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## President's Letter

Another successful year, but one which saw a number of deaths - in the USA, David DeLaura, an outstanding Victorian scholar who has written splendidly on Carlyle, and in the UK David Daiches and, immediately affecting us in the Carlyle Society, Ken Fielding. David Daiches was a unique scholar with a range unmatched in his generation and our publications include insightful essays by him. His lecturing will long be remembered: lucid, apparently without notes, full of enthusiasm and quotation and informed by a lifetime's reading. But our society is the poorer for losing one of its Chairs, Professor K.J. Fielding who since his arrival in Edinburgh almost forty years ago, was a leading light in his department, in Victorian Studies nationally and internationally and in Carlyle studies in particular: for many years he led the *Carlyle Letters* project and for many years was a constant attender - and frequent speaker - at the Carlyle Society. It is right that a tribute to him should start this year's Occasional Papers. It gives me great pleasure to announce that Aileen Christianson has agreed to be Chair of the Carlyle Society, jointly with Lady Elizabeth Hamilton. She needs no introduction and as these words are written, is sitting with the latest volume of the *Letters* working towards their deadline, as she does every summer.

Our thanks, as ever, to the University for their hospitality; to the various members of the society who help us by their quiet assistance in many ways; to the printing department who produce our papers immaculately year after year. We welcomed the Gaskell Society in 2004, and may well welcome them again to our meetings. New members continue to arrive, and their arrival is the surest sign yet of the Carlyle Society's continuing health.



The death of Kenneth Fielding has robbed Edinburgh University's English Literature department of one of its distinguished emeritus professors, and the wider world of Victorian studies of one of its most important senior figures. For forty years Ken Fielding (or "KJF" as he was almost universally known) has dominated the field in several areas, in Dickens studies (where he was a figure of international authority) and in the ever-growing field of Carlyle studies, where he only recently retired as senior editor of the *Carlyle Letters* project, now about to publish its 33rd volume. But more than that, his presence was very much obvious in the University from the senior committees down to the everyday business of running a large and busy department, an onerous job he accepted for many years of his career, and which he tackled with characteristic grit and energy.

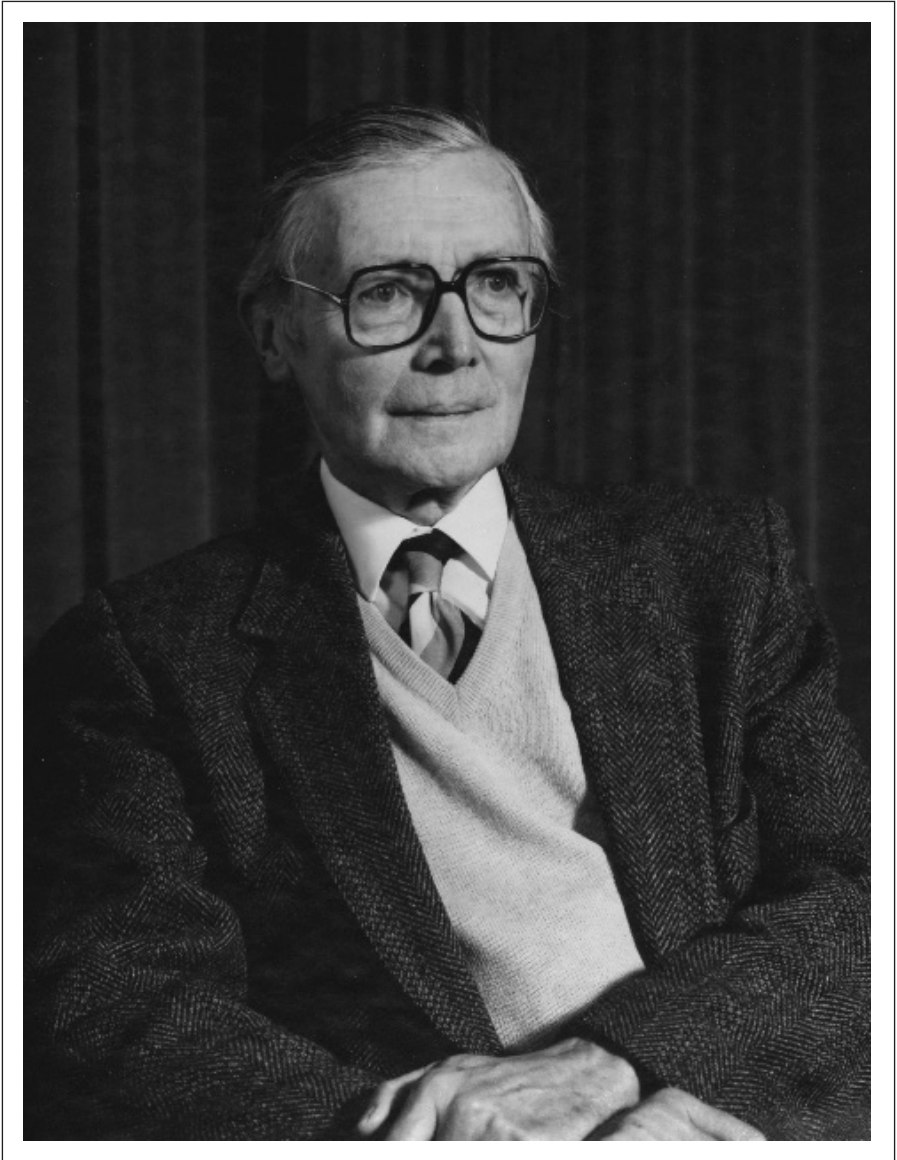
Kenneth Joshua Fielding was born in Yarmouth in 1924, and after school and University (and national service) began his engagement with higher education in Liverpool at a training college where he was senior administrator, while pursuing

with astonishing energy a publishing career in Dickens studies which resulted in several books and literally scores of academic papers. When he came to Edinburgh to the newly-created Saintsbury chair of English in 1965 he was a scholar of international reputation, even if this was his first teaching job in English literature. At Oxford he had begun a lifelong engagement with scholarly editing, and he never lost his interest in two major and international projects: the recovery, editing and publishing of the letters of Charles Dickens (in the Pilgrim edition) and Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle (in the Duke-Edinburgh edition). The latter he led more or less from his arrival in Edinburgh, taking over from John Butt: his energy and his leadership saw the project grow and survive hard times to become one of the major events of nineteenth-century literary publishing, for which he was honoured in the USA (by the Modern Language Association) and in this country (by the Saltire Society).

Scholarly editing can be likened to pushing a very large rock up a very long hill, especially when there are thousands of manuscripts to be dealt with. KJF specialised in finding originals, often in the most unlikely places; in filling in gaps in knowledge; in tracing family papers and official archives; in making links (for instance, with Harriet Martineau and Elizabeth Gaskell scholars); above all in trying to pin down facts with accuracy and get ahead to the next manuscript. The number of volumes of Dickens and Carlyle which he contributed to and which his restless energy brought to fruition is a testament to the relentless way he drove himself - and often others - to meet targets and deadlines, always with other deadlines in view ahead. He could be an impatient - sometimes very difficult - colleague but also an astonishingly thoughtful and generous one. He found time to read a bewildering number of other people's work and edit it, very helpfully, before publication: many people began their academic career with the confidence of a successful doctoral thesis he had supervised meticulously to its completion. He was a concerned and scrupulous teacher of undergraduates and above all of postgraduates: he enjoyed working with senior students and colleagues in conference and in seminar, and he introduced many to what was happening in Victorian studies in the USA before travel became as commonplace as it is today. He attracted many distinguished visitors to Edinburgh where they enriched departmental life.

He faced misfortune with courage; the protracted illness and death of his wife Jean; the loss of their only child Janet; many years of ill-health in his own case. After retirement he rediscovered some of the pleasures of social life, music, theatre, cinema, foreign travel, though ill health confined him increasingly to the house and latterly to the Western General Hospital where, after a difficult last illness, he died peacefully surrounded by affection and care. Many projects he began will outlive him, and he would have asked for no better memorial.

Ian Campbell



**“Glory Whatever Happens”:  
Carlyle, Napoleon, and the Napoleonic Legend**

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Of the instinct for hero-worship, Carlyle writes that “it is very cheering to consider that no sceptical logic, or general triviality, insincerity and aridity of any Time and its influences can destroy this noble inborn loyalty and worship that is in man” (*Heroes* 14). Though he regarded Napoleon as a deeply flawed hero, Carlyle would not have been surprised by the interest that France has shown in the 200th anniversary of his coronation as Emperor in Notre Dame Cathedral on 2 December 1804. Figures kept by the Louvre indicate that David’s painting of Napoleon’s coronation continues to be the second most popular work of art in the entire collection, close behind *La Gioconda*. While “le bicentenaire du sacre” has generated widespread critical analysis of Napoleon’s legacy--the French *Historia Thematique* devoted its entire November-December issue to a “contre enquête explosive” entitled, “Napoléon: Empereur ou Dictateur?”--it has also demonstrated the enduring strength of what Carlyle would have called the Napoleonic “Mythus.”

In an interview in 2003 with the *New York Times*, the then French foreign minister Dominique de Villepin, also the author of a best-selling study entitled *Les Cent-Jours, ou l'Esprit de Sacrifice* (2001), succinctly described the appeal of Napoleon’s credo: “Victory or death, but glory whatever happens.” In peculiarly Carlylean language, Villepin observed that “not a day ... goes by without me feeling the imperious need to remember so as not to yield in the face of indifference, laughter or gibes” in order to “advance in the name of a French ambition” (8 Mar. 03). The response suggests that even in an age dominated by post-modern skepticism, hero-worship remains a vital force. As Carlyle remarked in *Heroes*, unbelievers might mock the tendency, but “in no time whatever can they entirely eradicate out of living men’s hearts a certain altogether peculiar reverence for Great Men; genuine admiration, loyalty, adoration, however dim and perverted it may be” (13). What might have shocked him about Villepin is the reverence of Napoleon because of his ambition, the very quality that disqualifies him as a true hero in Carlyle’s estimate.

Carlyle was characteristically contradictory, independent, and prescient in his assessment of Bonaparte, though his views are seldom mentioned either by historians or biographers. From an early stage in his career he rejected the myth of Napoleon that had been cultivated by the exiled leader on St Helena, and propagated by a wide range of writers, including Byron, Walter Scott, and Hazlitt in England, and Vigny, Balzac, Stendhal, Chateaubriand, and Hugo in France. The Dutch historian

Pieter Geyl excluded Carlyle from his remarkable analysis of the Napoleonic legacy, *Napoleon For and Against* (1949), despite the fact that Geyl's own summary of Bonaparte's career echoed the author of *Heroes and Hero-Worship*: "He was a conqueror ... who could not help turning an ally into a vassal or at least interpreting the relationship to his own exclusive advantage decorated his lust of conquest with the fine-sounding phrases of progress and civilization; and who at last, in the name of the whole of Europe, which was to look to him for order and peace, presumed to brand England as the universal disturber and enemy" (9).

Geyl's oversight was probably deliberate. He admired Carlyle as an historian, but he later accused him in *The Use and Abuse of History* (1955) of espousing "Romantic notions [that] lured him into a more naked idolatry of power than Ranke" (39-40). Yet nowhere does Geyl acknowledge Carlyle's antipathy to the Napoleonic cult, which dominated French history for half a century, and played an important part in the Emperor's entombment at Les Invalides in 1840, and in the later accession of Louis Napoleon. For one who supposedly idolized power, Carlyle's criticism of Napoleon in *Heroes* and elsewhere seems oddly perverse. It is tempting to dismiss his judgment as symptomatic of his contempt for the French nation and its "Gallic effervescence." Carlyle savored such complaints, and in *Heroes* he playfully indulges those who seek evidence of his anti-French prejudice. He marvels that the French could venerate Voltaire, but concedes he is "the realized ideal of every one of them; the thing they are all wanting to be ... *He* is properly their god,--such god as they are fit for" (*Heroes* 14). Typically, he drops such remarks to disguise the extent of his own intellectual and emotional engagement. In the same way that Carlyle keeps returning to the subject of Voltaire in his writings, so too does he persist in reading and thinking about Napoleon.

