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THE ALLEGED PRUSSIANISM OF THOMAS  
CARLYLE.

HERBERT L. STEWART.

IT HAS been said that one of the incidental results of the war has been to destroy for ever that reputation for moral and social insight which was once enjoyed to a unique degree by Thomas Carlyle. Such a judgment seems to the present writer grotesquely exaggerated. It will be the purpose of this article to inquire just how far the old Scottish prophet upheld a gospel of force as present-day Germans have been shown to understand it.

Those who are acquainted only with isolated fragments from his works may be excused for getting the impression that he was spiritual brother to Clausewitz and Treitschke. They are confirmed in this when they learn that passages from *Frederick the Great* are prescribed as patriotic literature in German schools, and when they recall the famous letter to *The Times* written while the German army was encamped before Paris in 1870. Carlyle's justification of the raid upon Silesia has certainly something in common with the Chancellor's argument about a scrap of paper.<sup>1</sup> And his impatience with those who objected to Bismarck's annexation of Alsace-Lorraine makes us wonder how he would have regarded von Jagow's avowed purpose to rob France of her colonies. These words have an unpleasant ring in our ears to-day:

That noble, patient, pious, deep, and solid Germany should be welded into a nation, and become queen of the continent, instead of vapouring, vainglorious, gesticulating, quarrelsome, and over-sensitive France, seems to me the hopefulest public fact that has occurred in my time.<sup>2</sup>

Nor is the suspicion of Carlyle confined to those who remember against him that pro-Teutonic sentiment which he shared with very many in England and America during the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. esp. *Frederick*, Bk. XI, chap. 9, Bk. XII, chap. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to the *Times*, 1870.

Franco-Prussian war, but which most of us have now seen reason to revise. Beyond doubt his philosophy of history is pervaded by respect for strength. His Hero-Worship, his admiration for successful despots, his contempt for Parliamentary institutions, his ridicule of Bentham and the 'philosophic Radicals,' his advocacy of paternalism in government, his defence of West-Indian slavery,—all these are very suggestive. But Carlyle, like every other prophet, must be his own interpreter, and the admission that he resembled a Prussian war lord is being far too freely made. No doubt his so-called 'gospel of force' contained a great deal that is profoundly untrue, a great deal which experience both before and since—but especially since—amply entitles us to discard. He was again and again a special pleader for pieces of statecraft that were really inhuman. But he did not mean what Treitschke meant. The untruth which we feel sure that we can now detect, and the obsessions for which we must make allowance, are not of the order which comes from Berlin. In justice both to his memory, and to our own Anglo-Saxon race, we must distinguish things which so widely differed.

## I.

To begin with, what Carlyle constantly tells us is, not that *Might is Right*, but rather that *Right is Might*. He was suspected during his own lifetime of entertaining the heresy in question, and he has himself recorded an indignant denial. Lecky had spoken of a great and venerable author who worshipped Force. "I shall have to tell Lecky one day," was the retort, "that quite the converse, or reverse, is the great and venerable author's real opinion,—namely that *Right is the eternal symbol of Might*, . . . and that, in fact, he probably never met with a son of Adam more contemptuous of *Might*, except where it rests upon the above origin."<sup>3</sup> Many passages can be cited in corroboration of this apologia. For despite the gloomy view

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<sup>3</sup> From Carlyle's *Journal* quoted by Froude, *Carlyle's Life in London*, Vol. ii, p. 451.

which he took of his own age, especially when he wrote *Latter Day Pamphlets*, he remained an unflinching optimist in regard to the moral order. For him Providence does not take the side of the stronger battalions, but those battalions which, in dark times and against fearful odds, keep fighting for eternal justice, will find that Providence will in the end *make them the stronger*. It might take time. But whether it were one of these days, or only 'one of these centuries,' the issue was sure as life and sure as death. The great soul of the world was just.<sup>4</sup> "One strong thing I find here below; the just thing, the true thing. My friend, if thou hadst all the artillery of Woolwich trundling at thy back in support of an unjust thing; and infinite bonfires visibly waiting ahead of thee, to blaze centuries long for thy victory on behalf of it,—I would advise thee to call halt, to fling down thy baton, and say 'In God's name, No!' Thy 'success'? Poor devil, what will thy success amount to?"<sup>5</sup>

