondence of Thomas Carlyle and Ralph Waldo Emerson. 1834-1872. In two volumes. Boston: J. R. Osgood & Co., 1883.



seemed to promise a more genial sort of testimony, and the promise has been partly kept. Carlyle is here in intercourse with a friend for whom, almost alone among the persons with whom he had dealings, he appears to have entertained a sentiment of respect—a constancy of affection untinged by that humorous contempt in which (in most cases) he indulges when he wishes to be kind, and which was the best refuge open to him from his other alternative of absolutely savage mockery. Of the character, the sincerity, the genius, the many good offices of his American correspondent, he appears to have had an appreciation which, even in his most invidious hours, never belied itself. It is singular, indeed, that throughout his intercourse with Emerson he never appears to have known the satiric fury which he directed at so many other objects—accepting his friend *en bloc*, once for all, with reservations and protests so light that, as addressed to Emerson's own character, they are only a finer form of consideration. Emerson, on the other hand, who was so much more kindly a judge, so much more luminous a nature, holds off, as the phrase is, comparatively, and expresses, at times, at least, the disapprobation of silence. Carlyle was the more constant writer of the two, especially toward the end of their correspondence; he constantly expresses the desire to hear from Emerson oftener. The latter had not an abundant epistolary impulse; the form and style of his letters, charming as they are, is in itself a proof of that. But there were evidently certain directions in which he could not go with his friend, who has likewise sundry tricks of style which act at times even upon the placid nerves of the inventor of Transcendentalism. He thinks, for instance, that Carlyle's satire of the "gigmania" has been overdone; and this, although Emerson himself was as little as possible of a gigmaniac. I must add that it would be wrong to suppose that the element of reserve, or of calculated silence, plays in the least a striking part in the letters of either. There is nothing more striking, and nothing finer, than their confident frankness. Altogether the charm of the book is that as one reads it one is in excellent company. Two men of rare and beautiful genius converse with each other, and the conversation is a kind of exhibition.

There was something almost dramatic in the beginning of their friendship. Emerson, a young Bostonian, then unknown, went to Europe for the first time in 1833. He had read Carlyle's contributions to the "Edinburgh Review," and on his return from Italy, spending the summer in England, had no greater care than to become acquainted with the author. Carlyle, hardly better known

then than Emerson,—poor, struggling, lonely, discouraged, but pregnant with all his future eloquence,—was spending at the farm of Craigenputtock, in the south of Scotland, those melancholy, those almost savage years of which we have so rich a report in the letters and journals published by Mr. Froude. "I found the house amid desolate, heathery hills, where the lonely scholar nourished his mighty heart." So writes Emerson in the first chapter of the "English Traits." The two spent a day of early autumn together, walking over the moors, and when they separated it was with a presentiment of the future and a conviction on the part of each that he had made a rare acquisition. Carlyle has commemorated in several places the apparition of the generous young American,— "one of the most lovable creatures in himself that we had ever looked upon," he wrote to his mother; and toward the end of his life, in one of these letters, he glances back at it in the tenderest manner, across the years. "I shall never forget the visitor," at a later date, too, Mrs. Carlyle wrote, "who years ago, in the desert, descended on us out of the clouds, as it were, and made one day there look like enchantment for us, and left me weeping that it was only one day." Emerson went back to America, and the first letter in this collection is of the date of nine months later—May, 1834. This letter contains, by the way, an allusion to Carlyle's situation at that time, which, in the light thrown upon his state of mind and circumstances at Craigenputtock by the "lonely scholar's" own letters, journals, and reminiscences, may provoke a smile. "I remembered with joy the favored condition of my lonely philosopher, his happiest wedlock, his fortunate temper, his steadfast simplicity, his all means of happiness—not," Emerson indeed adds, "that I had the remotest hope that he should so far depart from his theories as to expect happiness." Carlyle's fortunate temper and steadfast simplicity sound to-day like bold touches of satire. It is true that his idiosyncrasies were as yet more or less undeveloped. The Correspondence speedily became brisk, the more so that, in the winter of 1834-5, Carlyle had settled himself in London, that life and work had opened to him with a somewhat better promise, and that the transmission to his American disciple of his new compositions offered repeated occasion for letters.