Particularly in the period following the publication of *The French Revolution* (1837), Napoleon performs the role of the hero as tyrant in Carlyle's writings. On the one hand, he represents an historical phenomenon that must be fathomed and defined; on the other, his status as a hero must be circumscribed, if hero-worship itself is to have any value or meaning in a world in which the notion of a natural order is being challenged by the principles of liberty and equality. Bonaparte's example is crucial to Carlyle as a reminder of the limitations, as well as the possibilities, of hero-worship. Keenly alert to the charge that he is an advocate of "might equals right," Carlyle seeks in the final lecture of *Heroes*, "The Hero as King," to distinguish between a ruler who governs in deference to the eternal laws of nature and God--Cromwell--and one who invests himself with the power and authority to transcend these laws--Napoleon. In essence the difference between true and false heroes lies in their capacity for belief, veracity, and conscience. Carlyle, the alleged worshipper of physical force, advances a view of heroism that he equates with spiritual rather than physical force. It is a distinction that perplexes and intrigues him, and will dominate

his edition of Cromwell's *Letters and Speeches* (1845), and later, his *History of Frederick the Great* (1858-65).

The comparison Carlyle draws between Cromwell and Napoleon in *Heroes* is partly shaped by his desire to redress the balance of their respective reputations. He was familiar with Scott's and Hazlitt's respective biographies of Napoleon. While Scott endorses the romantic view of Napoleon as a tormented genius, he attacks him for his Cromwellian contempt for political liberty: "[I]t must always be written down, as Buonaparte's error as well as his guilt, that misusing the power which the 18th Brumaire threw into his hands, he totally destroyed the liberty of France, or, as we would say, more properly, the chance which that country had of attaining a free, and at the same time, a settled government. He might have been a patriot prince, he chose to be an usurping despot--he might have played the part of Washington, he preferred that of Cromwell" (4:223). Carlyle recalls the distinction in *Heroes*, where he assails those who identify Cromwell with "[s]elfish ambition, dishonesty, duplicity; a fierce, coarse, hypocritical Tartufe ... [a]nd then come contrasts with Washington" (*Heroes* 179).

Hazlitt refers briefly to Cromwell in his *Life of Napoleon Buonaparte* (1828-30), which Carlyle used in *The French Revolution*. Referring to the fact that they both were involved in equestrian accidents, Hazlitt remarks, "If this is any thing more than a mere casual coincidence, it might seem as if usurpers, or those who have seized the reins of government into their own hands, have an ambition to be charioteers, where there is a sense of power, and of difficulty and dexterity in directing it" (2:363). Yet elsewhere, Hazlitt exonerates Napoleon in terms that Carlyle may have found useful. In Hazlitt's view, Bonaparte is trapped between the need to assert his authority and his desire to realize the ideals of the French Revolution: "[He] was not strictly a free agent. He could hardly do otherwise than he did, ambition apart, and merely to preserve himself and the country he ruled. France was in a state of siege ... [and] ... required a military dictator to repress internal treachery and headstrong factions, and repel external force. Who then shall blame Buonaparte? ... The English, who having set the example of liberty to the world, did all they could do to stifle it? Or the Continental Sovereigns, who were only acquainted with its principles by their fear and hatred of them? Or the Emigrants, traitors to the name of men as well as Frenchmen? Or the Jacobins, who made the tree of liberty spout nothing but blood?" (3:3-4). Ironically, this is precisely the defense that Carlyle later employs when he attempts to redeem Cromwell and Frederick the Great, and to contrast them favorably with the unscrupulous Bonaparte.

Cromwell's name was frequently invoked by early French historians of the Revolution, and was invariably connected with images of dictatorship and tyranny. F.A.M. Mignet, whose *Histoire de la Révolution Française* (1824) Carlyle reviewed



in 1837, argued that the tragedy of Napoleon was that he too closely resembled the Protector. Mignet observes that “Napoleon has presented in France what Cromwell presented for a moment in England; the government of the army, which always establishes itself when a revolution is contended against; it then gradually changes, and from being civil ... becomes military” (453). But Napoleon exercised a more constructive influence than Cromwell, partly due to circumstance: “[Napoleon] disposing of immense force and of uncontested power, gave himself up in security to the vast designs and the part of a conqueror” while Cromwell, “deprived of the assent which popular exhaustion accords, incessantly attacked by factions, was reduced to neutralise them.” In Mignet’s view, Napoleon “had the frankness and decision of power; [Cromwell] the craft and hypocrisy of opposed ambition.” In the end, both suffer “the fate of all powers which, arising from liberty, do not continue to abide with her” (453-54).

In the case of Mignet, Carlyle accepted his analysis but rejected his conclusions. Cromwell emerged as a hero in his eyes because he devoted himself to the Sisyphean task of restoring order and appeasing factionalism in England, Scotland, and Ireland. Echoing Hazlitt, Carlyle argues that Cromwell had no other choice. He was destined to be exhausted by this endeavor, yet he pursued it nonetheless, tremulously confident that he was the vehicle of God’s holy purposes. Blair Worden has persuasively demonstrated that Carlyle’s primary motive in affirming Cromwell’s spiritual integrity was to counter the Whig civil libertarian interpretation of his actions: “The biblical fervour of the Puritans, their taste for Old Testament parallels ... their preoccupation with Antichrist, features of the movement which Whig and republican historians had always suppressed or disowned, delighted Carlyle.” Worden rightly notes that at this stage in Carlyle’s career—between 1839 and 1845 when he studies Cromwell—his “theory of hero-worship, which always had its authoritarian streak, was taken over by it” (140-41). Yet simultaneously, this is also the period in which Carlyle turns decisively against Napoleon, to whom he had referred in 1830 as “our chief contemporary wonder, and in some sort the epitome of his age” (*CL* 5:197; to Macvey Napier, 16 Dec.). And why does he reject Napoleon? In simple terms, because he is an authoritarian without the mitigating virtue of a transcendent belief, other than the “Quack” faith of personal ambition.

For Carlyle, a religious sense is the essential characteristic of any true hero, who must recognize that his own strength is a faint impression of God’s majesty and who shapes his ambition around this irrevocable “Fact.” Napoleon’s career illustrates the violation of the fragile boundaries that separate man from God. In claiming the territory of divinity, Bonaparte allows his authority to degenerate into a “falsehood” (*Heroes* 207). Carlyle connects Napoleon’s lack of belief to his tyranny. He is a lesser figure than Cromwell because he never acknowledges the limits of his power: “No silent walking, through long years, with the Awful, Unnameable of this Universe;

‘walking with God’ ... and faith and strength in that alone ... Napoleon lived in an age when God was no longer believed ... he had to begin not out of the Puritan Bible, but out of poor Sceptical *Encyclopédies*” (204). Napoleon conceives of human beings “mechanically” rather than religiously. They are the agents of his will and he values them as an extension of his personality. Carlyle’s spiritual perspective allows him to view Napoleon’s character from a vantage point unencumbered by what Pieter Geyl has called “the Napoleonic legend.” According to this script, Napoleon is to be regarded as “the representative of the Revolution, the Revolution as it was understood by the bourgeoisie, and as the creator of unparalleled *gloire*” (Geyl 53). Blair Worden has shown how Carlyle freed himself from the Whig interpretation of Cromwell’s life and captured an essential aspect of the Protector’s character--his fervent spiritual “sincerity”--that previous historians had either denied or misunderstood. Similarly, Carlyle rejects the legend that Napoleon was the incarnation of the French nation and its revolutionary destiny and represents him in a more complex light.

One of the chief advocates of the Napoleonic legend was Louis Adolphe Thiers (1797-1877), who had administered the return of Napoleon’s remains to France, and who had apotheosized him in two massive histories, *Histoire de la Révolution Française* (1823-27) and *Histoire du Consulat et de l’Empire* (1848-62). Carlyle had used Thiers’ first history in *The French Revolution*, and in a review in 1837 dismissed it as “waste, inorganic” (*Works* 29:3). In this earlier work Thiers links Napoleon to the world-historical movement of democracy: “[H]e came to perform a mysterious task, imposed, without his being aware of it, by Fate, of which he was the involuntary agent. It was not liberty that he came to continue, for that could not yet exist. He came to continue, under monarchical forms, the revolution in the world; he came to continue it, by seating himself, a plebian, on a throne; by bringing the pontiff to Paris to anoint a plebian brow with the sacred oil; by creating an aristocracy with plebians” (5:436). Carlyle agrees that Napoleon was the harbinger of the Revolution and the democratic ideal. He insists that in “the first period” Corsican’s lieutenant’s “faith” was genuine, and that he was a “true Democrat.” Napoleon was an enthusiast of “Democracy asserting itself in the French Revolution,” and his interpretation of this momentous movement “includes whatever the French Revolution, or any Revolution, could mean.” He believed wholly in the principle of “*La carrière ouverte aux talens*, The implements to him who could handle them.”

In practice, this meant not “anarchy,” but a hierarchy of authority based on natural aptitude. Napoleon’s greatest challenge was to “[t]o bridle-in that great devouring, self-devouring French Revolution; to tame it, so that its intrinsic purpose can be made good, that it may become organic, and be able to live among other organisms and *formed* things, not as a wasting destruction alone.” This was “the true purport” of Napoleon’s life, and at least until the period of his coronation as Emperor, he succeeded in realizing his goal. Carlyle’s language here suggests his resistance to

political interpretations or specific policies. Napoleon understood, with brilliant clarity, that the Revolution represented a popular repudiation of aristocratic “Shams” and hypocrisies, and of a society organized by the wealthy and the idle to protect and expand their privileges. He also realized that democracy was a “formula” rather than an “organic” reality to the French people. If it were not to serve as a prescription for chaos and terror, it had to be built on the solid foundation of “a strong Authority.”

In Carlyle’s view, it is precisely at the moment in which Napoleon establishes himself as a true “King”—a monarchy based on the strength of his talents and character, rather than on his name, his title, and his blood-line—that he betrays the legacy of the French Revolution. The Napoleonic legend is a fallacy because Napoleon deliberately forsakes his historical role as the incarnation of the French national will. He ignores the spiritual underpinnings of the Revolution—it was a cry for order, as well as rejection of lies and hypocrisies. French “hunger” was more than physical. The Revolution manifested itself in destruction and violence, yet its true “intrinsic purpose” was constructive. Read symbolically, it is a plea for God’s justice on earth. Carlyle disputes Hazlitt’s and Thiers’ argument that Napoleon was somehow an “involuntary agent” who “hardly could do otherwise than he did.” On the contrary, Napoleon’s rulership became a highly self-conscious piece of theatricality, intended to celebrate his increasingly swollen self-image. Corrupted by absolute power, Napoleon could only see it as an instrument to exploit those weaker than himself. Whereas he once held the “Democratic” notion that all men could be heroes, he now saw them only as instruments of his will. As Carlyle observes, “he believed too much in the *Dupeability* of men; saw no fact deeper in man than Hunger than this!”