What, exactly, did he mean by this? It is clear that he applied it both to the fate of individuals and to that of nations. In what sense did he hold that the righteous man, or the righteous people, must conquer 'in the end'? Not, certainly, that defeat here will be compensated in a future life. The chapter on Reward in *Past and Present* makes this apparent. Carlyle did not hesitate to express his sympathy with belief in heaven and hell, particularly in the latter.<sup>6</sup> But he has many a denunciation of the "morality by profit and loss" which keeps too keen an eye upon punishment and reward. Nietzsche himself has not breathed deeper, or—as it seems to me—more foolish scorn for "eternal indemnification." Are we then to understand that, although defeated, one's consciousness of right will make the defeat more glorious than any victory? That, in short, properly estimated it *is* a victory, just as the service of God is perfect freedom? This thought of the hero de-

<sup>4</sup> *Past and Present*, Bk. I, chap. ii.

<sup>5</sup> *loc. cit.*

<sup>6</sup> Cf. esp. *Past and Present*, Bk. III, chap. ii.

fying lawless Might, and thus proving himself stronger than the tyrant who has failed to subdue his will, is a familiar one. It is common in Greek Tragedy, and in the Roman Stoics; moreover, it is the inspiration of a memorable paragraph in *Sartor*.<sup>7</sup> But, surely, unless we are content with a mere play upon words, what it comes to is this, not that the good is certain to prevail, but that, whether it is likely to prevail or not, the good should be chosen rather than the evil. It is plain, however, that Carlyle, though in some passages he intended this, in a multitude of other passages intended much more. It seems to me that in different places he had in mind three quite distinguishable contentions:

(a) He holds before us again and again two alternatives for the explanation of life. The first is, as he picturesquely puts it, that "the world is Beelzebub's";<sup>8</sup> if so, we need not expect that even after countless generations any moral progress will be shown. Rather the reverse; for Beelzebub will strew the path of integrity with ingenious and tantalising disappointments. Our author submits with intense conviction the second hypothesis, "that God made this world, and a Demon not."<sup>9</sup> It follows that although the ups and downs may be long drawn out, there will be increasing confusion of the evil, and increasing advancement of the good. Thus Right has in it the potentiality of Might, and Wrong contains the seeds of its own overthrow.

Whence does this assurance come? Intuitively? Or from revealed religion? The distinctive thing about Carlyle's way of coming by it was that he saw it written in letters of fire across the page of history. His was no struggling yet persistent faith, believing where it could not prove. The triumphant moral order was indeed, he well knew, often concealed; but it was concealed only from a darkened eye. As S. Paul said of the gospel, it was hid only from them that

<sup>7</sup> *S. R.*, Bk. II, chap. 9.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. esp. *Frederick*, Bk. I, chap. i, and Bk. III, chap. ii. Also *Essay on Boswell's Life of Johnson*.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Past and Present*, III, 14. oc.

were lost. The law of justice was the universe's open secret.<sup>10</sup> We needed only, like those who inspect a great painting, to observe from the proper standpoint, that the significance may disclose itself. To vary the figure, we have to thread our way through the past as through a jungle, and we know that we have hit the trail only when what was before a senseless journeying round and round becomes a luminous progress towards a clearer and clearer end.

This is what our pious ancestors would have called the doctrine of a moral governance. Almost every historical work from Carlyle's pen was an effort to verify it. For our present purpose it is irrelevant to ask whether his history was accurate as to fact or fair as to interpretation. For what we wish to make clear is the nature of that law of justice which he used the past to illustrate. To do this, we must, at least provisionally, assume that the cases to which he appeals were as he conceived them. As Coleridge has warned us, we cannot appreciate the value of a writer unless we concede to his point of view 'a certain portion of gratuitous and, as it were, experimentative faith.'<sup>11</sup> In particular the critic who belongs to the Church of Rome must not in this case be deterred by the fanatical Protestantism which so often obtrudes itself. And the critic who belongs to no Church must allow for the fact that this author was incapable of taking the secularist standpoint. Since the days of Herodotus there has perhaps been no historian so theologically minded as Carlyle. But his theology is not that of William II. It is that of the Puritan divines and the Puritan soldiers.

