

ART. III.—THOMAS CARLYLE.

AN Article on "The Reminiscences of Thomas Carlyle," appeared in the April number of *THE CHURCHMAN*. Many interesting extracts were given from the volumes edited by Mr. Froude, but the paper was not, nor was it intended to be, exhaustive. It was struck off while the iron was hot, and the public mind was occupied with the illustrious deceased. There is room for another Paper on the man and his opinions; a man of original thought, singular genius, of true eloquence, gifted with a poetic imagination, and dowered with great strength of will. He was one who took a large and vigorous grasp of every subject that he touched. "The Reminiscences" are full of pathos—indeed, in some parts, of tragic pathos—and they have the power to touch while they enchain the reader. But they are also, in many of their aspects, very painful, and leave an impression of the author far from pleasant or satisfactory. They have not unnaturally cooled that first ardour of laudatory appreciation which was so general when the tidings that "the sage of Chelsea" was no more, reached the public ear. There was on the news of his death an almost unanimous chorus of praise from the secular press, mingled with lamentations for his loss, and no terms were thought too eulogistic for the homage that was due to the illustrious dead. But now the fervour has abated, and with the strains of eulogy are mingled other and far different notes. It is thought, and said, that "the Reminiscences" have given a death-blow to his heroic reputation. The great image which was supposed to be wholly of iron is found to have been mixed with clay. His weakness is almost as great as his strength. Already more than one indignant protest has appeared from the friends and relatives of those of whom he has written unkindly and ungenerously in this the last work that proceeded from his pen. Many of his remarks on his friends and contemporaries are with truth affirmed to be "often petty," "always painful," in many cases entirely unfounded and mistaken; and Mr. Froude is blamed for giving the book in its present form to the general eye. Carlyle intended these "Reminiscences" for publication, but he left to his executor a discretion in the matter. But whether meant for publicity or not, many of the sketches in the book are very painful, and they reveal what is far from being either heroic or great in the character of one to whom so much homage and reverence has been paid. It is therefore naturally a subject of regret with his numerous admirers, that the Editor should have shown so little delicacy and taste as to print those harsh

judgments of his friend, which are calculated to wound and distress the living. Had he expunged such passages, there is no doubt we should have had a higher opinion of Carlyle; but that would be simply because we should have known less about the man—because we should have been kept in ignorance how far a vanity wounded because he thought himself insufficiently appreciated, could lead him to speak slightly and contemptuously of those whom he called his friends. We might, it is true, have had a better opinion of Carlyle, but the man himself would have been the same; more highly esteemed simply because less truly known. Here, no doubt, “ignorance” would have been “bliss.” But, after all, it is well to know what manner of man this was, of so fine a genius, of such unremitting energy, whose literary skill was so forcible and picturesque, and who waged a life-long battle against shams and hypocrisies of every kind. And it is from his own hand, a hand, like Ishmael’s, lifted up against every man, with but few exceptions, that we have a picture of himself. From his “Reminiscences” we learn that he counted himself wiser than the wise, and that from the sublime heights of self-appreciation he looked down with contempt on many whom the world had considered to be his equals, in some instances his superiors. No wonder that the book has aroused some indignant protests against—shall we call them the slanders?—sown broadcast through its pages. The friends of Mrs. Irving and her family, the Martins of Kirkcaldy, have come forward to complain of the misrepresentations regarding the wife of Edward Irving and her nearest relatives. Mrs. Proctor, in a pamphlet printed for private circulation, has spoken out for her own family, and has said in her preface that “he should beware how he strikes with a dead hand.” All this comes like a shock to all who regarded Carlyle as a man of great heart and generous mind; and the shock is greater in the case of those who had placed him on a pedestal above his fellows, and regarded him in the light of a prophet and a seer. And the thought cannot but intrude itself that whatever may have been the indiscretion on Mr. Froude’s part in giving these “Reminiscences” to the world, the sketches were the deliberate work of Carlyle, a work undertaken, as he says, to relieve an overwhelming sorrow, and which might surely have had a softening effect on his mind, and have removed any inclination to be harsh or ungenerous, as he recalled, in his solitary chamber, the friends and acquaintances of his early days.¹