They pass with frequency for the following fifteen years, when there is an interruption of a twelvemonth. They begin again in 1850, and continue at the rate of two or three a year, till 1856. After this they are less frequent, though the mutual regard of the



writers evidently knew no diminution. In 1872, Emerson went abroad again (he had visited England for a second time in 1847); and after his return the letters cease. Many of the early ones are occupied with the question of the republication of Carlyle's writings in America. Emerson took upon himself to present "Sartor Resartus" and some of its successors to the American public, and he constantly reports to the author upon the progress of this enterprise. He transmits a great many booksellers' accounts as well as a considerable number of bills of exchange, and among the American publishers is a most faithful and zealous representative of his friend. Some of these details, which are very numerous, are tedious; but they are interesting at the same time, and Mr. Norton has done well to print them all. In the light of the present relations of British authors to the American public, they are curious reading. There appears to have been a fortunate moment (it was not of long duration) when it was possible for the British author to reap something of a harvest here. It would appear that, between 1838 and 1847, Emerson sent Carlyle some five hundred and thirty pounds, the proceeds of the sale of several of his works in this country. The sum is not large, but it must be measured by the profit that he had up to that time derived in England. It was in Boston that "Sartor Resartus," with which the English publishers would have so little to do, first made its way into the light, after a precarious and abbreviated transit through "Fraser's Magazine." "It will be a very brave day," Carlyle wrote in 1838, after Emerson had made arrangements for the issue of the "French Revolution" in Boston, "it will be a very brave day when cash actually reaches me, no matter what the *number* of the coins, whether seven or seven hundred, out of Yankee-land; and strange enough, what is not unlikely, if it be the *first* cash I realize for that piece of work—Angle-land continuing still *insolvent* to me." Six years later, in 1844, he writes, on the occasion of a remittance from Emerson of thirty-six pounds, "America, I think, is like an amiable family tea-pot; you think it is all out long since, and lo, the valuable implement yields you another cup, and another!" Encouragement had come to him from America as well as money; and there is something touching in the care with which Emerson assures him of the growth of his public on this side of the ocean, and of there being many ingenuous young persons of both sexes to whom his writings are as meat and drink. We had learned from Mr. Froude's publications that his beginnings were difficult; but this Cor-

respondence throws a new light upon those grim years—I mean in exposing more definitely the fact that he was for some time on the point of coming to seek his fortune in this country. Both his own and Emerson's early letters are full of allusions to this possible voyage: for Emerson, in particular, the idea appears to have a fascination; he returns to it again and again, keeps it constantly before his correspondent, never ceases to express his desire that Carlyle should embark for Boston. There was a plan of his giving lectures in the United States, and Emerson, at Carlyle's request, collects all possible information as to the expenses and the rewards of such an attempt. It would appear that the rewards of the lecturer's art, fifty years ago, were extremely slender in comparison of what they have since become; though it must be added that Emerson gives a truly touching description of the cost of living. One might have entertainment at the best hotels for the sum of eight dollars a week. It is true that he gives us no re-assurance as to what the best hotels in America, fifty years ago, may have been. Emerson offers his friend the most generous hospitality; on his return from Europe, he had married and settled himself at Concord. To Concord he entreats Mr. and Mrs. Carlyle to take their way; their room is ready and their fire is made. The reader at this point of the correspondence feels a certain suspense: he knows that Carlyle never did come to America, but like a good novel the letters produce an illusion. He holds his breath, for the terrible Scotchman may after all have embarked, and there is something really almost heart-shaking in the thought of his transporting that tremendous imagination and those vessels of wrath and sarcasm to an innocent New England village. The situation becomes dramatic, like the other incident I have mentioned, in the presence of Emerson's serene good faith, his eagerness for the arrival of such a cloud-compelling host. The catastrophe never came off, however, and the air of Concord was disturbed by no fumes more irritating than the tonic emanations of Emerson's own genius. It is impossible to imagine what the historian of the French Revolution, of the iron-fisted Cromwell, and the Voltairean Frederick, would have made of that sensitive spot, or what Concord would have made of Carlyle.