For instance, rightly or wrongly, he held that the Reformed Faith had constituted a touchstone by which the moral fibre of western Europe had been tried. What then were the wars of religion in the seventeenth century? The savagery of a Ferdinand, the zeal of a Gustavus, the ambition of a Wallenstein, the astuteness of an Oxenstierna? Was it the mere clash of individual wills? This might be

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<sup>10</sup> *Latter Day Pamphlets*, "Jesuitism."

<sup>11</sup> Preface to *Aids to Reflection*.

a sufficient explanation for Cause-and-Effect Philosophy. But for him it was to make moral chaos out of the past. The strife was not between men but between ideals. It was the travail pang of Protestantism. Truth when it came into the world had in general a stormy welcome. But the flaming Magdeburgs had been worth while, for through them God's Truth was vanquishing the Devil's Falsehood.<sup>12</sup> In the same way his *French Revolution* was an historic Theodicy. The death-bed of Louis XV showed not the physical sickness of a French king, but the moral sickness of the French kingship,<sup>13</sup> and each Act of the succeeding drama was the nemesis of a long injustice. The eighteenth century, he somewhere exclaims, would have overturned one's faith in God if there had *not* been a French Revolution at the end of it. And in *Cromwell* the central motive, which gives unity to the whole, is the idea of invincible Puritanism, sweeping before it the frauds and falsities of a perjured king. It was Oliver's task to prove again to the world that life is neither a lie nor a grimace.<sup>14</sup>

(b) But there is a second sense in which Carlyle identified Right with Might, a sense very different from the sanguine belief that God is in heaven and that all is right with the world. We find it especially in the political pamphleteering of his middle age and of his later life. It amounts to this, that wherever one sees a great social convulsion, a movement which stirs public energy and passion to the depths, one should look for the key to it in an impulse or a demand which is at bottom *just*.

An obvious example is in his lecture on Mohammed, where he warns his audience to cease thinking of a great religion as the outcome of fraud and chicanery, but to seek the principle of its strength in the good that underlay it. No edifice, he assures us, has stood for long, unless it was somehow built after the laws of Statics.<sup>15</sup> And "the first of all

<sup>12</sup> Cf. esp. the treatment of the Thirty Years' War in *Historical Sketches*.

<sup>13</sup> *F. R.*, Bk. I, chap. i.

<sup>14</sup> *Cromwell*, Introduction, chap. v.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *Heroes*, II.

gospels is this, that a lie cannot endure for ever."<sup>16</sup> But the best illustration for our purpose is in his pamphlet on the People's Charter. It seems strange indeed that so many critics should have stigmatised the author of *Chartism* as a political cynic. For a cynic is one who disbelieves in human nature, especially on its fervid or idealistic side. He is what George Eliot called "that antipole of all enthusiasms,—a man of the world."<sup>17</sup> Could the opposite of political cynicism be more clearly affirmed than in the doctrine that popular agitations derive their force, not from the deceit or insincerity which may be mixed with them, but from the element of truth and justice which invariably constitutes their root? To use a chemical figure, Carlyle held that it is always the honesty beneath such things which forms their active principle. And when, in the troubled year 1839, he issued his great manifesto about the Rights being identical with the Might of Man, he spoke the wisest word which England was then given a chance to hear and to disregard.

The Chartist Petition, bound with iron hoops, and rolled on a trolley up the floor of the House, asked for six concessions, nearly all of which have since been granted. Doubtless it would have been premature and unsafe to grant them at the time. But what would have been neither premature nor unsafe would have been to take into genuine consideration the distress of which the Charter was symptomatic. The Petition was refused a hearing, amid explosions of laughter from both sides of Parliament. Lord John Russell and Macaulay made elegant speeches in which they explained how a cultured Whig differs from a vulgar Socialist. Peel found it excellent sport to taunt the Ministry with having once "encouraged Manchester to march upon London," and then finding to their cost that sedition was two-edged. A few men, like Dickens, and Disraeli, and Charles Kingsley, saw that before long something else must be done with the Chartists besides either

<sup>16</sup> *F. R.*, Bk. II, chap. i.

<sup>17</sup> *Daniel Deronda*, chap. xl.



laughing at them, or using them for purposes of party re-  
crimination.<sup>18</sup> But it was Carlyle who embodied in his  
paradoxical phrase about Might and Right the deepest  
moral of the movement.