¹ Since the above was written, I observe the following remarks in the *Quarterly Review*. “If these things were not intended for publication, why were they deliberately, and even artistically, noted down and dressed up? Why are they so thickly interspersed in pages professedly

Mrs. Oliphant, in her Article on Carlyle in *Macmillan*, puts in, as an apology for the tone of remarks "offensive to so many personally, and painful above measure to all who loved and revered Carlyle," the circumstances under which, the Reminiscences, excepting the sketch of his father, were written:—

He had lost the beloved companion whom, as we all do, yet perhaps with more remorse and a little more reason than most, he for the first time fully perceived himself never to have done full justice to. He had been left desolate, with every circumstance of misery added which it is possible to imagine; for she had died while he was absent, while he was in the midst of one of the few triumphs of his life, surrounded by uncongenial noise of applause, which he had schooled himself to take pleasure in, and which he liked, too, though he hated it.

Again, Mrs. Oliphant says of him after his return from Mentone, where his friends had taken him for "a thorough change:—"

At first alone in his desolate house, and then stranded there upon that alien shore where everything was so soft and unlike him in his gaunt and self-devouring misery, he seized upon the familiar pen, the instrument of his power which he had laid aside after the prolonged effort of "Frederick" with more or less idea that it was done with, and rest to be his henceforth, and poured forth his troubled agony of soul, his restless quickened life, the heart which had no longer a natural outlet close at hand.

"Let any one," she continues, "who is offended by these 'Reminiscences' think of this:—"

He never looked at the disturbed and unhappy record of this passion again; "did not know to what I was alluding," when his friend and literary executor spoke to him two years later of the Irving sketch. Miserable in body and mind; his nerves all twisted the wrong way; his heart-rent storm, full of sorrow, irritation, remorseful feeling, and all the impatient longings of grief, no doubt the sharpness of those discordant notes, the strokes dealt blindly all about him, were a kind of bitter relief to the restless misery of his soul.

Let us make every allowance for the sharp words of one thus "wild with grief, distraught, and full of sombre excitement:" let us allow that there is nothing in them of deliberate malice; that all that is unkind in the book "should have been buried with sacred pity, or burned with sacred fire, and the rest read

devoted to friendship, filial piety, and conjugal love? They equally indicate the disposition and manner of judging whether they were meant for publication or not, and our knowledge of the real character of the man would be incomplete if they had been suppressed."—*The Quarterly Review*, April, 1881.

with reverence and tears;" yet it is not in these "Reminiscences" alone, that Carlyle has shown the sharpness of an irritable temper or dealt reckless strokes at others, "blindly all about him." Most of his illustrious contemporaries have come under the merciless lash of his sarcastic wit.¹ Long before he was "struck to the heart by the one blow which life had in reserve for him, the only blow which could strike him to the heart," he had shown how a mind with a morbid tendency to irritation could "shoot out its arrows—even bitter words."

In the little book by Mr. Nicoll, which is one of the many biographies called forth by the philosopher's death, the compiler gives the following as a specimen of his conversation:—

And what men we have to meet the crisis! Sir Walter Scott, a toothless retailer of old wives' fables; Brougham, an eternal grinder of commonplace and pretentious noise, like a man playing on a hurdy-gurdy; Coleridge, talking in a maudlin sleep an infinite deal of nothing; Wordsworth, stooping to extract a spiritual catsup from mushrooms which were little better than toadstools; John Wilson, taken to presiding at Noctes, and painting haggises in flood; the bishops and clergy of all denominations combined to keep men in a state of pupillage, that *they* may be kept in port-wine and roast-beef; politicians full of cant, insincerity and falsehood; Peel, a plausible fox; John Wilson Croker, an unhangd hound; Lord John Russell, a turnspit of good pedigree; Lord Melbourne, a monkey;—"these be thy gods, O Israel!" Others occupied in undertakings as absurd as to seek to suck the moon out of the sky; this windbag yelping for liberty to the negro, and that other for the improvement of prisons; all sham and imposture together, a giant lie, which may soon go down in hell-fire.