Napoleon’s subsequent career exhibits the effects of his “apostasy” from “Facts” to “Semblances”: he “strove to connect himself with Austrian Dynasties, Popedoms, with the old False Feudalities which he once saw clearly to be false;—considered that he would found ‘his Dynasty’ and so forth; that the enormous French Revolution meant only that!” Everything had become a matter of consolidating power, rather than using it to realize his once cherished “Democratic” ideals. His attitude to religion reveals the extent of his cynicism. This man, who once had the ability to “an eye to see ... a soul to do and dare” is now mesmerized by the pageantry of his own ambition. His “transcendent” objective becomes the extension of his own cult of power. Carlyle treats the coronation ceremony as Napoleon’s attempt to reclothe the religion in the garments of his own glory: “What a paltry patchwork of theatrical paper-mantles, tinsel and mummery, had this man wrapt his own great reality in, thinking to make it more real thereby!” (*Heroes* 206)

Contrary to what Hazlitt and Thiers maintain, Napoleon despises the French Revolution and its ideals. Carlyle pointedly contrasts Cromwell’s inauguration--“by the Sword and Bible”—with Napoleon’s gaudy ceremony, “wanting nothing to

complete the pomp of it,' as Augereau said, 'nothing but the half-million of men who had died to put an end to all that!'" Having deluded himself about the cause of his authority, Bonaparte forges a career by trying to delude others: "Self and false ambition had now become his god: self-deception once yielded to, all other deceptions follow naturally more and more" (*Heroes* 206). He fatally confuses might with right, and acts the role of the brutal tyrant rather than the enlightened hero. Carlyle singles out his execution of the Johann Philip Palm (1768-1806), a German publisher who had refused to name of the author of an anti-French pamphlet, as being the nadir of his reputation: "It was a palpable tyrannous murderous injustice, which no man, let him paint an inch thick, could make out to be other. It burnt deep into the hearts of men, it and the like of it; suppressed fire flashed in the eyes of men, as they thought of it,--waiting their day!" Writing in the apocalyptic language of the *French Revolution*, Carlyle identifies with those who will seek revenge.

He refuses to endorse the legend that Napoleon himself propagates at St. Helena. Instead, Carlyle declares that Bonaparte be judged according to "what he did *justly*; what Nature with her laws will sanction. To what of reality was in him; to that and nothing more." The "organic" link that the Emperor tries to develop between his own fate and that of France is entirely spurious: "France is great, and all-great; and at bottom, he is France. ... He cannot understand it: inconceivable that the reality has not corresponded to his program of it; that France was not all-great, that he was not France." Twenty-two years before Pierre Lanfrey (1828-77) attacked the Napoleonic legend in *Historie de Napoleon I* (1867-75)--a work that Carlyle read in 1873--the author of *Heroes* anticipated many of the French scholar's conclusions. Yet unlike Lanfrey, Carlyle can acknowledge the greatness of Napoleon, the magnitude of his achievements, and the psychological appeal of his "Mythus." That the comparison he draws between Napoleon and Cromwell is uneven and at times brutally paradoxical does not negate its subtlety or originality.

The vigor of Carlyle's portrait of Napoleon is partly dependent on his own confused notion of what separates unjust tyranny from just authority. If *Heroes* marks Carlyle's turn towards authoritarianism, then it is a tentative and often uncertain turn. From the *French Revolution* onwards, Carlyle had struggled to define the proper boundaries of political freedom and obedience, while scrupulously avoiding political explanations. Politics meant "mechanical" distinctions between tyranny and democracy that seemed unreal to him in the context of nineteenth-century government. English opposition to Napoleon was severely compromised by the notion that Liverpool, Castlereagh, and Wellington had somehow played the role of the "liberators" of Europe. Carlyle knew of no democracy that in any significant way had lived according to its basic ideals, other than Louis Napoleon's France, which he had visited in 1851. Consequently, he tended to see "liberty and equality" as symptoms of despair at the lack of genuine heroes, rather than as legitimate political ends. Wherever he looked, he saw that

“[s]ociety ... is some representation, not insupportably inaccurate, of a graduated Worship of Heroes;--reverence and obedience done to men really great and wise.”

By linking “reverence” to “obedience,” Carlyle constricts rational choice and dissent, weakens the distinction between the private and public sphere of judgment, and leaves little room for the vital check of doubt. In short, his conception of the hero erodes the role of politics in civil society, and leaves the “obedient” dangerously vulnerable to the will of the “great and wise.” The baneful effects of this one-sidedness are evident in Carlyle’s defense of Cromwell’s actions at Drogheda, which accompanies his condemnation of Catholic massacres. But elsewhere, Carlyle’s authoritarianism is undercut by his profound conception of what religion involves. In *Heroes* he remarks that “the thing a man does practically believe (and this is often enough without asserting it even to himself, much less to others) ... concerning his vital relations to this mysterious Universe, and his duty and destiny there, that is in all cases the primary thing for him.” A religious sense is vital because it constrains the hero’s will to power. Referring to Cromwell, Carlyle argues that “We exaggerate the ambition of Great Men; we mistake what the nature of it is.” For Cromwell, “God’s Word ... was great, and all else was little to him. To call such a man ‘ambitious’ ... [is] the poorest solecism.” In Napoleon’s life no such force operated to remind him of his fallibilities, other than his native commonsense, the impact of which his worldly ambition gradually eclipsed.

Carlyle did not recognize the fragility of the comparison he had drawn between these two modern “Kings” until he came to write the biography of a third claimant, Frederick the Great. The Prussian leader often seems to make a mockery of his conviction that the religious sense mattered to the hero. In private Carlyle complained frequently about Frederick’s lack of spirituality. To his assistant Joseph Neuberger he wrote, 16 February 1852, “I continue reading about *Frederic*; ordering Maps, running after books &c. to see what I am to order. The thing seems to myself very idle: what have I, here where I am, to say about the ‘lean drill-serjeant of the World’? I do not even grow to love him better: a really mediocre intellect, a hard withered soul; great only in his invincible courage, in his constant unconscious loyalty to truth and fact: the last and only *King* I know of in Europe since Cromwell” (*CL* 27:46). Carlyle omits Napoleon’s name here, and again in the “Proem” of the first volume of *Frederick*: “This ... is one of the peculiarities of Friedrich, that he is hitherto the last of the Kings” (12:6). Yet Napoleon remains crucial to Carlyle’s “Historical Conception of this Man and King.” Just as he had used Napoleon in *Heroes* and the *Letters and Speeches* to rescue Cromwell’s reputation, so too does Carlyle invoke the French Emperor’s example to vindicate Frederick as a just ruler rather than a tyrannical “lean drill-sergeant.”

In the “Proem” Carlyle openly acknowledges that “Friedrich is by no means one of the perfect demigods; and there are various things to be said against him with good ground. To the last, a questionable hero; with much in him which one could have wished not there, and much wanting which one could have wished” (12:14). Carlyle was familiar with his rival Macaulay’s stinging summary of Frederick’s amorality-- “[A] politician destitute alike of morality and decency, insatiably rapacious, and shamelessly false” (“Frederic the Great” [1842]:9:577)--and he had no desire to overstate his subject’s merits. He was too honest an historian to pretend that Frederick shared any of Cromwell’s enthusiasm for “the Law of Christ’s Gospel” (CE 226), but his sources had convinced him that the King of Prussia possessed a deep inner “veracity” of a religious quality. Frederick was an honest ruler in a dishonest century, and like Cromwell, he grew in inner strength as he faced greater adversity: “How this man, officially a King withal, comported himself in the Eighteenth Century, and managed *not* to be a Liar and Charlatan as his Century was, deserves to be seen a little by men and kings, and may silently have didactic meanings in it” (12:15). Carlyle realized that in order to extract these “meanings,” he would have to distance the Prussian king from the French “Charlatan.”

In *Frederick the Great* Carlyle continues his attack against the Napoleonic legend. He is determined to show that the Prussian ruler stays true to his nature and character throughout his life, and that he never sacrifices his principles and loyalties for the sake of “*Self* and false ambition.” Frederick is everything that Napoleon is not. Writing to a young correspondent in search of heroes in 1856, Carlyle dismisses Bonaparte as a “Play actor--turned-Pirate in his character and history--an immense Gambler à la Dick Turpin, who after all his huge reckless bettings and enormous temporary successes (more astounding to the foolish than to the wise) ended by losing his last guinea, and by being flung out of the room head foremost” (CL 32:34-5; 28 Nov.). Yet the reputation of this “Gambler” has soared since the French Revolution, while Frederick’s name has been forgotten. In the “Proem” Carlyle remarks, “On the breaking-out of that formidable Explosion, and Suicide of his Century, Friedrich sank into comparative obscurity; eclipsed amid the ruins of that universal earthquake.” Historians have allowed their critical judgment to be undermined by the Napoleonic legend: “[I]t seemed as if there had been no generals or sovereigns before: as if Friedrich, Gustavus, Cromwell, William Conqueror and Alexander the Great were not worth speaking of henceforth” (*Works* 12:7). In his biography Carlyle strives to overturn the assumption that Napoleon’s heroic example had rendered Frederick’s obsolete.

Implicitly, Carlyle reveals the way in which tyrants and their acolytes falsify the past in order to justify their brutal policies. In the period that he writes *Frederick*, the Napoleonic legend continues to be exploited by the “Copper Captain,” Louis Napoleon, who benefits from the comparison between himself and his illustrious

Uncle. Carlyle may have been familiar with Thiers' massive *Histoire du Consulat et de l'Empire* (1845-62), which portrayed Bonaparte in the very terms that Carlyle ridiculed in his "Proem." Though Thiers was opposed to the new Emperor, his version of Bonaparte's career occasionally bordered on hagiography. According to Thiers, Napoleon was an unprecedented historical reality. Thiers explained his uniqueness by contrasting him with Frederick: "Greatness! there is no lack of that in him who succeeded Frederick, and surpassed him in the admiration he excited, and the destruction he caused! It was reserved for the French Revolution, destined to change the aspect of European society, to produce a man who would fix the attention of the world as powerfully as Charlemagne, Caesar, Hannibal, and Alexander. He possessed every qualification ... whether we consider the greatness of the part he was destined to perform, the vastness of the political convulsions he caused, the splendour, extent, and profundity of his genius, or his majestic gravity of thought" (12:433).

Thiers acknowledges Frederick's brilliance as a strategist and leader, but argues that he fell short of Napoleon in relation to both accomplishment and character: "Frederick, the jesting sceptic, the crowned leader of the philosophers of the eighteenth century, the despiser of all that is respectable in mankind, who turned his very friends into ridicule; who was in some sort predestined to defy, insult, and humble the pride of Austria, and of the old system it represented; who dared, in the midst of that firmly seated Europe, in whose position it was so difficult to effect a change--dared, we repeat, to undertake the creation of a new power, and had the honour of succeeding, though opposed alone to the entire continent. ...This Frederick is an original and striking character, who, though not deficient in great deeds, is deficient in greatness, either because he only changed the relative proportion of power in the interior of the Germanic Confederation, or because his mocking physiognomy is deficient in that dignity which impresses mankind" (12:433-34). For Carlyle, the opposite is true: Frederick's "greatness" can be attributed to his lack of dignity and to his realistic and honorable ambitions.

By defying the powers of Europe and exposing the hypocrisy of eighteenth-century diplomacy, Frederick sets in motion a political movement that culminated in the French Revolution. The keynote of his character is his brutal honesty, and his refusal to countenance lying as a conventional form of political conduct. Frederick is a warrior, but not one who indulges in force for the sake of personal prestige or martial glory. On the contrary, he is forced to defend himself because Europe will not tolerate his "veracity." Like Cromwell, Frederick has little choice but to fight in order to preserve his country. Though physically broken and mentally exhausted by the task, he perseveres with tenacity and courage. In Carlyle's view, "Napoleon did indeed, by immense expenditure of men and gunpowder, overrun Europe for a time: but Napoleon never, by husbanding and wisely expending his men and gunpowder,



defended a little Prussia against all Europe, year after year for seven years long, till Europe had enough, and gave-up the enterprise as it could not manage" (*Works* 12:7).