These poor Chartists, he said, are quite likely to be asking  
for something that is absurd, for something that would  
ruin them if they got it. They are no experts in the science  
of government. What they know is that they are starv-  
ing, and that they are *unjustly* starving. They know that  
by hundreds of thousands they are ready to work for a  
living wage, and no work is to be had. It is not for them to  
tell Lord John Russell what to do, any more than it is for  
the patient to diagnose and treat his own disease. The  
Charter is like an eruption of the skin that betokens a  
virus festering inwardly. The sense of injustice, diffused  
over great masses of men, is an explosive which, if not  
wisely dealt with, will burst as tragically in England as it  
did in France. Let something be done, lest something do  
itself in a manner which will please nobody. The Reform  
Government, forsooth, has "put down the chimera of  
Chartism"! True; it is the *chimera*, not the reality of  
Chartism which has been put down. To tell the destitute  
workman that commerce is prospering, and that according  
to Political Economy the steam engine must increase work,  
is like a farmer dismissing his horses at the end of the season  
with advice to go seek cartage, of which there is assuredly  
abundance in some continent of the globe. The horses will  
leap the fence, "eat foreign property,—and we know the  
rest."<sup>19</sup> If a Birmingham riot cannot cure social ills, at  
least it should reveal them, as a boil on one's neck "an-  
nounces that it continues there, that it would fain not con-  
tinue there."<sup>20</sup> Let the upper classes set themselves to  
discover what it is that the lower classes intrinsically mean.  
Let them make articulate those needs which are proclaim-

<sup>18</sup> Cf. esp. Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, I, 3; *Hard Times*, II, vi; Disraeli, *Sybil*, III  
v; Kingsley, *Alton Locke*, xxxii.

<sup>19</sup> *Chartism*, iv.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, i.

ing themselves inarticulately. Honourable members are either spokesmen for the dumb class, or they are nothing that one can well specify. "No man at bottom means injustice; it is always for some obscure, distorted image of a right that he contends."<sup>21</sup> And unless all history be a lie, just in so far as he *has* a right, it will one day invest itself with might.

No reader who knows Dickens's *Hard Times*, Disraeli's *Sybil*, or Kingsley's *Alton Locke*, can fail to appreciate how close to the root of the matter Carlyle had reached. No one who reflects how we have travelled in social legislation during the last thirty years can doubt that his voice was prophetic.

(c) There is yet a third sense in which the Carlylean epigram is to be understood. Our author believed intensely in Napoleon's maxim, "The tools to the man who can handle them." By this he meant that if there is any part of the world's work for which a particular person or a particular group of persons has more capacity than others, to that person and to that group the work justly belongs. And, conversely, what he intended to deny was that mankind should tolerate unskilful performance in any field,—performance by which the general interest is sacrificed—simply because of a supposed title on the part of someone to keep exclusive possession of it, whatever the quality of his execution may be.

This is the source of two great diatribes, for which, more than for anything else, he has incurred resentment,—his attack upon democracy, and his defence of slavery. It is but fair that even the most convinced democrat and the most ardent abolitionist should realise the precise character of Carlyle's position. For although they will judge that he omitted much that should have been said, they may find less than they suppose in what he did say with which they will disagree. That the multitude is indefeasibly entitled to govern itself, even though better objective results might be got out of submission to a wise autocrat, was a doctrine

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, i.

which he could never abide. He believed with Pope in the government that is best administered. He was as emphatic as any Jacobite on the divine authentication of kingship, provided men fit for kingship could be found.<sup>22</sup> Thus in his *French Revolution*, whilst he approved of what the revolutionary leaders did, because the concrete situation demanded it, he has nothing but scorn for those abstract principles about "Rights of Man" by which philosophedom was wont to justify the overthrow of the Bourbons. And, although he holds that the Stuart dynasty in England had to be deposed, this is not because he had the least sympathy with elective Protectorates. It is because the Stuarts had ceased to be real kings, and because he saw in Cromwell all the substance without the name of royalty. Again, in his *Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question* there is no reason to suspect the sincerity of his view that compulsory labour in the West Indies was best for the black man himself. We have there, indeed, what Mirabeau would have called a very thorough "swallowing of formulas." Abolitionists had spoken much about the abstract right to freedom, and of abstract rights Carlyle had as great a horror as Burke. He would have eagerly subscribed the doctrine of the *Reflections* that liberty means allowing people to do as they please, and that whether it is good or bad depends on what it will please them to do. He thought the negro in Demerara incorrigibly idle, unless compelled to labour; and as the highest blessedness of all men, black or white, was to work, whatever means could secure this was enjoined by the law of God. It was an actual frustrating of the purposes of the Most High that one man in a niggard soil should have to eat bread in the sweat of his brow, whilst another browsed in animal sloth where Nature had been most profusely bountiful.<sup>23</sup>