Such criticisms may be in part due to the sharpness of his dyspeptic constitution and irritable temper, but surely one who comes forth as the great Teacher of his age should set a more dignified example, more humble, more self-controlled; he should let others see that besides being able to "speak with the tongues of men and of angels," and to "understand all mysteries and all knowledge," he has also that "*grace* of charity" which is greater than any *gift*, and which "suffereth long and is kind; which envieth not, vaunteth not itself, and is not puffed up." It is precisely because we see the Teacher so conscious of his own greatness, and so keenly alive to the failings of others, that we cannot but feel he was lacking in that great principle which alone can tone and subdue into harmony all the jarring discords of the natural heart. Sorrow is no excuse for harsh and unkind judgments of

¹ The several sketches in the Book were written at different times— "James Carlyle" was written in 1832; "Edward Irving" in 1866; "Lord Jeffrey" in 1867; "Jane Welsh Carlyle" in 1866.

others. Alas, for the tears, when behind their moisture burn the fires of anger and irritation! Alas, for the tears that do not fall like showers upon the tender grass with refreshing and healing power!

These volumes are full of unjust strictures and unkindly sneers on the greatest of his contemporaries. Thus, "Charles Lamb and his sister are a very sorry pair of phenomena; insuperable proclivity to gin in poor old Lamb." "Shelley to me always was, and is, a kind of ghastly object; colourless, pallid, without health or warmth or vigour; the sound of him shrieking, frosty, as if a ghost were trying to sing to us." "Shelley I likened to one of those huge sandstone-grinding cylinders which I had seen at Manchester, turning with inconceivable velocity (in the condemned room of the iron factory, where the men die of lung-disease at forty, but are permitted to smoke in their damp cellar, and think that a rich recompence!)—screaming harshly, and shooting out each of them its sheets of fire (yellow, starlight, &c., according as it is brass or other kind of metal that you grind and polish there)—beautiful sheets of fire, pouring out each as if from the paper cap of its low-stooping-backed grinder, when you look from rear-ward." Much more about Southey of the same import, though he looked upon him, too, with some kindness and pity.

Of Wordsworth he says, amongst other things, "a man recognisably of strong intellectual power, strong character; given to meditation and much contemplation of the meditative world and its noisy nothingness; had a fine limpid style of writing and delineating in his small way; a fine limpid vein of melody, too, in him (as of an honest rustic fiddle, good, and well-handled, but wanting two or more of the strings, and not capable of much!) In fact, a rather dull, hard-tempered, unproductive, and almost wearisome kind of man; nor adorable by any means as a great poetic genius, much less as the Trismegistus of such; whom only a select few could ever read, instead of mis-reading, which was the opinion his worshippers confidently entertained by him!" Even Carlyle's love for Edward Irving does not restrain him from sharp words. "He affected the Miltonic, or old English Puritan style, and strove visibly to imitate it more and more till almost the end of his career, when indeed it had become his own, and was the language he used in utmost heat of business for impressing his meaning. At this time, and for years afterwards, there was something of preconceived intention visible in it; in fact, of real affectation, as there could not well help being." Carlyle's coarse allusions to Mrs. Irving and her family have been referred to already. He has kindly words for some of his friends; but they are few—Mrs. Basil Montague, and Charles Buller, and Irving; and he gives us portraits of his father and

mother, painted with a reverent and affectionate appreciation of their mental and moral qualities, while the sketch of his wife is full of a profound and touching pathos which reaches the well-spring of tears.

The "Reminiscences" are distinguished by the same graphic force which gives such charm to his other works, and the style is as vivid and picturesque. It is this power of word-painting, of placing the very scene which he is describing and the actors before us, with the broad contrasts of light and shade, that renders his style so attractive. This is the secret of his charm. He struck out a new style for himself, forcible, vivid; but by no means faultless, and full of affectations. May we not best attempt to describe it by a passage taken from his own "Miscellanies," and intended for a description of Mirabeau? "He had the indisputablest ideas: but then his style! In very truth, it is the strangest of styles, though one of the richest; a style full of originality, picturesqueness, sunny vigour, but all cased and slated over, three-fold, in metaphor and trope: distracted with tortuosities, dislocations, starting out into crotchets, cramp-turns, quaintnesses, and hidden satire which the French head had no ear for—strong meat, too tough for babes!"