Frederick's "might" derives from his "right," and his kingship stands in sharp opposition to Napoleon's: "So soon as the Drawcansir equipments are well torn off, and the shilling-gallery got to silence, it will be found that there were great kings before Napoleon,--and likewise an Art of War, grounded on veracity and human courage and insight, not upon Drawcansir rodomontade, grandiose Dick-Turpinism, revolutionary madness, and unlimited expenditure of men and gunpowder" (*Works* 12: 8-9). But at certain moments in the biography, Carlyle is obliged to confront evidence that reveals a strong Napoleonic streak in Frederick's character, and a "Dick-Turpinism" worthy of the French Emperor. For example, the Prussian king justifies his invasion of Silesia by stating that "It was a means of acquiring reputation; of increasing the power of state; and of terminating what concerned that long-litigated question of the Berg-Jülich Succession." Whereas Carlyle can explain Cromwell's excesses at Drogheda by appealing to divine justice, here he finds it difficult to attribute a religious motive to Frederick's resolution. He refers evasively to the King as "a man who expects to be believed ... his eye set on the practical merely" (*Works* 14:405). In such instances, Carlyle quietly tolerates his "questionable" hero. From his perspective, Frederick is at his least admirable when he most resembles Napoleon Bonaparte.

Elsewhere Carlyle tries to invest Frederick's actions with a loosely defined religious sense. Referring to the Württembergers' allusion to Frederick as a "Protestant Hero," Carlyle comments "that there is something of real truth in it." Though Frederick's creed "differed extremely" from that of Martin Luther, Carlyle believes that they share one "all-essential" conviction in common: "That it is not allowable, that it is dangerous and abominable, to attempt believing what is not true. In that sense, Friedrich, by nature and position, was a Protestant, and even the chief Protestant in the world" (*Works* 18:169-70). Carlyle chooses his words carefully here, and outlines Frederick's "Protestant" qualities in a manner that would have satisfied Voltaire. The Prussian king interprets religion in a negative way, yet there is a genuine spiritual element in his outlook. Frederick's faith amounts to a instinctive revulsion at the way in which European rulers exploit spiritual "shams" to delude the masses and to sanctify their tyranny. Frederick boldly refuses to emulate them, and though he is tolerant of other religions, he makes it clear to his people that his "Protestant" attitude is the distinctive "Mythus" of the Prussian nation.

While Frederick's belief cannot rival Cromwell's "Law of Christ's Gospel," it does operate on his character as a transcendent restraint. Unlike Napoleon, he shows no interest in establishing a cult of personality. Modest and austere, he gains loyalty by



judging events through the eyes of ordinary Prussians. Carlyle uses the episode of Miller Arnold to demonstrate his simple humanity. When the King learns in 1779 about the case of a Miller who had a stream diverted by a wealthy aristocrat but is denied legal compensation, he risks his reputation for impartiality by overturning the Court's decision and imprisoning the justices. Carlyle lauds his conviction that "everybody, be he high or low, rich or poor, get prompt justice" and supports his initiative against the "attorney species" (*Works* 19:239). Though the case eventually proves to be more complicated than Frederick at first grasped--a later decision finds that the Miller had not been affected by the diversion--Carlyle sympathizes with Frederick, who is ridiculed by polite Berlin Society for his interference: "To Friedrich respectability of wig that issues in solemnly failing to do justice, is a mere enormity, greater than the most wigless condition could be" (*Works* 19:244). He may have been wrong to act, but Frederick's sympathies link him to the people. He achieves what Napoleon only pretends to achieve--and the episode itself stands in stark contrast to Bonaparte's cruel treatment of Palm, the Berlin bookseller.

Carlyle's epic attempt to refute the Napoleonic legend in *Frederick the Great* unintentionally reveals his fascination with the French "Charlatan." Curiously, he continues to read about Napoleon long after he completes *Frederick*. In a letter to John Carlyle in November 1873, he admits that he has again revised his opinion of Napoleon after reading Lanfrey's *Histoire*: "Lanfrey's book is hard and dry, but not without intelligence and vigour; and says throughout the very worst that can be said of that wonderful man. ... In *Lanfrey* Napoleon gradually delineates himself as the nearest approach ever made to Lucifer, called otherwise Satan *Saltoun*: but I found there were grave omissions in that delineation and that the man was actually human after all. Hardly ever man so strangely situated and so strongly tempted in this world before!--" In certain respects, Lanfrey's portrait of Napoleon resembles Carlyle's in *Heroes*. Lanfrey's Bonaparte is consumed by ambition and glory: "[He] ... loved glory ardently, and by it his ambition, selfish as it was, rose far above the vulgar level. On this side at least it was disinterested, and, though insatiably greedy for power, he was not the man to be content with power without grandeur. But the glory that he proposed to his soldiers was not glory in the sense which the modern world, and especially the French Revolution, had attached the word: it was glory as understood by the great conquerors of antiquity, which consisted in vanquishing, subjugating, and dazzling men, and not in raising and ennobling them; glory which has in view victories of the sword, and not the conquests of civilisation" (1:91)

Yet Carlyle refuses to accept this withering judgment of Napoleon because it excludes what is transcendently "wonderful" about him. In a recent biography of Napoleon, Frank McLynn has astutely remarked that "[i]f Napoleon became a mythical figure, this was because for once the cliché was true, and the whole was greater than the sum of the parts. If aspects of Napoleon's career and personality are scrutinized one

by one, it is possible to mount a devastating critique. But what remains overall defies such a reductive analysis” (664). Carlyle’s perspective is similarly nuanced. He does not deny that the Napoleonic legend contains elements of truth. What disturbs him about Bonaparte is his profound lack of a spiritual sense, which undermines his noble intentions. Oddly, Carlyle’s verdict on Napoleon anticipates the views of a writer who was resolutely opposed to any reading of history as the biography of great men. In *War and Peace* Tolstoy’s summary of Napoleon’s character serves indirectly to vindicate Carlyle’s understanding of heroic greatness: “‘Greatness’ would appear to exclude all possibility of applying standards of right and wrong. For the ‘great’ man nothing is wrong; there is no atrocity for which a ‘great’ man can be blamed. ... For those of us who have the standard of good and evil given us by Christ, nothing can claim to be outside the law. And there is no greatness where simplicity, goodness and truth are absent” (1268).

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**“As others dress to live, he lives to dress.”**

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Jane Welsh Carlyle wrote to Frances Wedgwood in October 1838 describing Thomas “the ‘Man of Genius’ as looking the same but brown as a nut by the exposure to air ... To the eyes of true Philosophy, indeed, which would take in the *Clothes* as an inseparable part of the whole man, he must exhibit a touching spectacle of demoralisation - not a shirt left that would look ‘respectable’ on a *crow-boggle* (as we call it in Scotland) ... precious result of travelling about the world without one’s wife and needles and thread! Striking illustration of the truth of the maxim ‘a stitch in time saves nine’! And it is I, *poverina*, who must now put in these nine stitches multiplied by nine - I who ‘being an only child ... never wished to sew’.”

Jane may have written that Thomas resembled a scarecrow and it may have been, in spite of his first book-length publication being on the subject of clothes albeit full of metaphor and irony, that he took little heed of his own personal appearance. Indeed, Elisabeth Dwight was surprised on meeting him for the first time at the Grange in December 1850 and wrote to her sister Mary Parkham that he was “much younger and smoother looking” than she expected, at dinner “he was well dressed and combed” and “looked much like other people” and she could “hardly believe it was he”. Thomas did occasionally show that he was conscious of how he presented himself, the detail of which may be seen as frivolous. In the Autumn of 1843 he wrote to Jane from Scotland that waistcoats, fashioned for him by Thomas Garthwaite (his Ecclefechan tailor), had a problem with the buttons chosen and unfolded to her the saga - “no buttons other than condemnable ... yellowish silk buttons were sent; twice as large as they were meant to be ... Gilt buttons came next, with a detestable Prince-of-Wales feather etched on them.” Then there were “certain big mother-of-pearl shirt buttons ... and they have a ‘bad effect’.” So “Goody if she like” should “go up to Regent Street and choose. Silk buttons of the due size and colour would do best ...but anything that pleases Goody shall be pleasant.” Thomas admitted “I feel such a noble sartorial ardour at present that I could almost resolve to provide as many clothes as would last me to the probable end of all, and so deliver my existence from what is at present a real annual plague to it. Oh Fox<sup>1</sup> how wise was that ever-enduring suit of leather; which at the due season would need only a new touch of Day-and-Mantel (blacking-manufacturers) and vex the immortal soul of man no farther.”

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<sup>1</sup> George Fox (1624-91; *ODNB*), founder of the Society of Friends, who wore a leather suit.

Men's dress during this period hardly changed at all. Their coats and trousers remained very simple. But they literally went to town on their waist-coats, often with lavish embroidery, or figured silks with small patterns, or woven velvets. Under the influence of Prince Albert, tartan waist-coats became very popular in the 1850s. Thomas was obviously not prepared to follow the trends, even to the extent of fancy buttons. He could never be described as a dandy. In the early 1820s when he was playing court to Jane, he would have realised early that she had no time for gentlemen who dandified themselves. She described most amusingly to her dear friend Eliza Stodart in 1823 a visit from an erst-while suitor, John Wilkie. "Before dinner he had retired to his Inn, and vapoured back, in the course of an hour or so, in all the pride of two waistcoats, (one of figured velvet, another of sky-blue satin) gossamer silk stockings, and morocco leather slippers - 'these little things are great to little men'."

Jane wrote to her cousin Maggie Welsh in 1842 that Thomas "dislikes nothing in the world so much as going into a shop to buy anything - even his own trowsers and coats; so that to the consternation of Cockney tailors I am obliged to go about them." Two years later, Jane was to write that "with a great deal of courage he had gone out" and bought her a cloak as a Christmas gift. Unfortunately he had bought it "by *gass light*" and "felt quite desperate about it when he saw it in the morning" - But it is a wonderful cloak for him to have bought - warm, and not *very* ugly - and a good shape - only entirely unsuitable to the rest of my habiliments! Being a *brownish colour* with *orange spots* and a brown velvet collar!!" Jane's judgement, too, was occasionally flawed. He had written in *Sartor Resartus* in his chapter "The World in Clothes" that "the first purpose of Clothes, the Professor imagines, was not warmth or decency, but ornament". But when Jane ordered a "*sky-blue coat* with *yellow buttons* which made him 'an ornament to society in every direction'", his faith in her was quite shaken "as far as *the dressing of him* was concerned" she told Helen Welsh in 1844.

Indeed, it was not only Jane who was involved in the dressing of Thomas. Scotland was usually the source of Thomas's clothes, ordered and or made during his annual visits North. His whole family in Scotland appears to have played its part, whether sister Jean Aitken in Dumfries was seeking fabric, his mother knitting socks - he wrote to Jean in 1853 requesting that she tell his mother not to knit more as he was "supplied almost to superfluity at present" - or asking brother John to pass on messages to Thomas Garthwaite. In October 1850 "the things required of Garthwaite are: 3 pairs of warm flannel drawers (good flannel, above all); certain pairs of trowsers and of winter waist-coats, all of *dim*-coloured woollen corduroy ... Waistcoats are

to have flannel-sleeves and flannel linings; button to the *top*; ... if he find any very *thin* supple cordy (grey or otherwise), they will be welcome in hopes of another summer.” Even “Jean’s boy in Glasgow ... connected with ‘Tweed-Warehouse’ Managers” had “sent some superior specimens [of fabric].” In a letter to his sister Janet Hanning in July 1842, Thomas had written giving exact dimensions together with “a *measuring strap* which I bought some weeks ago ... for the purpose” for flannel shirts he required that she make for him -

*width* (when the shirt is laid on its back) 22 ½ inches

*extent from wrist-button to wrist-button* 61 inches

*length* (in the back) 35 inches

*length* in the front 25 ½ inches.

Janet had been able to follow the instructions to the letter for in November Thomas was writing again to his sister, thanking and praising her “as the expert needlewoman” that “*all fits* with perfect correctness ... I have one of the cambric shirts on me at present: everything is as right as if it had been made under my own eye. The flannel of the shirts is excellent, they are made to the very measure. The drawers also are the *best fit* of the article I have had for several years back.”