Another way of putting this is to say that Carlyle conceived the world as a place where the will of the Maker is to be done, that he looked on the sentimental and anarchic

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. *F. R.*, chap. i.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question*, passim.

tendencies of his time as an effort to claim for the individual a capricious right of doing his duty or of refusing to do it, and that he believed the sole question—in disregard of all individual interests and ‘rights’—to be that of making each person diligent and efficient in the work that is assigned to him. If democracy and abolition served this purpose they were good. But in his view they served the reverse.<sup>24</sup>

## II.

In the three senses which I have enumerated, and, I believe, in no other sense, can the phrase ‘gospel of force’ be applied to Carlyle’s social teaching. Let me now point out how different it is from the creed of *Weltmacht oder Untergang* with which German spokesmen, eager to make their own side respectable, have affected to identify it.

Clearly the ethic of militarism is as far removed as anything can be from a pious belief that in the struggles of mankind Right will eventually become Might. Such a statement implies that Right is one thing, Might another, whilst the Bernhardi message is that they are one and the same. What the apostles of the new morality have asked us to do is to rearrange both our words and our ideas so as to think and to call ‘good’ that which proves itself to be physically strong. It is plain that Carlyle’s radiant faith in the triumph of ultimate justice over temporary oppression is one which should comfort not the Germans, but the Belgians, the Poles, the Serbs. Its truth, if it be true, can have nothing but terrors for William II, for Count Tisza, for Enver Pasha. Indeed no doctrine of more complete moral satisfactoriness could have been announced, and any misgiving we may feel towards it must arise not because we dislike it, but because we lack evidence for its validity.

Equally foreign to the mind of a German publicist is any such view as that great movements have always a sound basis somehow underlying them. The nerve of Prussian

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. *Latter Day Pamphlets*; esp. articles entitled “The Present Time,” “Parliaments,” and “The New Downing St.”

administration, especially in subject countries, has been the confidence that mankind can be drilled into any mental attitude which a ruling caste may prescribe. To find out what the Poles and the Social Democrats 'intrinsically mean,' and to give effect in an enlightened way to what is reasonable in such demands, is no object of a Kaiser's Chancellor. The tradition of Bismarck is that by efficiency in education and in discipline it may be dictated to Poles and Social Democrats what they *shall* mean, and that sooner or later they will come to think reasonable that which is pronounced so at the headquarters of Reason in Berlin. If the sentiment of local patriotism is there placed on the moral Index Expurgatorius, it is expected that Imperial officers shall take steps to remove this from among the aspirations of Poland. The whole idea of the *Kulturkampf* implied that the minds and consciences of men are as plastic towards State control as their muscles are responsive to the exercises of the gymnasium. Faith in machinery seems to go beyond even this. For, after all, the trainer must work within the limits of anatomy and physiology. But the extent to which man's moral life is modifiable at will seems to be taken by many German writers as quite indefinite. Could any position be more precisely antithetical to that of Carlyle? "Is arithmetic, think you, a thing more fixed by the Eternal than the laws of justice are, and what the right is of man towards man?"