But with all his blemishes, his ruggedness, his frequent obscurity, and his inveterate mannerisms, there is not to be found in our literature such word-power, such vivid pictures of men and things, such scenes of passion and of pathos, of bloodshed and tears, as are painted in what many think his masterpiece, "The History of the French Revolution." And though the History cannot, in any real sense of that word, be called a history, yet, it contains a series of scenes and pictures and sketches which are unique in their effect, their interest, and their power. With a touch like that of a magician's wand, he calls from the dead the various personages of that terrible era, and they live before our eyes. Marat appears at his bidding, and we see the "squalidest, bleared mortal, redolent of soot and horse-drugs," his evil soul looking through his "bleared, dull, acrid, woe-stricken face." Danton rises from the dead, "through whose black brows and rude flattened face there looks a waste energy as of Hercules not yet furibund." There comes next upon the scene Robespierre, "anxious, slight, ineffectual-looking, under thirty, in spectacles, his eyes (were the glasses off) troubled, careful, with upturned face, snuffing dimly the uncertain future time, complexion of a multiplex atrabiliar colour, the final shade of which may be the pale sea-green." We have the whole scene before us as this man proclaims to his "Jacobin House of Lords" his woes, his

¹ "Critical and Miscellaneous Essays." By Thomas Carlyle. In Five Volumes. Second Edition. London: Chapman and Hall. 1842.

uncommon virtues, his incorruptibilities, and his readiness to die at a moment's warning; and as on this, David, the painter, cries, "Robespierre, I will drink the hemlock with thee!" and we have then the supreme moment when Robespierre appeals to the "President of Assassins" in vain, when "his frothing lips are grown blue, his tongue dry, cleaving to the roof of his mouth," and the mutineers cry, "The blood of Danton chokes him?"

Let us take but one other picture from this gallery of portraits. This shall be Mirabeau. Mirabeau, with thick, black hair, "through whose shaggy beetle-brows, and rough-hewn, seamed, carbuncled face, there look natural ugliness, small-pox, incontinence, bankruptcy, and burning fire of genius, like comet-fire glaring fuliginous through murkiest confusions, is the type Frenchman of this epoch."

It would be easy to give numberless instances of the same graphic force in hitting off the characteristics of the people whom he knew, as when he describes John Stuart Mill's conversation as "rather wintry and saw-dustish, but always well-informed and sincere." De Quincey is

A pretty little creature, full of wire-drawn ingenuities, beautiful enthusiasms, bankrupt pride, with the finest silver low-toned low voice and most elaborate gently-winding courtesies and ingenuities in conversation. "What wouldn't one give to have him in a box, and take him out to talk!" This was her criticism of him, and it was right good—a bright, ready, and melodious talker, but in the end inconclusive and long-winded.—One of the smallest man-figures I ever saw; shaped like a pair of tongs, and hardly above five feet in all. When he sate, you would have taken him by candle-light for the beautifullest little child—blue-eyed, sparkling face. Had there not been a some-thing, too, which said "*Eccovi*," this child has been in hell. After leaving Edinburgh I never saw him, hardly ever heard of him. His fate, owing to opium, &c., was hard, evil, and sore: poor, fine-strung, weak creature, launched so into the literary career of ambition, and mother of dead dogs.

Lady Holland he represents as "a kind of hungry ornamented witch, looking at me with merely carnivorous views;" views, no doubt, as to what she was to make of her "Lion" now she had caught him in her social toils. In a few bold and characteristic words he describes a speech of the Duke of Wellington as "a speech of the most haggly, hawky, pinched, and meagre kind, so far as utterance and eloquence went, but potent for conviction beyond any other."

It is not, however, the vividness and picturesqueness of his style alone that have made his writings so attractive to many, and have placed him amongst the most popular authors of the day. Style alone, were it even more pure and polished than his, and free from the faults of extravagance and exaggeration, would