Emerson, indeed, throughout had no hesitations on this score, and talked of the New England culture to his lurid correspondent without the least fear that his delicate specimens would be scorched. He sends him Mr. Alcott, he sends him Margaret Fuller, and others besides, who have a varying fortune at



the little house in Cheyne Walk. It is true that Carlyle gave him constantly the encouragement of a high and eloquent esteem for his own utterances. He was evidently a great and genuine admirer of the genius, the spirit of his American friend, and he expresses this feeling on a dozen occasions.

"My friend! you know not what you have done for me there [in the oration of 'The American Scholar']. It was long decades of years that I had heard nothing but the infinite jangling and jabbering, and inarticulate twittering and screeching, and my soul had sunk down sorrowful and said there is no articulate speaking then any more, and thou art solitary among stranger-creatures; and lo, out of the West comes a clear utterance, clearly recognizable as a *man's* voice, and I have a kinsman and brother: God be thanked for it! I could have *welt* to read that speech; the clear high melody of it went tingling through my heart; I said to my wife, 'There, woman!' \* \* \* My brave Emerson! And all this has been lying silent, quite tranquil in him, these seven years, and the 'vociferous platitude' dinning his ears on all sides, and he quietly answering no word; and a whole world of thought has silently built itself in these calm depths, and, the day having come, says quite softly, as if it were a common thing, 'Yes, I am here, too.' Miss Martineau tells me, 'Some say it is inspired; some say it is mad.' Exactly so; no *say* could be suitabler."

That is from a letter of 1837, and though at a later date (in 1850) he speaks of seeing "well enough what a great deep cleft divides us in our ways of practically looking at this world"; though, too (in 1842), he had already uttered a warning against Emerson's danger (with his fellow-transcendentalists) of "soaring away \* \* \* into perilous altitudes, beyond the curve of perpetual frost \* \* \* and seeing nothing under one but the everlasting snows of Himmalayah"—the danger of "inanity and mere injuring of the lungs!"—though, as I say, he threw out his reflections upon certain inevitable disparities, his attitude toward the Concord philosopher remained (I have already noted it) an eminently hospitable one. "The rock-strata, miles deep, unite again; and the two poor souls are at one," he adds in the letter written in 1850, from which I have just quoted. When "English Traits" came out, Carlyle wrote, "Not for seven years and more have I got hold of such a Book;—Book by a real *man*, with eyes in his head; nobleness, wisdom, humor, and many other things in the heart of him. Such Books do not turn up often in the decade, in the century." He adds, indeed, rather unexpectedly: "In fact, I believe it to be worth all the Books ever written by New England upon Old." Carlyle speaks as if there had been an appreciable literature of that kind. It is faint praise to say that "English Traits" was the authority on the subject. He declares in another letter that "My Friend

Emerson, alone of all voices out of America, has sphere-music in him for me." These words, written in 1843, are part of a paragraph in which Carlyle expresses his feelings with regard to the American "reforming" class at large. The high esteem in which he held his correspondent did not impel him to take an enthusiastic view of certain persons with whom, apparently, he supposed his correspondent to be in some degree associated. "Another Channing, whom I once saw here, sends me a 'Progress-of-the-Species' Periodical from New York. *Ach Gott!* These people and their affairs seem all 'melting' rapidly enough into thaw-slush, or one knows not what. Considerable madness is visible in them \* \* \* I am terribly sick of all that;—and wish it would stay at home at Fruitland, or where there is good pasture for it, \* \* \* [a] bottomless hubbub, which is not all cheering." Several of the wanderers from "Fruitland" knocked at his door, and he speaks of them to Emerson with a humorous irreverence that contrasts characteristically with Emerson's own tone of consideration (that beautiful courtesy which he never lost) for the same persons. One of them, "all bent on saving the world by a return to acorns and the golden age," he desires to be suffered to love him as he can, "and live on vegetables in peace; as I, living *partly* on vegetables, will continue to love him!" But he warns Emerson against the "English Tail" of the same visitor, who, arrived in London, apparently had given away his confidence on terms too easy. "Bottomless imbeciles ought not to be seen in company with Ralph Waldo Emerson, who has already *men* listening to him on this side of the water." Of Margaret Fuller, however,—one of those who had attempted "the flight of the un-winged," as he calls it,—Carlyle speaks in the most affectionate though the most discriminating manner:

"Poor Margaret, that is a strange tragedy that history of hers, and has many traits of the Heroic in it, though it is wild as the prophecy of a Sybil. Such a predetermination to *eat* this big Universe as her oyster or her egg, and to be absolute empress of all height and glory in it that her heart could conceive, I have not before seen in any human soul. Her 'mountain *me*' indeed:—but her courage too is high and clear, her chivalrous nobleness indeed is great; her veracity, in its deepest sense, *à toute épreuve*."

It is difficult to resist quoting, where so much is quotable; but the better way is to urge the reader to go straight to the book. Then he will find himself interested, even more than in the happy passages of characterization in which it abounds, in the reflection it offers of two contrasted characters of men



of genius. With several qualities in common, Carlyle and Emerson diverged, in their total expression, with a completeness which is full of suggestion as to their differences of circumstance, race, association, temper. Both were men of the poetic quality, men of imagination; both were Puritans; both of them looked, instinctively, at the world, at life, as a great total, full of far-reaching relations; both of them set above everything else the importance of conduct—of what Carlyle called veracity and Emerson called harmony with the universe. Both of them had the desire, the passion, for something better,—the reforming spirit, an interest in the destiny of mankind. But their variations of feeling were of the widest, and the temperament of the one was absolutely opposed to the temperament of the other. Both were men of the greatest purity and, in the usual sense, simplicity of life; each had a high ideal, each kept himself unspotted from the world. Their Correspondence is to an extraordinary degree the record, on either side, of a career with which nothing base, nothing interested, no worldly avidity, no vulgar vanity or personal error, was ever mingled—a career of public distinction and private honor. But with these things what disparities of tone, of manner, of inspiration! “Yet I think I shall never be killed by my ambition,” Emerson writes in a letter of the date of 1841. “I behold my failures and shortcomings there in writing, wherein it would give me much joy to thrive, with an equanimity which my worst enemy might be glad to see. \* \* \* My whole philosophy—which is very real—teaches acquiescence and optimism. Only when I see how much work is to be done, what room for a poet—for any spiritualist—in this great, intelligent, sensual and avaricious America, I lament my fumbling fingers and stammering tongue.” Emerson speaks the word in that passage; he was an optimist, and this in spite of the fact that he was the inspiration of the considerable body of persons who at that time, in New England, were seeking a better way. Carlyle, on the other hand, was a pessimist—a pessimist of pessimists—and this great difference between them includes many of the others. The American public has little more to learn in regard to the extreme amenity of Emerson, his eminently gentle spirit, his almost touching tolerance, his deference toward every sort of human manifestation; but many of his letters remind us afresh of his singular modesty of attitude and of his extreme consideration for that blundering human family whom he believed to be in want of light. His optimism makes us wonder at times where he discovered the errors that it

would seem well to set right, and what there was in his view of the world on which the spirit of criticism could feed. He had a high and noble conception of good, without having, as it would appear, a definite conception of evil. The few words I have just quoted in regard to the America of 1841, “intelligent, sensual, and avaricious,” have as sharp an ironical ring in them as any that I remember to have noticed in his part of the Correspondence. He has not a grain of current contempt; one feels, at times, that he has not enough. This salt is wanting in his taste of things. Carlyle, on the other hand, who has fearfully little amenity (save in his direct relation to Emerson, where he is admirable), has a vivid conception of evil without a corresponding conception of good. Curiously narrow and special, at least, were the forms in which he saw this latter spirit embodied. “For my heart is sick and sore on behalf of my own poor generation,” he writes in 1842. “Nay, I feel withal as if the one hope of help for it consisted in the possibility of new Cromwells and new Puritans.” Eleven years later, returning from a visit to Germany, he writes that “truly and really the Prussian soldiers, with their intelligent *silence*, with the touches of effective Spartanism I saw or fancied in them, were the class of people that pleased me best.” There could be nothing more characteristic of Carlyle than this confession that such an impression as that was the most agreeable that he had brought back from a Continental tour. Emerson, by tradition and temperament, was as deeply rooted a Puritan as Carlyle; but he was a Puritan refined and sublimated, and a certain delicacy, a certain good taste would have prevented him from desiring (for the amelioration of mankind) so crude an occurrence as a return of the regiments of Oliver. Full of a local quality, with a narrow social horizon, he yet never would have ventured to plead so undisguisedly (in pretending to speak for the world at large) the cause of his own parish. Of that “current contempt” of which I just now spoke, Carlyle had more than enough. If it is humorous and half-compassionate in his moments of comparative tolerance, it is savage in his melancholy ones; and, in either case, it is full of the entertainment which comes from great expression. “Man, all men, seem radically dumb, jabbering mere jargons and noises from the teeth outward; the inner meaning of them—of them and of me, poor devils—remaining shut, buried forever. \* \* \* Certainly could one generation of men be forced to live without rhetoric, babblement, hearsay, in short with the tongue well cut out of them alto-