The only colourable resemblance between the Prussian and the Carlylean doctrine is to be found in their common antagonism to democracy. Yet here too the difference is far more significant. Our author believed in autocratic rule on grounds which we think mistaken—at least for western peoples,—but which we cannot think immoral. He disbelieved in self-government for reasons which in many a social situation of the past have been valid, and which, for aught we know, may become valid again. No intelligent advocate of democracy will take the position that it is a natural right of all mankind as such, or that it is desirable at every stage of human advancement, or that it is to be

justified otherwise than by its fruits. And no one who understands the dark mid-Victorian epoch in which *Laissez Faire* was the watchword of a heartless commercialism, can forget the man who wrote *Past and Present*. The time of the Charter was a time for someone to speak the truth about Whig 'liberty,' to bid the State be paternal enough to save its children from starvation, and, in defiance of political economists, to call *Laissez Faire* a doctrine of devils. The extent to which State control should be pressed, and to which the old maxims of unfettered individualism should be revised, was of course a matter of great nicety, and we are not concerned to deny that Carlyle went to a dangerous extreme. He had no vision of that collective control by the people which has proved not less effective and far less objectionable than a benevolent despotism. But we can still meet him upon a common platform of humanity. Our social purpose is the same as his. We differ as to the means by which it may be reached.

It is needless to point out at any length how remote all this is from militaristic Prussianism. The latter rests upon a postulate which would have filled Carlyle with horror, a postulate which has not been antiquated by changing circumstance but which never was valid, and never can be so, a postulate which would mean an end of all social justice, a postulate to which the only reply that will be understood must be given otherwise than in words. An autocracy which is organised for social good differs *toto cælo* from an autocracy that is organised for war. The Bismarckian programme makes much of the rule of the most competent. But why? As we have seen it interpreted, this is not because a democratic system means trusting the unwise multitude with powers which they will use to their own undoing. It is because such a system, by emphasising personal good must obstruct that racial predominance which can only be reached where the individual is made a cog in the State wheel. Nietzsche was in many respects a rebel against the bureaucratic régime, but he was its faithful representative when he poured scorn upon "the

happiness of the most,"<sup>25</sup> and when he declared that for the sake of evolving a higher caste millions of men must be turned into slaves and instruments.<sup>26</sup> What an Ernulphus curse would have been pronounced by him who wrote *Working Aristocracy* upon those to whom he is so freely quoted as a parallel!

We may attack Carlyle's Hero-Worship from many points of view, but this at least is not one of them. We may say with Mr. R. H. Hutton that he was for ever bidding us trust a wise autocrat, without giving us a hint of how to find him. We may point out that democracy has taken all the risks of which the Chelsea prophet spoke, and that his dire predictions of mob foolishness, of corruption, of demagogic deceit, have not been fulfilled to any extent which is comparable with the benefits it has brought us. We may urge that free institutions have wrought a spiritual development, that the masses have evolved a wisdom and a self-restraint for which he never gave them credit. We may mark with pride the extent to which the people are finding means to cure their own worst faults. As we do so, perhaps we shall conclude that Carlyle's fierce attack was not wholly without result as an awakener to the too sanguine Radicals of his day. We shall certainly conclude that his ideal of a benevolent despot is now less plausible than ever it was before. But let us not dishonour his memory by confusing him with those to whom his kinship was so superficial and so slight. There is all the contrast between kingship for public service and kingship for personal privilege. Carlyle's conception remains that of Milton:

For therein stands the office of a king,  
His honour, virtue, merit, and chief praise,  
That for the public all this weight he bears.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. *Twilight of the Idols*, p. 87.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *Beyond Good and Evil*, 258, 265.

<sup>27</sup> *Paradise Regained*, Bk. I.

## III.

The reader may perhaps object that this defence of our Scottish prophet has the defect of proving far too much. Whatever else he failed to do, he seldom failed to express himself with lucidity. If he was really so antithetical to Prussianism as we now know it, why, it may be asked, has he come under such general suspicion of being a sympathiser with it? The answer seems to be this. Carlyle had undertaken to prove from history an ethical doctrine about the triumph of good which history could not prove, but often seemed rather to refute. He strained the evidence to make it fit his thesis, and the inevitable result was to change the meaning of the thesis into something which the evidence he invoked was adequate to support. In trying to show from empirical facts that the way of the world is just, he gave the impression that by justice he meant no more than the way of the world.