The Carlyles’ dress did not only revolve around Thomas’s “cares of cloth”. Jane had her own to contend with. Sewing would never be her favourite pastime. In October 1823, early in their relationship, she complained to Thomas that “As long as the profession of Callers continues to exist, and as long as perishable silks and muslins continue to be worn, and as long as tea-parties and dinner-parties continue to be frequented and as long as I have neither a great deal of money ... I have three pairs of silk stockings to darn - two muslin caps to make.”

Nevertheless, Jane was very handy with a needle. Thomas wrote to his mother in January 1836 that Jane “has made the *tartan*: into what think you? No dressing-gown, but a Gown proper; with black sleeves (large as bushel-sacks), and wears it daily, very dashing I assure you.” In June 1833, Jane had been practising her own form of *Sartor Resartus*, through necessity rather than as a pleasure. She wrote to Eliza Stodart describing her attempts at re-constructing past frocks in order to make new ones. “I have also put through hands at the same time a Modicum of useful needlework, with the greatest possible dispatch - a little gingham f(rock) for my Brother’s daughter that is my name child - the old cloak, rehabilitation thereof (this article of apparel is establishing its claim to the french epithet *eternal* (Carlyle bought handkerchiefs in the Palais Royale with that recommendation) a NIGHT Cap not of *the* sort but a night cap in ordinary and lastly, not finished yet, a pellerion which you must have seen officiating as a gown, not on one but several Members of the family, something like twenty years ago the gowns of that period being adequate to make more than a sleeve in the present, I realised out of it in the beginning of

summer a singularly elegant bonnet; and the residue is now combining itself into a pelerine, which lined with wadding, and part of the old (villainously bad) crimson Persian of the old cloak, will in the gracefulest manner protect my shoulders thro' the approaching inclemencies of the season - O my dear Cousin what a fine thing is a fine natural taste especially for the Wife of an Author, at a time when the booksellers trade is so low!" Although by the 1850s the Carlyles were relatively well-off, Jane's sense of Scottish thrift had not diminished as her 1855 Journal tells us - "22nd October ... repaired black merino gown against winter ... 24th October ... rehabilitated two old bonnets having failed to find one large enough ... 31st ...very devoted to mending; Mr C's trowsers among other things! 'being an only child' I never wished to sew mens trowsers - no never!"

In her letters Jane displays great concern and low self-esteem at the necessity of being "dressed", and her descriptions of Ball attended, few and far between. Possibly her lack of funds had much to do with it, though in her 1855 "Budget of a *Femme Incomprise*", she wrote to Thomas visiting the Grange (home of the Ashburtons) that her "allowance of 25£ is a very liberal one; has enabled me to 'spend freely' for *myself* ... I can 'keep up my dignity' and my wardrobe, on a less sum - on 15£ a year. - A silk *dress*, a 'splendid dressing gown', a Milliner's bonnet the less ... Besides I have had so many 'gowns' *given* me, that they may serve for two or three years." Later, she reminds him of the "most ill-timed Dressing-gown, and my *cheap*, ill-timed *chiffonière*, and my halfyears bills to Rhind and Catchpole; I have what will serve me till June come round." Thomas, having read her account "with great laughter", graciously increased her allowance to £30.

The "gowns given" to her were not always welcomed. It was acceptable in the circles in which they moved that upper-class women sewed clothes for the poor, or passed on their own gowns to their servants. Therefore, whereas to give, as a gift, a length of silk, satin or velvet (enough for a gown) was most acceptable, a *ready-made* gown was deemed insulting and smelled strongly of charity. Indeed Jane wrote to Jeannie Welsh in November 1842 that "on the whole the pleasures of *benevolence* between ourselves, are not a whit less visionary than other sublunary pleasures ... There is a moment of moral satisfaction in putting a starved old woman into a warm flannel petticoat ... and so on of every thing else of the sort one attempts in the way of *charity*."

A storm, therefore, erupted at Christmas 1855 at the Grange. Lady Ashburton had given Jane a made-up frock from under the Christmas tree. This had been given on the advice of a close friend of Lady Ashburton, Jane Brookfield, who wrote in her diary "this present seems to have a little angered that lady. She would not take it; she vowed she was being insulted, and Lady Ashburton at last was forced to seek her in her room, and assure her with tears in her eyes that she had not meant

to offend.” Lady Ashburton should have followed her mother Lady Sandwich’s example. While staying at Bay House in the summer of 1858 with the Misses Baring, Lord Ashburton’s sisters, Jane wrote to Lady Sandwich “Oh you never saw such a beautiful as *that* is, made up! the gown you gave me on Xmas day! I had it made up to come here - and Mrs Mildmay even, who professes to be a judge *in raiment* said ‘surely it had been made in Paris’ - It fits beautifully, and makes quite a presentable woman of me! I felt, the first time I put it on, such a *besoin* to go and show myself to you, and ask your blessing!”

The experience suffered at the Grange did not, however, stop Jane accepting gifts of clothes from others - only the giving of gowns seems to have been contentious. She waxed lyrical while writing to Calliope Dilberoglu in January 1852. “Oh Heavens! How beautiful! *You* - the shirt - the whole thing! It is not in mere terrestrial prose that one should acknowledge such a gift; one’s thanks should be a ‘*Song of the Shirt*’ as bright and glowing as the other was dark and dreary - if only I had the power of the Song left in me! - but - alas! ... But the shirt ... it seemed to me in its glistening loveliness an emanation from the Moon, fallen on this lower Earth! ... I *will* astonish the finest ladies in London with my bit of ‘Orientalism’ - my glistening shirt out of the Moon!”

She was also extremely grateful to her cousin Maggie who sent her, in December 1861, a gift of black sleeves which “would come in ‘neat and appropriate’ at the present mourning crisis!” (Prince Albert had died on the 14th December.) The crisis for Jane did not end there, and she had driven to Madame Elise’s (a well-known dress-maker) and had said “*Do* for Mercy’s sake make me a black mourning gown by New Year’s day ... I’m going to the Grange!” At mention of the Grange, she got her gown. Many years earlier, in 1837, on the death of William IV in June, Jane described her quandary of what to wear “in the present blackness, when the thermometer fell to the level of *black velvet*, and I ‘*trat hervor glorreich*’ [came forward in splendour], as black as a crow from head to foot ...my black crucifix and a charming little black mantilla edged with lace ...[it] saves my loyalty.” She described London as being covered in “bombazeen and crape which makes the whole City at this moment look like a City ‘*gone to the undertaker*’.”

Dressmakers to the aristocracy could be terrible snobs and had great power especially over such as Jane Welsh Carlyle who, in matters of dress, had not great self-confidence. She had always disliked dress-makers. She wrote to Thomas in April 1823 that “[her] whole morning has been worried with a pest of a dress-maker, rhyming [sic] over her vocabulary of fashion, and pinning, fiddling and experimenting on my unfortunate person.” Thirty two years later, in her Journal, Jane had recorded that she had taken “the black silk Lady Ashburton presented me with last Christmas to Catchpool that it might be made up *for the Grange*. ‘Did you buy *this* yourself



Mam?’ said Catchpool, rubbing it between her finger and thumb. ‘No - it was a present - but why do you ask?’ ‘Because, Mam, I was thinking, if you bought it for yourself, you had been *taken* in. It is so poor! Very trashy indeed! I don’t think I ever saw so trashy a Moire!’ A week later she reported her visit to Catchpool to “have *that* dress fitted. ‘Oh dear! You *do* grow so thin Mam!’ said Catchpool snappishly.”<sup>2</sup> Before going to Bay House in August 1858, Jane visited dressmakers Howell and James who “seeing the necessities of the case, had *padded* the new gown in a very artistic manner - ‘chiefly wadding, Mrs Carlyle’.” This would be the closest that Jane came to the mention of re-crafting the body through corsetry except for one mention of Stays in a letter to Thomas (14 January 1848).

It was perfectly *de rigueur* in Victorian times to create the shape of the body which you, or your dressmaker, required. Women who believed that their bodies were blighted with too much embonpoint could reduce the appearance of their girth, or cursed by underdeveloped busts or hips could disguise their lack of curves by choosing corsetry that was specially designed and padded in those areas of greatest lack. As Leigh Summers writes in *Bound to Please: A History of the Corset* “corsetry operated to construct, maintain and police *middle-class* femininity ... it was prized by the fashion-conscious middle-class because to crafted the flesh into class-appropriate contours ... it operated to hide any course abdominal bulges from view, while it smoothed the hips and created the small, circular (rather than oval-shaped) waistline that supposedly denoted good breeding.” *Queen* magazine reported that clients often badgered their dressmakers to make their dresses at least one size too small “‘O! you make the waist of so many inches and I’ll engage to get into it!’” How the ‘getting into it’ was effected, reported the *Queen*, referring criptically to the corset, was one of the ‘secrets of the prison house’.

In the 1830s, a “Lady of Distinction” had published *The Mirror of the Graces* in which she warned against the use of corsets, against “the consequences of applying compression, by corsets of some unyielding material ... enclosing so many delicate organs (ie heart, lungs, kidneys, liver) whose free function is essential to health.” However, thirty years later the multitude of advertisements in *The Times* indicates that corsetry was a thriving business (the *Post Office Directory* of 1859 for London listed under “Stay and Corset makers and sellers” a total of 265, including 11 “French Corset” makers, many of whom were men, making for men. It was not only women who were corseted to the detriment of their health but men, also were helped to be fine upstanding members of Victorian society. It was generally believed that men made the best corsets as women were not strong enough to cut the whale-bone involved in their construction. However, one of the best known corsetieres was a certain Madame

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Roxy Caplin, who won several awards for her designs and took the prize medal at the Great Exhibition in 1851. According to Leigh Summers “her success was, in part, due to her husband’s involvement ...Monsieur Caplin was a doctor who advised his wife on the physiological impact of corsetry ... [and therefore] the garments were based on hygienic medical principles.” Her designs covered all ages of women - from “the child’s bodice, the ‘reverso tractor’ for the adolescent, maternity stays for ‘femmes enceintes’, the self-regulating contracting belt for the new mother, the ‘medical belt or uterus supporter’ for the sufferer of prolapsed uterus, to the ‘double elastic corset’ for the woman ‘of weak constitution’.”

For everyday wear Jane avoided dressmakers. In spite of her lack of enthusiasm, she was more than capable of making dresses and jackets for herself. She wrote to her friend Mary Russell in January 1860 that she “needed a little jacket for home-wear, and possessing a superfluous black-silk scarf, I resolved, in a moment of economical enthusiasm, to make, with my own hands a jacket out of it! For in spite of the ‘Thirty thousand distressed needlewomen’ one hears so much of; the fact remains that nobody can get a *decent* article of dress made here unless at enormous cost. And besides, the dressmakers who can fit one, wont condescend to make anything but with their own materials! So I fell to cutting out that jacket last Monday, and only finished it today (Friday)!! ... But Lord preserve me, what a bother! Better to have bought one ready made at the dearest rate!” However three weeks later, having recovered from the trauma of the jacket, in a further letter she is encouraging Mary to make a similar one, detailing and suggesting fashionable use of trimmings but ends with “Decidedly my talent does not lie in the way of drawing for *The Magazine of Fashion*.”

However, for the most part, Jane felt completely inadequate as far as her dress for important occasions of aristocratic visits were concerned. “Oh dear”, she wrote in her Journal, 11 December 1855, “I wish this Grange business were well over ... To care for my dress at this time of day, more than I ever did when young and pretty and happy ... on a penalty of being regarded as a blot on the Grange *gold and azure* is really too bad.” In January 1860, on returning to Cheyne Row from the Grange, Jane wrote to Eliza Donaldson that she, having been ill for much of the winter, had had to make swift arrangements to enlarge her wardrobe, “when about to be launched again among people wearing ‘purple and fine linen’ and ‘dining sumptuously every day,’ the quantity of elegant details *wanted* is enough to turn my brain! To day I was out after some of these; so soon as I had done my breakfast! result: a Belivedera-like head dress, black, with golden stars! the spiciest ...little jacket, black overlaid with gold lace - sleeves collars &c &c! - -- No wonder I had to go out early and take a good deal of money with me!”