gether, their fortunate successors would find a most improved world to start upon!" Carlyle's pessimism was not only deep, but loud; not of the serene, but of the irritable sort. It is one of the strangest of things to find such an appreciation of silence in a mind that in itself was, before all things, expressive. Carlyle's expression was never more rich than when he declared that things were immeasurable, unutterable, not to be formulated. "The gospel of silence, in thirty volumes," that was a happy epigram of one of his critics; but it does not prevent us from believing that, after all, he really loved, as it were, the inarticulate. And we believe it for this reason, that the working of his own genius must have been accompanied with an extraordinary internal uproar, sensible to himself, and from which, in a kind of agony, he was forced to appeal. With the spectacle of human things resounding and reverberating in his head, awaking extraordinary echoes, it is no wonder that he had an ideal of the speechless. But his irritation communed happily for fifty years with Emerson's serenity; and the fact is very honorable to both.

"I have sometimes fancied I was to catch sympathetic activity from contact with noble persons," Emerson writes in a letter from which I have already quoted; "that you would come and see me; that I should form stricter habits of love and conversation with some men and women here who are already dear to me." That is the tone in which he speaks, for the most part, of his own life; and that was the tone which doubtless used to be natural in Concord. His letters are especially interesting for the impression they give us of what we may call the thinness of the New England atmosphere in those days—the thinness, and, it must be added, the purity. An almost touching lightness, sparseness, transparency marked the social scenery in those days; and this impression, in Emerson's pages, is the greater by contrast with the echoes of the dense, warm life of London that are transmitted by his correspondent. One is reminded, as we remember being reminded in the perusal of Hawthorne's "American Notebooks," of the importance of the individual in that simple social economy—of almost any individual who was not simply engaged in buying and selling. It must be remembered, of course, that the importance of the individual was Emerson's great doctrine; every one had a kingdom within himself—was potential sovereign, by divine right, over a multitude of inspirations and virtues. No one maintained a more hospitable attitude than his toward anything that any one might have to say. There was no presumption against even

the humblest, and the ear of the universe was open to any articulate voice. In this respect the opposition to Carlyle was complete. The great Scotchman thought *all* talk a jabbering of apes; whereas Emerson, who was the perfection of a listener, stood always in a posture of hopeful expectancy and regarded each delivery of a personal view as a new fact, to be estimated on its merits. In a genuine democracy all things are democratic; and this spirit of general deference, on the part of a beautiful poet who might have availed himself of the poetic license to be fastidious, was the natural product of a society in which it was held that every one was equal to every one else. It was as natural on the other side that Carlyle's philosophy should have aristocratic premises, and that he should call aloud for that imperial master, of the necessity for whom the New England mind was so serenely unconscious. Nothing is more striking in Emerson's letters than the way in which people are measured exclusively by their moral standards, designated by moral terms, described according to their morality. There was nothing else to describe them by. "A man named Bronson Alcott is great, and one of the jewels we have to show you. \* \* \* A man named Bronson Alcott is a majestic soul, with whom conversation is possible. He is capable of the truth, and gives one the same glad astonishment that he should exist which the world does. \* \* \* The man Alcott bides his time. — — is a beautiful and noble youth, of a most subtle and magnetic nature. \* \* \* I have a young poet in the village named Thoreau, who writes the truest verses. I pine to show you my treasures. \* \* \* One reader and friend of yours dwells now in my house, Henry Thoreau, a poet whom you may one day be proud of, a noble, manly youth, full of melodies and inventions." Carlyle, who held melodies and inventions so cheap, was probably not a little irritated (though, faithful to his constant consideration for Emerson, he shows it but mildly) by this enumeration of characters so vaguely constituted. "In fact, I do again desiderate some *concretion* of these beautiful *abstracta*." That remark which he makes in regard to one of Emerson's discourses, might have been applied to certain of his friends. "The *Dial*, too, it is all spirit-like, æriform, aurora-borealis-like. Will no *Angel* body himself out of that; no stalwart Yankee *man*, with color in the cheeks of him and a coat on his back?" Emerson speaks of his friends too much as if they were disembodied spirits. One doesn't see the color in the cheeks of them and the coats on their back. The fine touch in his letters, as in his other writings, is