not have given him the acceptance he has enjoyed, or drawn to him the homage of the most thoughtful and active intellects of the lower and middle classes. Many have allowed him to shape their views of life and society because he has waged war to the death against all shams and hypocrisies, and has proclaimed with unceasing energy the absolute necessity of truth, sincerity, and earnestness to every kind of greatness; and has shown a ready sympathy with the true and the right. He craves for energy and intensesness. He lays his axe at the root of all mere formulas and forms. In this he has done good service in an age of shams and seemings, when the deceptions and artificialities which enter into every department of life pass also into our religion, and sap the very foundation of all that is good. In his persistent proclamation of the beauty and glory of earnestness and truth, Carlyle has spoken both justly and profoundly; but, as it has been well said by Archdeacon Hare, in a note to his "Mission of the Comforter," "When it is asserted that these qualities are all in all—that truth, subjective truth, truth of character, sincerity, earnestness—are not merely essential elements in that which is good and great, but do of themselves and by themselves constitute goodness and greatness, it is plain that the power of evil in man and in the world, the lawless tendencies of the will, and the necessity of law to organize the tumultuous stirrings and heavings in man's breast in a consistent orderly whole, must be left out of view; and then an admirer of mere energy will readily fall into that abysmal error, that *Might is Right.*"

To quote another passage from the remarks of the same writer on Carlyle's "Lectures on Heroes." "Though in these Lectures," says Archdeacon Hare, "the truth often wrestles with its opposite, it is not brought out with distinctness how the informing idea alone can render the fermenting energies in man truly heroic, and how the latter are without form and void until that idea vivifies and hallows them; in a word, how the truly-heroic idea is that of Duty, animated by Love, and kindling into self-sacrifice; and how Law is the clearest, and for man, in almost all cases, the safest exponent and form of Duty; so that the true hero should realize Milton's grand description of a king: 'disciplined in the precepts and the practice of temperance and sobriety, without the strong drink of injurious and excessive desires, he should grow up to a noble strength and perfection, with those his illustrious and sunny locks, the laws, waving and curling about his god-like shoulders.'"

Carlyle's ideas of heroes and hero-worship are the offspring of that pantheistic spirit which has so pervaded our literature, and which makes power and intellect a sort of inspiration, even though divorced from purity, sobriety, and religion. His

heroes are men of genius, of strength of will, and energy of mind. In such qualities as these he sees the "godlike," the "divine." Moral character is left out of sight, and so he chooses for worship such men amongst others as Mahomet, Richter, Goethe, Burns! "These be thy gods, O Israel!" He has also an immoderate admiration of Mirabeau and others whose principles and lives Christianity condemns, and who are utterly wanting in the graces which are emphatically commended by Christ. The men whom he calls upon us to admire are distinguished by qualities which have no place amongst the beatitudes, and are altogether outside of that kingdom of heaven whose citizens are the pure in heart, the poor in spirit, the merciful, and the meek, the mourners, and those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. He idolizes strength, courage, power, all of which are pagan virtues, and passes over with contempt those passive and more gentle graces which are exalted in the pages of the New Testament. And in spite of much that is wise, and noble, and true in his writings, much to fire the imagination, reach the conscience, and touch the heart—it is sentiments like these which create a doubt whether he is to be regarded as a believer in Christianity at all. If his creed, so far as it may be gathered from his several writings, be not pantheistic, it has certainly a close analogy to that system. And so far as it is so, his works, however fascinating and powerful they may be, however high-toned in sentiment, generous in their advocacy of the oppressed, and bold in their assertion of many neglected truths, are calculated to inflict a grave injury on religion, and to be hurtful to the young, indeed to all who are unable to disengage what is sound and valuable from the errors and exaggerations which are so abundant.

Even his own friends say, "What his beliefs were, no one can definitely pronounce; they were more perhaps than he thought." It is to be hoped so—one of the most painful things in the "Reminiscences" is that, although the greater part of

¹ Since the above was in type the Writer has seen the following remarks conceived in the same spirit, in the April number of the *Quarterly Review*:—"That his admirers should still think it right to raise busts or statues in his honour is their affair; but they are assuming a grave responsibility. They are canonizing genius simply because it is genius, without regard to its application or direction, careless of its good or evil effects upon mankind. They are sanctioning a false philosophy. They are setting up a false standard of excellence. They are winging and pointing anew arrows aimed at the reputation of their most distinguished contemporaries. They are doing their best to diffuse and perpetuate a baneful influence; to give increased authority and circulation to works composed for the most part in open defiance of good sense, good feeling, or good taste; works whose all pervading tone, spirit, and tendency are radically wrong."