Jane’s ambivalent feelings about social occasions surely stem from her childhood. In writing “The Simple Story of my own first Love” she described in great detail how

she was dressed. After describing how Master Scholey (the object of her affections) was dressed, the image of him having “stamped itself on my soul for ever!”, she adds, “If you would like to know my own Ball-dress, I can tell you every item of it; a white Indian muslin frock open behind, & trimmed with twelve rows of satin ribbon, a broad white satin sash reaching to my heels, little white kid shoes, and embroidered silk stockings.” She was used to being the centre of attention but on this occasion her efforts were in vain for his affections lay elsewhere.

London society balls were even harder work and caused her a great deal of stress.

“But fashion, full of change and full of whim,  
In times succeeding more display’d each limb;  
Gave more transparent covering to the breast,  
And show’d the form of beauty half undress’d.”<sup>3</sup>

In July 1850, she wrote to Helen Welsh that “the Bath House Ball threw me into a perfect fever for one week - as I had got no dress for it; not understanding that I had to go - but Mr C was ‘quite determined for once in his life to see an aristocratic Ball and if I chose to be so peevish and ungracious as to stay away there was no help for me’ - I pleaded the want of a dress - he ‘would pay for any dress I chose to get’; and then I fell back on the horror of *stripping* myself, of ‘being bare’ - at my age after being muffled up so many years! And that if I didn’t I should be like no one else - to which he told me angrily - ‘true propriety consisted in conforming to other peoples fashions!!! And that Eve he supposed had as much sense of decency as I had and *she* wore no clothes at all!!!’ So I got a white silk dress - which first was made high and longsleeved - and then on the very day of the ball was sent back to be cut down to the due pitch of indecency! - I could have gone into *fits* of crying when I began to put it on - but looked so astonishingly well in it *by candle light*, and when I got into the fine rooms amongst the universally *bare* people I felt so much in *keeping*, that I forgot my neck and arms almost immediately - I was glad *after* that I went.” However, she was not at all happy about being “bare” as she wrote two years later to Kate Sterling “I hope I shant have to figure in that low breasted short sleeved white silk gown and white feathers (Good Heavens) this season again.” Zoe Thomson had not thought much of Jane’s dress during the Christmas visit to the Grange in 1856, describing her as having “an angular figure, and unfortunately dressed in white classical costumes.” However, six months earlier, Ellen Twishton had written to her sisters that “Mrs Carlyle was sumptuous, in a black velvet and Roman scarf.”

In *Dress and Address* published in 1819 and dedicated to the Merveilleux of Either Sex, is written:

“Relentless fashion! Thou art, sure, to blame,  
Thus to misguide the venerable dame,  
Who, gravely dress’d, in robe befitting age,  
Might pass for modest, reverend and sage.”<sup>4</sup>

Leaving her neck and arms naked was anathema to Jane Welsh Carlyle. Jane had written to her cousin, Helen, after her visit to the Grange in December 1851, thanking her for the tinsel ribbon she had sent her, that it “was quite an inspiration of Providence. it suits so beautifully the ornament to be suspended round my neck and without which I could not wear the only *low* dress I had brought with them - any *bareness* being horrible against my feelings at this date the Lady Sandwich who is turned 70 shows a whole neck and breast much less presentable than mine, every day.” Several years later, while visiting the Donaldson sisters in Haddington, Jane wrote to Thomas - “One thing I find this dear stupid little place infinitely superior to London is - and that is its old women! Age does not masquerade and make a fool of itself here; but retires into widow’s, or such like caps, and black shawls.” Writing to Helen in 1848, Jane described a dinner at the Macready’s where one of the guests “an old Lady Morgan” was “‘naked as robins’ half way down - age seventy five!” Ellen Twisleton’s letters to her family in America are filled with detail of the clothes worn during the London season and also of the old women. She wrote of Lady Chantry that she was “dressed in green satin, white lace mantle, and pink crepe bonnet - she is as old as anybody that isn’t absolutely tottering, but this is the style, and among English women she did not look outré.” In a later letter she would write “Lady East is fifty-nine and her dress would have struck you, ... the low neck and light necklace ... she is very wrinkled.”<sup>5</sup>

The aristocratic ladies of London society did not have to be “old” for both Jane and Ellen to make unflattering remarks on the appearance of their contemporaries. Jane wrote to Lady Ashburton in June 1848 describing how she had been “spell-bound by the Duchess of Sutherland’s gown! As my Helen exclaimed over looking a *Virgin and Child* in the National Gallery ‘My Oh My! how expensive!’... White lace ‘wandering at its own sweet will’ all a-down a figured grey silk ... her beautiful arms were *bare* up to the elbows, for the thin white lace which covered them so far was mere *delusion* ... she was escorted by Lyall the geologist who looked, my Husband said, ‘very much embarrassed poor fellow’”. The Duchess was only forty-

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4 p20

5 *Letters of the Hon.Mrs.Edward Twisleton written to her Family* p.30,102.

two. Six years later Ellen would write to her sisters describing the same lady as being “dressed as hideously as I have always seen her - in a blue and white brocade open in front, a Honiton lace mantelet, all done up with little, fussy, pink-ribbon bows, and a cap of point-de-Venise, ornamented in the same frightful manner.”<sup>6</sup>

In *The Mirror of the Graces*, the handbook for manners and good form, a “Lady of Distinction” wrote “To the exposure of the bosom and back, as some ladies display those parts of their person, what shall I say? This mode is not only repugnant to decency, but most exceedingly disadvantageous to the charms of nine women out of ten. The bosom and shoulders of a very young and fair girl may be displayed without exciting much displeasure or disgust; but when a woman, grown to the age of discretion, of her own choice ‘unveils her beauties to the sun and moon’, then the eye turns away with loathing.”<sup>7</sup> Jane could have written this herself and it was, therefore, with much relief that Jane wrote to Thomas in Scotland in July 1858 that “Miss Baring has invited me to Bay House - with leave to wear high dresses and caps.”

Dresses for Victorian women had become wider and wider. It was no wonder that Jane had had difficulty fashioning more than a pair of sleeves from a frock she had worn before she was married. For, due to corsetry, the quintessential female silhouette of the mid-Victorian era was a tight bodice blossoming out from the hips into a bell-like voluminous skirt. Before the invention of a light dress frame made of steel hoops called the crinoline, these wide skirts carried all sorts of problems with them - whether the yards of muslin, used to achieve the effect, caught fire resulting in reports of tragic deaths in *The Times*, or the sheer weight of the fabric used in the stiffened petticoats, required the wearer needed an extra strong corset to keep the back straight. There were other draw-backs. One report in *The Times* of 12th January 1858 described how a crinoline had actually saved a young girl from drowning. The girl, Martha Shepherd, jumped from the balustrade of the bridge over the Serpentine, but “on falling, her dress, which had a large hoped crinoline skirt underneath, expanded to its full dimensions, and she came upon the water like a balloon, floating there for several minutes.” Which gave the police constable on duty, time to fish her out - much to her annoyance.

The Carlyles seemed, for the most part, to be more interested in comfort than in fashion as can be seen in Robert Tait’s *Chelsea Interior* painted in 1857-58. The viewer is immediately struck by the informality of the dress of both Thomas and Jane. They could, as most would, have chosen dressed as if for a dinner party but that would not have been the authentic Carlyles at home. Jane was happiest in her “new

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6 *ibid.* 204.

7 p77.

grey gown” (with its long sleeves and high neck), “and smart lilac cap”, looking “quite presentable.” Did Thomas choose to be painted thus because it was his own sartorial look? Is it a statement that clothes per se do not matter? He certainly looks like the philosopher deep in thought - the Sage of Chelsea with his pipe. He appeared to wear dressing-gowns during the day, in this case a sort of house-coat which created an extra layer of warmth while he worked in his “garret” or a coat which could easily be exchanged for an outside one. But not always. When he is seeking to buy a horse in 1857, he does not hesitate to rush outside as he is, as Jane wrote to Mary Russell - “Mr Farie is cantering up and down the street while I write: showing off a horse to Mr C who is out in the middle of the street in a long hideous pink and brown tartan dressinggown chosen for him by his sister Mrs Ai[t]ken.-and a brown *wideawake* of course a crowd of boys have assembled to stare at them.”

Therefore, dressing-gowns, their quality and their size, were always of tantamount importance for Thomas Carlyle and he was always very specific in his orders. To his brother John he wrote in October 1848, that he needed a “thick massive Dressing-gown too, warm and reaching to the ankles; but I know not if Garthwaite will undertake it.” Thomas Garthwaite must have agreed, for a month later, Thomas wrote again telling him exactly what he wanted. “With respect to the making of the garment, I wish Garthwaite to be *lucky* in his measures generally, to let the thing come down to the very ankles, and wrap amply round one;-- the last he made was a little scimp both ways (2 inches more in the *length* for one thing would be an improvement), and being very thin and fully lined, was always an ineffectual garment. As to lining, -- the gown I have on, which was made by Sampson, is lined throughout and down to the very base with this stuff, a worn specimen of which I have just *clipt* out, and here send you: the sleeves and all are lined with this; it was very warm once, but is grown a little thinnish now. It seems to be some kind of woollen drugget; I of course care nothing about having the *same* kind of lining; and equivalent texture, and dim colour, will suit equally well. And if the sleeves *have* flannel, or some *warmer* lining than the rest, that will be no evil.” When it did arrive two weeks later, he wrote to his mother - “But what shall I say of the Dressing gown? Jane admits, it is the bonniest I ever had at any time: warm, light, fine, and pretty to look upon, and (tell poor Garthwaite too) it fits every way to perfection.”

Thomas had told Caroline Fox of the Quaker family in 1846 that he had “often wished [he] could get people to join [him] in dressing in a rational way. In the first place, I would have nothing to do with a hat; I would kick it into the Serpentine, and wear some kind of cap or straw covering. Then, instead of these layers of coats one over the other, I would have a light waistcoat to lace behind, because buttoning would be difficult; and over all a blouse.”<sup>8</sup> However, if we travel forward in time twelve years,

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8 *Memories of Old Friends; Being Extracts from the Journals of Caroline Fox.* p207-8

to the summer of 1858, we discover that although in all portraits, Boehm's statue and in photographs bar one taken of him in the garden at Cheyne Row, Thomas is bare-headed, he is *recognised* by his hat. This is evidenced by Jane's letter to him relating how a certain Madame Blaize de Bury, while riding in Hyde Park, had been demanding of everyone she met who knew Thomas to introduce her to him, but to no avail. Eventually she had met George Cook who told her "I passed Mr Carlyle a little way on, in his brown wide-awake." At which information the "Lady lashed her horse and set off in pursuit, leaving her party out of sight - and went all round the park at full gallop looking out for the wide-awake."

The Carlyles moved very much in the upper echelons of London society. In spite of Thomas's sometimes eccentricities of dress and Jane's abhorrence of appearing half-naked in public, they were both aware of the necessities of fitting into that society. They recognised that "[c]lothes, as despicable as we think them, are so unspeakably significant."<sup>9</sup> Thomas wrote in *Sartor Resartus* in his chapter "The Dandiacal Body", "Every faculty of his soul, spirit, purse, and person is heroically consecrated to this one object, the wearing of Clothes wisely and well: so that as others dress to live, he lives to dress". Although both Carlyles conformed to a certain degree to the demands of the fashions of their time, neither Thomas nor Jane can stand accused of being slaves to those fashions. As Michael Carter writes in his *Fashion Classics from Carlyle to Barthès*, "Clothes are the outward manifestation, the external condition, of our sociality, our ideals, or what Carlyle would call our 'spirit'. Dead emblems may command obedience but they will never inspire reverence"<sup>10</sup> Thomas and Jane Carlyle were accepted because of their wit, their intelligent and amusing conversation - not for the clothes they wore.

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9 *Sartor Resartus*, p55.