always the spiritual touch. For the rest, felicitous as they are, for the most part they suffer a little by comparison with Carlyle's; they are less natural, more composed, have too studied a quaintness. It was his practice, apparently, to make two drafts of these communications. The violent color, the large, avalanche-movement of Carlyle's style—as if a mass of earth and rock and vegetation had detached itself and came bouncing and bumping forward—make the efforts of his correspondent appear a little pale and stiff. There is always something high and pure in Emerson's speech, however, and it has often a perfect propriety—seeming, in answer to Carlyle's extravagances, the note of reason and justice. "Faith and love are apt to be spasmodic in the best minds. Men live on the brink of mysteries and harmonies into which they never enter, and with their hand on the door-latch they die outside."

Emerson's views of the world were what the world at all times thought highly peculiar; he neither believed nor thought nor spoke in the most apprehensible manner. He says himself (in 1840) that he is "gently mad"—surrounded, too, by a number of persons in the same condition. "I am gently mad myself and am resolved to live cleanly. George Ripley is talking up a colony of agriculturists and scholars, with whom he threatens to take the field and the book. One man renounces the use of animal food; and another of coin; and another of domestic hired service; and another of the State; and on the whole, we have a commendable share of reason and hope." But Emerson's "madness" was as mild as moonlight, compared with the strange commixture of the nature of his friend. If the main interest of these letters is, as I have said, their illustration of the character of the writers, the effect of Carlyle's portion of them is to deepen our sense, already sufficiently lively, of his enormous incongruities. Considerably sad, as he would have said himself, is the picture they present of a man of genius. One must allow, of course, for his extraordinary gift of expression, which set a premium on every sort of exaggeration; but even when one has done so, darkness and horror reside in every line of them. He is like a man hovering on the edge of insanity—hanging over a black gulf and wearing the reflection of its bottomless deeps in his face. His physical digestion was of the worst; but it was nothing compared with his moral digestion. Truly, he was not genial, and he was not gracious; as how should he have been in such conditions? He was born out of humor with life; he came into the world with an insurmountable preju-