Belief that the right always wins is an optimism of the most unbounded type, and its dangers were long ago pointed out by men whom Carlyle unduly despised, the French Encyclopædists of the eighteenth century. Our author reflected on this matter much more deeply than Voltaire, but he was too much given to dismissing an objection as shallow merely because it was obvious, and he might have learned from even the impious merriment of *Candide*. If the good always prevails, then that which prevails is necessarily good. When the University of Coimbra after the Lisbon earthquake decided to prevent such things in future by a more zealous execution of heretics, and when the Leibnizian Dr. Pangloss was strung to a gallows as the first step, *Candide* cries in amazement "If this is the best of all possible worlds, what are the others?"<sup>28</sup> Nor was he much relieved to remember that the victim himself had found a sufficing reason for the earthquake, and had shown both the fall of man and the consequent curse to belong of necessity to a perfect cosmic system. Even the

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<sup>28</sup> *Candide*, chap. vi.



view of Dr. Pangloss, however, is more defensible, or at least less capable of disproof, than some of the suggestions which have been hazarded by Carlyle. The good which it finds in apparent evil is, indeed, made exquisitely ridiculous in Voltaire's caricature. But the position that the disasters and even the immoralities of life are incidental to a scheme designed for human discipline, permitting human freedom, faintly appreciated when seen only in fragments, but furthering upon the whole the highest human values,—the position which is theologically expressed in the words “He maketh all things work together for good” and “even the wrath of man to praise Him,” is, after all, more satisfying than any other “philosophic” reply to the eternal riddle. Carlyle makes a far larger draft upon our capacity for optimism. He is able to verify the justice of the world order here and now. For him God ceases to move in a mysterious way; the working of His hands may be somewhat minutely traced, and is seen invariably to vindicate the righteous and confound the wicked.

Now, if you are sure that good always triumphs in this world, then failure, especially prolonged failure, is apt to suggest that a cause cannot have been so good as you had supposed. *Vice versa* an uninterrupted run of success is evidence that an enterprise is worthy. You may warn yourself as much as you choose against premature decision. You may think that the inference was too hasty against those on whom the Tower of Siloam fell, and against those whose blood Pilate mingled with the sacrifices. But if, with Carlyle, your morality is of the Old Testament rather than of the New, judgment for an evil thing, or approval of a good thing may be so very long deferred as to shake your confidence in your own moral insight. You tend to think it more likely that this was in error than that the foot of justice should be so slow and so limping. The sanction of conduct becomes thus, in spite of yourself, an ultimate reward in victory for the good, and if the exigencies of proof require you to look forward, not to one of these years, but

to one of these centuries, the appeal becomes somewhat visionary. Small wonder if such postponement makes the hearts of the sons of men wholly set in them to do evil. For your creed is in the end that of Bildad the Shuhite. "Nature" begins to dictate to conscience, rather than conscience to adjudicate upon Nature.

It is in this Puritan Theodicy, and not in anything like the Immoralism of German *Kriegsherren*, that we should find the root of Carlyle's extraordinary judgments upon the men and events of the past. It is sheer want of acquaintance with the text of his *Frederick* which makes many assume that he defended that royal brigand on the unblushing plea of the right of the stronger. On the contrary Carlyle enters into detailed and plausible proof that, for example, there was no substantial breach of faith towards Maria Theresa. His argument now appeals to few, and what I suggest is that it would not have appealed, as it certainly did, to himself, without the predisposing cause of an ethical theory which those events were to illustrate. And this case does not stand alone. We know that there are certain types of historical situation where, amid all the brilliance of the picture he gives us, we do well to suspect him as a guide. For he was writing with a thesis in his mind. We can never trust him when he deals with a triumphant despotism. Perhaps we should be on our guard when he is under the intoxication of *anything* that has triumphed. "Doth God pervert judgment? Or doth the Almighty pervert justice?" How easy it is to make these questions the basis for an immoral depicting of the past! The book of *Job* was always among Carlyle's favourites, and the line of thought of Job's friends was often not far from his own. A scheme has won its way; then let the light be cast upon its points of merit, or of colourable merit; exhibit little, and that little dexterously arranged, of the more sordid and selfish side. Thus the picture of a "Hero" is convincingly presented.