10 p.6

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## The Carlyles and Their Servants

by Jane Roberts

In Cheyne Row, “The high old house without water, without electric light, without gas fires, full of books and coal smoke and four-poster beds and mahogany cupboards, where two of the most nervous and exacting people of their time lived, year in year out, was served by one unfortunate maid.”<sup>1</sup> She slept in a four poster bed in the front kitchen. It was below street level, but had two windows through which the afternoon sun shone. The range, for cooking and water heating, remained lit all day. Water came via a pump from a well under the floor, and although mains water was introduced in 1852, the pump was still used for many years after. The house was tall, and jugs of water, coals, brooms, brushes and slop-pails had to be carried from the basement up three flights of stairs. When Virginia Woolf visited the house in 1931 she wrote of a picture of Jane: “Her cheeks are hollow; bitterness and suffering mingle in the half-tender, half-tortured expression of the eyes. Such is the effect of a pump in the basement and a yellow tin bath up three pairs of stairs.”<sup>2</sup> As well as cleaning, cooking, serving and washing up the meals, the maid did all the household washing although it was common in many households for the washing to be sent out. When one servant, Isabella, was told that the washing was part of her duties, and that Helen had always done it, she shouted “Oh yes there are women *that like to make slaves of themselves*, and her you had was of that sort, but I will never slave myself for anybody’s pleasure!”<sup>3</sup> She was nicknamed Pessimia, and soon left, declaring that no woman living could do the work expected of her by the Carlyles.

Mrs. Beeton gives an account of the maid’s daily duties: first she must open all the shutters and the downstairs windows. She should then clear out the remains of the kitchen fire, and brush up, blacken, and brighten the range, and light the fire. Then she must sweep the breakfast-room, empty and blacklead the grate, light the fire, and wash the hearthstone. Then sweep the hall and clean the doorstep, and then return to the breakfast room and dust it. Next she cleans any boots and shoes unavoidably left since the night before, and then wakes the family, taking warm water to the bedrooms. Then she lays the breakfast table, and cooks the breakfast. She clears the table, sweeps the hearth, tidies the room, and then washes the breakfast things and cleans and tidies the kitchen. Next she goes up to the bedrooms to empty the slops, sweep, dust and tidy the rooms, make the beds, and take the water jugs and candlesticks downstairs. Then there are the public rooms to clean and the fires to lay, the stairs to brush, the scullery and the privy to clean. Lunch, and later dinner,

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1 Woolf, 24

2 Woolf, 25

3 JWC-SS 29 Dec. [1846] CL 21:122-3



have to be prepared, cooked, served, cleared away, washed up and the kitchen cleaned. In the afternoon she will do washing, mending, ironing, plate cleaning etc. or perhaps shopping. After dinner she prepares the bedrooms – taking up jugs of water, closing windows and shutters, turning down beds. Then she herself should go to bed – “plenty of sleep is absolutely necessary for any one who daily undergoes hard bodily labour; and this a general servant who rises at six cannot have unless she goes to bed at ten o’clock.”<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately for the Carlyles’ maids they were often unable to do this as Thomas liked to smoke his pipe in the kitchen, sometimes quite late at night, and the maid had to wait till he had finished before she could get to bed. Perhaps it was this that prevented the maids from getting up as early as they should have – “Early rising is the great secret of success, and will aid her in successfully accomplishing the duties of the busiest day”<sup>5</sup> – something little Charlotte never seemed to manage. When she first came to work for Jane, Jane wrote to a friend, “of course she ‘slept in’; little girls always do!”<sup>6</sup> and even two years later when she is working with another maid, Sarah, neither could wake up in the morning. Jane arranged for two local men to bang on the window on their way to work, and supplied the girls with an alarm clock. Anne Cook’s attitude was more practical – as Thomas sometimes found it hard to sleep, Anne said to Jane “if Mr. Carlyle bees ony uneasy thro the nicht, and’s ga an staiveren about the hoose wull ye bid him gee us a cry at five i’ the morning”!<sup>7</sup>

Mrs. Beeton was only one of many writers telling young wives how to run their households. “As with the commander of an army, or the leader of an enterprise, so it is with the mistress of a house. Her spirit will be seen through the whole establishment; and just in proportion as she performs her duties intelligently and thoroughly, so will her domestics follow in her path.”<sup>8</sup> Jane appears to be well aware of this; “for I have common sense enough to know that a mistress must keep up her authority over her Servants or it will be the worse for her!...If one is to treat a servant indulgently humanly, fellow-creaturely, one must show her at the same time the best of oneself – not the worst, and substitute the real respect one inspires for the conventional respect one does not exact.”<sup>9</sup>

Servants, like children, required to be treated with firmness and kindness. And as with children it was a mistress’s duty to educate her servants, both practically and morally. “The habit of indulging in gay amusement and dissipation is one evil to

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4 Mrs. Beeton, *Every-Day Cookery*, xliii

5 Oram p. 42

6 JWC-MR [ca. 16 May 1858]

7 JWC-MAC [23 Dec. 1835] CL 8:273

8 Mrs. Beeton, *Book of Household Management*, 1.

9 JWC-MR [25 March? 1859]

be strenuously guarded against by servants who value their good name.”<sup>10</sup> In 1835 Thomas brought Anne Cook from Scotland as the new maid, a girl who had had what they called in Annandale ‘a misfortune’, but as Jane said “it would be difficult for ME to say that an Annandale woman’s virtue is the worse for a misfortune -- I am certain that in their circumstances, with their views and examples I should have had one too if not more.”<sup>11</sup>

Helen was more problematic: “My poor little Helen has been gradually getting more and more into the habit of tipping -- until some fortnight ago she rushed down into a fit of the most decided drunkenness that I ever happened to witness.” The Carlyles were up till 3 in the morning trying to get her to bed. The next day she was filled with shame and despair, and Jane forgave her. Half an hour later she was found “lying on the floor dead drunk...in the midst of a perfect chaos of dirty dishes and fragments of broken crockery.” Jane forgave her again and again, knowing that “away from me she saw no possibility of resisting what she had come to regard as her Fate....I feel as if I had adopted a child.”<sup>12</sup>

Most dramatic of all was the maid Mary, whom, she was told on returning from a trip away, “had an illegitimate child in your house on the 29th of last July....There has been constant company kept in your kitchen since there was no fear of your seeing it.” While Mary “was in labour in the small room at the end of the dining room (the china closet), Mr. Carlyle was taking tea in the diningroom with Miss Jewsbury talking to him!!! Just a thin small door between! the child was not born till two in the morning when Mr. C was still reading in the Drawing room. By that time Helen had fetched two women – one of whom took the child home to be nursed – need one ask where all my fine napkins went, when it is known that the Creature had not prepared a rag of clothing for the Child!”<sup>13</sup>

Many books were written in the nineteenth century to advise women on the management of servants. They stress the social gulf between masters and servants: “For any nineteenth century family with social pretensions at least one domestic servant was essential, even if [only] a thirteen-year-old ‘skivvy’ from the local workhouse at a wage of a shilling a week....the keeping or not keeping of domestic servants [was] the dividing line between the working class and those of a higher social scale.”<sup>14</sup>

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10 Oram p. 43-44

11 JWC-TC [26 Oct. 1835] CL 8:244

12 JWC-MAC [27 Oct. 1840] CL 12:301-303.

13 JWC-MR 12 Nov. 1864, Hansons, 528

14 Horn, p.17

According to Mrs. Beeton,<sup>15</sup> an income of £150-£200 a year should enable a family to employ one servant. The problem for the Carlyles was that their income fluctuated wildly. In 1845 Thomas earned less than £100, in 1847 he earned £800, and between 1848 and 1855 less than £150 a year; then in 1858 he received £2800 from the first two volumes of *Frederick*. In Feb.1855 Jane wrote her “Budget of a Femme Incomprise”,<sup>16</sup> explaining why she needed an extra £30 a year for housekeeping, and part of this was due to the rise in the servant’s wages. Bessy Barnet in 1834 had been paid £8 a year, Helen £12, Fanny £13, and Anne (the current servant) was paid £16, and also insisted on regular meat dinners. The cost of feeding a servant had risen along with her wages.

Although servants had a hard life, they did have some legal protection. A month’s notice either way was required. If a servant had been employed for over a year she could not be discharged, or not paid, when sick. The employer was not legally bound to provide medical treatment, but if he did then he had to pay. In 1861 when the cook Matilda fell ill Jane assumed responsibility: “That invalided Cook was only discharged from St Georges Hospital some two weeks ago – what they call cured – but that doesn’t mean fit for any active service -- and I don’t think she will ever be that again. I got her into a Convalescent Hospital at Walton on Thames where she would be kept in all the comforts of life, without a penny to pay, for one month, But after? -- It is really time some former mistress should take her up -- for she has lain very heavy on me for a long time now,--considering that she was just five weeks my servant”<sup>17</sup> Sometimes a servant’s mishap provided high drama: Ann “rushed into the drawing room last night, with her head tumbled off (as at first it looked to me) and carrying it in her hands!! and crying wildly ‘Oh Mam! I must go to a Doctor (scream) my ear my ear! (scream) an animal has run into my ear!!’...I sprang forward and pulled her fingers from her ear which was full of blood. ‘What animal?’ I gasped. ‘Oh I think it is a black beetle!’ ...I called up Mr Carlyle, for I had lost all presence of mind as well as herself -- He took it coolly, as he takes most things; ‘Syringe it,’ he said; ‘syringing will bring out any amount of black beetles.’ -- There is an apothecary at the bottom of our street; I threw a table cover about her, and told her to run to him; and I begged Mr C. to go with her...‘Go with her?’ he said, ‘What good could it do my seeing the Beetle taken out of her ear?’” Jane was worried that the Apothecary might be “an ass and might spoil her hearing for life...if indeed she did not die of it, or go raving mad, as I should do in her place” and so rushed after her, and found to her relief that the Apothecary had acted promptly and removed the creature piece-meal.<sup>18</sup>

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15 Mrs. Beeton, *Book of Household Management* 7.

16 JWC-TC [12 Feb. 1855] CL 29:251-258.

17 JWC-MR 14 Oct. 1861.

18 JWC-AH [23 Nov. 1857] NLM 2:169-170

Holidays were at the discretion of the employer, and usually few – Ann in 1856 had one day off every three months, yet when she insisted on taking it when Jane was ill, Jane complained – “One might have thought a woman between forty and fifty might without much self sacrifice have put off her holiday for a week or two till I was fairly on my legs.”<sup>19</sup>

Despite their different backgrounds -- Jane the petted, only child of a comfortably off doctor, Thomas the oldest of many children of a farmer in rural Annandale, neither saw domestic work as degrading or demeaning, merely something you paid someone else to do if you could afford it. Jane was never afraid to get her hands dirty or to help out the servants. She might have said – many times – that “being an only child I never wished to sew, or cook, or bake bread or whatever” but that never stopped her turning her hand to whatever needed doing. Learning to make bread at Craigenputtoch she remembered Cellini, and “I asked myself, After all; in the sight of the upper powers, what is the mighty difference between a statue of Pericles [Perseus] and a loaf of bread, so that each be the thing one’s hand hath found to do?”<sup>20</sup> One Christmas, writes Jane, Thomas was “seized with a perfect convulsion of hospitality, and has actually insisted on improvising two dinner parties with only a day between.” The first dinner went off successfully, but before the second there was a crisis. “I do not remember that I have ever sustained a moment of greater embarrassment in life than yesterday when Helen suggested to me that ‘I had better *stuff the Turkey* – as she had *forgotten* all about it’! I had never *known* ‘about it’! but as I make it a rule never to exhibit *ignorance* on any subject ‘*Devant les domestiques*’ for fear of losing their respect – I proceeded to *stuff* the Turkey with the same air of calm self dependence with which I told her some time ago, when she applied to me, the whole history of the Scotch-free-church dissensions – which up to this hour I have never been able to *take in!*” The stuffing was a great success – “pleasanter to the taste than any stuffing I ever remember to have eaten – perhaps it was made with quite new ingredients – I do not know!”<sup>21</sup>