them was written in his latter days, there is nothing in them of a true Christian hope. The chapter about his wife, a most remarkable woman according to the testimony of all who knew her, is, as has been said already, full of a pathos that lies very near to tears. His allusions to her are most touching, and are fraught with feelings near akin to remorse that he had never discovered her true worth till she was no more. Passages like the following occur again and again. "Oh, what of pain, pain, my poor Jeannie had to bear in this thorny pilgrimage of life! the unwitnessed heroine, or witnessed only by me, who never till now see it wholly." Speaking of his lectures in Willis's Rooms, after saying, "Detestable mixture of prophecy and play—actorism, as I sorrowfully defined it—nothing could well be hatefuller to me," he adds:—

But I was obliged; and she, oh, she was my angel, and unwearied helper and comforter in all that; how we drove together, we poor two, to our place of execution; she with a little drop of brandy to give me at the very last, and shone round me like a bright aureola, when all else was black and chaos! God reward thee, dear one! now when I cannot even own my debt. Oh, why do we delay so much till death render it impossible? And don't I continue it still with others? Fools, fools! We forget that it has to end; so this has ended, and it is such an astonishment to me, so sternly undeniable, yet, as it were, incredible.

Again he sorrowfully says:—

Oh, my dear one, sad is my soul for the loss of thee, and will to the end be, as I compute. Lonelier existence there is not henceforth in this world—neither person, work, or thing going on in it that is of any value in comparison, or even at all. Death I feel almost daily in express fact, death is the one haven; and have occasionally a kind of kingship, sorrowful but sublime, almost godlike, in the feeling that it is nigh. Sometimes the image of her, gone in her car of victory (in that beautiful death), and as if nodding to me with a smile—"I am gone, loved one! Work a little longer, if thou still carest; if not, follow. There is no baseness, and no misery here. Courage! to the last. That, sometimes, as in this moment, is inexpressibly beautiful to me, and comes nearer to bringing tears than it once did.

Once more:—

As to talent epistolary, and other, these letters, I perceive, equal, and surpass whatever of best I know to exist in that kind; for talent, genius, or whatever we may call it. What an evidence, if my little woman needed that, to me! Not all the Sands and Eliots, and babbling *cohue* of celebrated scribbling women that have strutted over the world in any time, could, it seems to me, if all boiled down and distilled to essence, make one such woman.

Then there are cries, wrung from the very depths of his wounded spirit, which are profoundly affecting. "Oh, my dearest, my dearest, that cannot now know how dear." "Ah me! ah me!" "Ay de mi!" "Blind and deaf that we are! oh, think if thou yet love anybody living, wait not till death sweep down the paltry little dust-clouds and idle dissonances of the moment, and all be at last so mournfully clear and beautiful, when it is too late."

But one more sob of this sorrowful, regretful heart, which will find an echo in many another sorrowful and regretful heart, that only realizes all that it has lost when the dear one has passed away beyond recall, and can never more be told of our infinite love; when remorse is idle, and tears are vain. "Ah me, she never knew fully, nor could I show her in my heavy-laden miserable life how much I had at all times regarded, loved and admired her. No telling of her now. Five minutes more of your dear company in this world. Oh, that I had you yet for but five minutes to tell you all!"

These cries must go to every heart. But what is painful in the book is the absence of any expression of that faith which would be like a healing branch in these waters of bitterness turning their saltness into sweetest streams. Though it would appear that he never quite shook off the early training of his pious father and mother, yet is there too much reason to fear that he cast aside his belief in dogmatic Christianity. For our own part we would gladly exchange all his vague phrases about the "Eternities," and the "Silences," and "The Immensities," "The Everlasting Yea," and "The Everlasting Nay," "Nature and Eternal Fact," for one clear statement of that Christian hope which lightens the gloom of sorrow, and irradiates the darkness of the grave.

CHARLES D. BELL.

ART. IV.—"HOW I CROSSED AFRICA."

How I Crossed Africa: from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean through Unknown Countries. Discovery of the great Zambesi Affluents, &c. By Major SERPA PINTO. Translated from the Author's Manuscript, by Alfred Elwes. Two vols. Maps and Illustrations. Sampson Low & Co. 1881.

A WELL-WRITTEN book of African travels is always welcome. There is a sort of fascination about the interior of Africa; and a careful description of a journey through regions of which but little is known, and about which there is really some-