Sometimes the effect of this is merely grotesque, as when Frederick William is complimented for having swept off

the street all applegirls who were not industrious enough to knit at their stalls,<sup>29</sup> or when Francia's reign of terror in Paraguay is drawn as a sort of earthly Providence, or when the benevolent bullying of the monks by Abbott Samson is made to serve as a pattern of the best age of the Church. At other times we are roused to an indignant outcry, for example by the justification of the Cromwellian massacre at Drogheda and Wexford, or by the scorn for sentimentalists who object to the efficient lash of a West Indian planter, or by the refusal to see perfidy in Frederick the Great. Carlyle indeed is far from singular in all this, and as we condemn him we should include the others as well. Our English historians who have panegyriced Cæsar's Gallic wars, and Alexander's aggressive Kultur in the East, should hesitate to cast a stone. Moreover they have not the excuse of a Hebrew theology which they were pledged to support. But the fault remains a grave one, however it arose. We cannot help asking how our author would have comported himself if certain issues had turned out differently. Suppose Frederick's attack upon Silesia had been defeated, and suppose Strafford's policy of Thorough had been successful, would his moral rhetoric have adapted itself? Should we have heard how a Prussian bandit had been broken upon the Eternal Verities? And how the sword of an iron Chancellor had "gleamed like a star, . . . shearing asunder the big balloons and letting out the diplomatic hydrogen" of an Hon. Mr. Pym, and a Right Hon Mr. Hampden?<sup>30</sup>

Such, however, are the embarrassments and the temptations of those who undertake to philosophise history, in particular when they aim to show not only that the finger of Providence is in it, but just where and just how that finger has moved. Despite its difficulties the attempt is one which none of us can, or perhaps should, wholly forbear. When men around us to-day are exclaiming in the churches that the Allied Powers must win "because their

<sup>29</sup> *Frederick*, Bk. IV, chap. 4.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, Bk. XIII, chap. 2.

cause is just," are they not still at Carlyle's standpoint, and exposed to his perils? The prosperity here and now of a cause that is just was the doctrine which he devoted himself to driving home. He did it with quite unexampled force. Again and again he made clear that the course of things is far more equitable than we tend to admit. Again and again he made us feel that the sense of right is an immense reinforcement to effort, and that it is not mere poetry to speak of him as thrice armed who hath his quarrel just. He was among the first to point out the real dynamic that gave strength to Cromwell, and to reveal the inner heart of morality in the French Revolution. But he was resolved to admit no contradictory cases, even though he had to venture the monstrous paradox that there is no injustice anywhere if we look far enough ahead. Alas! the exceptions are numerous, and such moralising of the cosmic process, however heroically it may be carried out, becomes its own refutation.

And even as we have no ground in experience, so we have no assurance in the Christian revelation, that any such unimpeachable fairness belongs to the development of world history. Those who have been telling us that faith in God could not survive a German victory if such should occur, must be singularly unaware of the roots of faith, and singularly insensible of the human tragedies by which in every mean street it is constantly being tried. The righteousness of good men is not *here and now* brought forth as the light and their judgment as the noonday. That the right is often overborne, and must wait for its vindication elsewhere, is both the lesson of our moral consciousness and the teaching of the New Testament. Perhaps Mr. R. H. Hutton was not far wrong when he said that Carlyle never rose beyond the Hebrew point of view. And Miss Julia Wedgwood, in her incomparable study of his work, has put the same criticism in a form which bears somewhat closely on the problem of this paper. She finds that Carlyle never escaped from the idea of the moral order as a thing ordained by the arbitrary will of a Divine Being, and as

thus in the end a mere external law imposed by Power. If we call him an immoralist for this worship of force, we misuse words; for we might equally well say so of the men in the Westminster Assembly. But though the Calvinists will never see it, their way of expressing themselves lends colour to the comparison with the creed of Prussia, and the Prussian takes to Calvinistic phrases as germane to his own thought. That was a characteristic retort which Carlyle made to the lady who told him that she "accepted the universe"; "Gad, madam, you had better." Of what Kant meant by calling morality autonomous, he had probably little idea. To be ever in the great *Taskmaster's* eye was the formula by which he was moved, and he had the defects not less than the sublimities of that way of envisaging duty. Hence he was absolutely at home in the exposition of Islam; he could never have entered into the soul of Sakya Mouni. But if he thus lived on Sinai rather than at Nazareth, he at least lived there in singleness and honesty of heart, and his memory is not to be defiled by analogies with men whose spirit is equally apart from either though in language they parody both.

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