Jane’s mother also was not above helping with the housework. In September 1835 Thomas fired a particularly annoying servant, bewailing the changing relation between master and servant, and insisting that rather “than be bedevilled with such a set of unfortunates”, he would “get some small apartment, and sweep it out and arrange it for myself with my own hands.”<sup>22</sup> Rather than doing this, he went off to Scotland, leaving Jane and her mother to deal with the house, helped by Sereetha, a somewhat ineffectual maid. While Jane got the breakfast, Mrs. Welsh made her own

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19 JWC-MR [5 Nov. 1856] CL 32:26

20 JWC-MS 11 Jan. 1857 CL 32:72

21 JWC-JW 28 Dec. 1843 CL 17:219

22 TC-JAC 23 Sept. 1835 CL 8:211

bed and tidied her room; and after the meal was over she followed Sereetha down to the basement, where, said her daughter, “she jingles and scours and from time to time scolds Sereetha -- till all is right and tight there; I, above stairs, sweep the parlour, blacken the grate...then mount aloft to make my own bed.”<sup>23</sup>

While the manuals said that “A mistress can assist her servant in her work, and lighten it for her, without having to perform offices uncongenial and distasteful to a woman of education and refinement,” Anne Cook obviously felt that Jane could do both: “where was there another lady that could stuff chair-cushions, and do anything that was needed, and be a lady too!”<sup>25</sup>

These are relationships based on a reciprocity of affection and respect that has little to do with class and social status. This may come partly from the Carlyle’s mainly rural, Presbyterian background. Also attachments between mistress and servant were more likely in households where there was only one servant. When Jane first had two servants in 1860, she writes: “With *one* servant – especially with *one* Charlotte; we were one family in the House -- one Interest and *one* Power! -- Now it is as if I had taken in Lodgers for down stairs...I ring my bell -- this one answers but it is ‘the other’s business’ to do what I want -- Then the solemn consultations about ‘*your* dinner’ and ‘*our* dinner’...the ever recurring ‘*we*’, which in little Charlotte’s mouth meant Master and Mistress and self; but in the mouth of the new tall Charlotte means – most decidedly -- ‘*I* and Sarah’”<sup>26</sup>

Mistresses were advised to keep a ‘proper distance.’ “Invariably speak the exact truth to servants, be firm, but mind and never address an unnecessary word to a new servant; old tried servants are privileged, but new ones must be kept ‘in place’, and all temptation to gossip checked at once....Young wives are often lonely and talk to their maids for a change; it is a bad plan, depend upon it, and often causes disagreeable liberties to be taken.”<sup>27</sup> This shows up the fact that the main division in the house was not that between masters and servants, but between men and women. Jane probably spent far more time with her maidservants than she did with Thomas, who not only worked alone, but preferred to ride and to walk alone as well. And she says of Charlotte “[T]he strange little Being has so much sense and reflection in her, that she is quite as good to talk with as most of the fine Ladies that come about me.”<sup>28</sup>

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23 JWC-TC [12 Oct. 1835] CL 8:223

24 Mrs. Beeton, *Every-Day Cookery*, xxx

25 Holme, 23

26 JWC-MR [22? Oct. 1860] NLM 2:237

27 Mrs. Beeton, *Every-Day Cookery*, iv

28 JWC-BB [ca. April 1859] NLM 2:208

The first servant Jane was close to was Betty Braid, who joined the Welsh household when Jane was a girl, and Betty was only 6 years older. She was regarded by Jane as a cross between nurse, confidante and devoted friend, and was to remain so all Jane's life. When Betty's son died in Feb. 1865, Jane wrote –“Oh, Betty, darling, I wish I were near you! If I had my arm about your neck, and your hand in mine, I think I might say things that would comfort you a *little*, and make you feel that, so long as I am in life, you are not without a child to love you. Indeed, indeed, it is the sort of love one has for one's own Mother that I have for you my dearest Betty!”<sup>29</sup> She was not alone in maintaining such long attachments to servants; in 1857 she visited her friend David Davidson's aunt Janet, and writes to Thomas: “she has still the same servant Mary Jeffreys who was with her when I was a child! she has served her ‘with the same relish’ for fifty years! ‘*Ye dinna find us as PERFECT as I could wuss*’ She (Mary) said to me (the house was clean as a new pin!) ‘*but I'm as wullin as ever to work – only no just so able!*’ – At the door she called after me – ‘*yell find us ay here while we're to the fore! but its no unco lang we can expect to get bided.*’ I dont think either Mistress or Maid could survive the other a month.”<sup>30</sup>

If Betty Braid was like a mother to Jane, Charlotte Southam, who came to the Carlyles at the age of 15 in 1858, was “far more like an adopted Child than a London maid-of-all-work.”<sup>31</sup> “Charlotte is full of intellect and imagination and feeling...I assure you I never took more trouble to gain the esteem and affection of man or woman that I have taken to gain hers.”<sup>32</sup> But even then she was aware that “other influences may be brought to bear on her” and after several warnings in the summer of 1860 Charlotte was dismissed, Jane feeling that she needed stricter supervision than she was able to give her, “[I]t is gratifying to feel that one's kindness to the girl has not been all lost on her, for she really loves both of us passionately – only that passionate loves, not applied to practical uses, are good for so little in this matter-of-fact world.”<sup>33</sup> She was re-instated in November, but the following year she left to better herself, taking a place as an under-housemaid in a big country house. “Oh, child, child!” Jane wrote to her later, “you have no idea of the disappointment, the heart-sorrow you caused me! I had set so much love on you, and so much hope! So much permanent good was to come out of our chance-relation for both of us!”<sup>34</sup>

The single maid-of-all-work was the bottom of the ladder – “it is a most onerous place, and it is generally only taken as a stepping-stone to ‘future greatness;’”<sup>35</sup>

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29 JWC-BB Feb. 1865 LM 3:245

30 JWC-TC [23 July 1857] CL 32:196-197

31 JWC-MR [1 Oct. 1858] LM 2:387

32 JWC-MR [25 March? 1859]

33 JWC-TC 17 Sept. 1860 LM 3:61-62

34 JWC-CS 29 March 1863 *Strand Magazine*

35 Walsh, 223

and Charlotte was not the only servant to leave for better prospects. In 1861 Jane complained – “Girls here, I observe, only strive to do well and to keep a place as long as they are learning their work – *having* learnt it they must be off to new work and new ways! My little cook is now up to most cooking that we need – she has a nice easy place of it – and is better off every way than she ever was in her life – But she takes away my breath sometimes – by asking me ‘If I think it would be a good thing for her to go out to her sister in Australia? Or if I think she would make a good kitchen-maid to be under a man cook so as to rise to be head cook in a family’!! she doesn’t call this a *family!*”<sup>36</sup> When Helen left to go and keep house for her brother in Dublin in 1846, she explained – “to be made a Lady of all on a sudden does not fall in ones way every day!”<sup>37</sup> And in February 1858 Ann gave notice, saying she intended to find “a situation with a single gentleman who kept an under servant to do all the rough work” – “Don’t she wish she may get it?” said Jane.<sup>38</sup>

Domestic service was often seen as a ‘bridging’ occupation – between childhood and adulthood, home and marriage, poverty and respectability. It was good training for marriage, and it often provided some education – it was advantageous for a servant to be literate and numerate, and these skills were increasingly essential in urban life. Bessy Barnet, the Carlyles’ first servant in Cheyne Row, turned up nearly thirty years later, “she glided swiftly up to me like a dream, and took my head softly between her hands and kissed my brow again and again, saying in a low dreamlike voice, ‘Oh, you Dear! You Dear! You Dear! Don’t you know me?’ I looked into her eyes in supreme bewilderment. At last light dawned on me, and I said one word – ‘Bessy?’ ‘Yes, it is Bessy!’ and then the kissing wasn’t all on one side, you may fancy!”<sup>39</sup> Bessy was now married to a kind and affluent doctor, and able to welcome Jane as a guest in her own house.

In 32 years at Cheyne Row Jane had 34 maids, not counting temporary helpers and charwomen. It was said that she alternately spoilt her maids and lost her temper with them. She always started with high hopes, and a desire to love and be loved, and as often became disenchanted. In 1849 she wrote of Elizabeth Sprague – “She is far the most *loveable* servant I ever had -- a gentle pretty sweet-looking creature with innocent winning ways.”<sup>40</sup> A year later she was referring to her as “that dreadful Elizabeth.”<sup>41</sup>

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36 JWC-CS 29 March 1863, *Strand Magazine*

37 JWC-MR [25 Sept. 1846] CL 21:58

38 JWC-MR [ca. 5 Feb. 1858] NLM 2:176

39 JWC-MR 3 June 1863 LM 3:167

40 JWC-JCA 1 May 1849 CL 24:43

41 JWC-TC [22 Aug. 1850], CL 25:166

Jane describes herself after interviewing several young women – “Sitting with my elbows on the table and my head in my hands....praying your ‘immortal gods’ to give me sound judgement....but God bless me! one dont marry one’s servant – one can divorce her in a month if one like, or in a minute paying a month’s wages! so what need to take the matter so gravely”<sup>42</sup> But she always did take the matter gravely, and took enormous trouble to make good relationships with her servants. Thomas’ ways didn’t always help – “She might be gone on quite comfortably with in any other house but this, where it is considered a sin against the Holy Ghost to set a chair or a plate two inches off the spot they have been used to stand on! And where the servant of a week is required to know all the outs and ins of the house as currently as the servant of ten years. Men are very unreasonable really and this man in particular....”<sup>43</sup> “I have to stand between them, and imitate in a small humble way the Roman soldier who gathered his arms full of the enemies’ spears and received them all into his own breast!”<sup>44</sup>

When Thomas returned from his trip to Germany in 1858 while Jane was still in Scotland, she wrote to Charlotte with explicit instructions: “Trouble him with as few questions as possible -- You can ask him whether he will take tea or coffee to breakfast? and whether he would like broth, or a pudding to dinner? you must always give him one or other with his meat. and either an egg to breakfast or a slice of bacon....If you take pains to please him I have no doubt you will....Heaven help you and him well thro’ it!”<sup>45</sup>

Most of Jane’s servants seem to have had deep and genuine affection for her – even Maria – employed for a month while Helen was away on holiday in 1844 – cried for two days when she had to leave – “certainly I have a wonderful luck for inspiring fervent passions to servant-maids!”<sup>46</sup> said Jane. Jane Welsh Carlyle had ‘a wonderful luck for inspiring fervent passions’ in more than just maid-servants, thanks to her charm and humour, her affectionate nature and her enormous fascination with the lives of others. For her, servants were no less deserving of such attention than anyone else – as she says in reply to a friend’s letter: “My goodness...why do you make bits of apologies to me for writing about the servants – as if ‘the *servants*’ were not a most important – a most fearful item in our female existence!”<sup>47</sup>

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42 JWC-TC [24 Aug. 1850], CL 25:174

43 Holme, 15-16

44 JWC-MR 15 Dec. 1862, NLM 2:276

45 JWC-CS [16 Sept. 1858], *Strand Magazine*

46 JWC-JW [ca. 12 June 1844], CL 18:64



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## SYLLABUS 2004-5



### CARLYLE SOCIETY: PROGRAMME FOR 2005-6

Meetings take place in 11 Buccleuch Place at 1415.

September 24 2005	Maurice Milne	The “Dark Expounder” and the “Melodious Voice”: Thomas Carlyle and Elizabeth Gaskell on Chartism
October 22	Malcolm Ingram	Dr. John Carlyle, Travelling Physician
November 26	Ian Campbell	Teaching Carlyle AGM and pre-Christmas celebration
February 11 2006	Liz Sutherland	Jane’s Gentlemen Callers
March 4	Sheila McIntosh	Living with <i>Frederick</i>
March 11	David Sorensen	Carlyle and Islam

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