dice; and to be genial and gracious naturally seemed of small importance in the face of the eternal veracities—veracities of such a grim and implacable sort. The strangest thing, among so many that were strange, was that his magnificent humor—that saving grace which has eased off the troubles of life for so many people who have been blessed with it—did so little to lighten his burden. Of this humor these volumes contain some admirable specimens—as in the description of "the brave Gambardella," the Neapolitan artist who comes to him with an introduction from Emerson; of the fish-eating Rio, historian of Christian Art; of the "loquacious, scriblacious" Heraud; of the "buckramed and mummy-swathed" Miss Martineau, and many more besides. His humor was in truth not of comic but of tragic intention, and not so much a flame as an all-enveloping smoke. His treatment of all things is the humorous—unfortunately in too many cases the ill-humorous. He even hated his work—hated his subjects. These volumes are a sort of record of the long weariness and anguish (as one may indeed call it) with which he struggled through his "Cromwell," his "French Revolution," and the history of Frederick. He thought, after all, very little of Frederick, and he detested the age in which he lived, the "putrid eighteenth century—an ocean of sordid nothingness, shams, and scandalous hypocrisies." He achieved a noble quantity of work, but all the while he found no inspiration in it. "The reason that I tell you nothing about Cromwell is, alas, that there is nothing to be told. I am, day and night, these long months and years, very miserable about it—nigh broken-hearted often. \* \* \* No history of it *can* be written to this wretched, fleeing, sneering, canting, twaddling, God-forgetting generation. How can I explain men to Apes by the Dead Sea?" Other persons have enjoyed life as little as Carlyle; other men have been pessimists and cynics; but few men have rioted so in their disenchantments, or thumped so perpetually upon the hollowness of things with the view of making it resound. Pessimism, cynicism, usually imply a certain amount of indifference and resignation; but in Carlyle these forces were nothing if not querulous and vocal. It must be remembered that he had an imagination which made acquiescence difficult—an imagination haunted with theological and apocalyptic visions. We have no occasion here to attempt to estimate his position in literature, but we may be permitted to say that it is mainly to this splendid imagination that he owes it. Both the moral and the physical world were full of pictures for him, and it would seem to be by his great



pictorial energy that he will live. To get an idea of the solidity and sincerity of this gift one must read his notes on a tour in Ireland in 1849; \* it is a revelation of his attention to external things and his perception of the internal states that they express. His doctrine, reduced to the fewest words, is that life is very serious and that every one should do his work honestly. This is the gist of the matter; all the rest is magnificent vocalization. We call it magnificent, in spite of the fact that many people find him unreadable on account of his unprecedented form. His extemporized, empirical style, however, seems to us the very substance of his thought. If the merit of a style lies in complete correspondence with the feeling of the writer, Carlyle's is one of the best. It is not defensible, but it is victorious; and if it is neither homogeneous, nor, at times, coherent, it bristles with all manner of felicities. It is true, nevertheless, that he had invented a manner, and that his manner had swallowed him up. To look at realities and not at imitations is what he constantly and sternly enjoins; but all the while he gives us the sense that it is not at things themselves, but straight into this abysmal manner of his own that he is looking.

All this, of course, is a very incomplete account of him. So large a genius is full of interest of detail, and in the application in special cases of that doctrine of his which seems so simple there is often the greatest suggest-

iveness. When he does look *through* his own manner into the vivid spots of history, then he sees more in them than almost any one else. We may add that no account of him would have even a slight completeness which should fail to cite him as a signal instance of the force of local influences, of the qualities of race and soil. Carlyle was intensely of the stock of which he sprang, and he remained so to the end. No man of equal genius was probably ever less of a man of the world at large—more exclusively a product of his locality, his clan, his family. Readers of his "Reminiscences" and of Mr. Froude's memoir will remember how the peasant-group in which he was born—his parents, his brothers and sisters—appeared to constitute one of the great facts of the universe for him; and we mean not as a son and a brother simply, but as a student of human affairs. He was impressed, as it were, with the historical importance of his kinsfolk. And as one finds a little of everything in a man of genius, we find a great deal of tenderness even in the grimness of Carlyle; so that we may say, as the last word of all (for it qualifies our implication that he was narrow), that his tenderness was never greater than when, in spite of the local limitation, he stretched across the ocean, in gratitude for early sympathy, for early services, and held fast to the friendship of Emerson. His family was predominant for him, as we say, and he cleaved to his relations, to his brothers. But it was as a brother that he addressed Emerson.

\* See THE CENTURY for May, June, and July 1882.

*Henry James, Jr.*

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## YESTERDAY AND TO-DAY.

(YESTERDAY.)

It is so wide, this great world vaulted o'er  
By the blue sky clasping white shore to shore.  
And yet it is not wide enough for me!  
I love you so—it cannot hold my love.  
There is not space in earth or heaven above.  
There is not room for my great love and me.

(TO-DAY.)

It is so wide, this great world vaulted o'er  
By the sad sky clasping dark shore to shore,  
It is too wide—it is too wide for me!  
Would God that it were narrowed to a grave,  
And I slept quiet, naught hid with me save  
The love that was too great—too great for me.

*Frances Hodgson Burnett.*