ТОМАС КАРЛЕЙЛЬ

LIFE OF JOHN STERLING

Thomas Carlyle

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Carlyle T.

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Содержание

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PART I

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTORY

Near seven years ago, a short while before his death in 1844, John Sterling committed the care of his literary Character and printed Writings to two friends, Archdeacon Hare and myself. His estimate of the bequest was far from overweening; to few men could the small sum-total of his activities in this world seem more inconsiderable than, in those last solemn days, it did to him. He had burnt much; found much unworthy; looking steadfastly into the silent continents of Death and Eternity, a brave man's judgments about his own sorry work in the field of Time are not apt to be too lenient. But, in fine, here was some portion of his work which the world had already got hold of, and which he could not burn. This too, since it was not to be abolished and annihilated, but must still for some time live and act, he wished to be wisely settled, as the rest had been. And so it was left in charge to us, the survivors, to do for it what we judged fittest, if indeed doing nothing did not seem the fittest to us. This message, communicated after his decease, was naturally a sacred one to Mr. Hare and me.

After some consultation on it, and survey of the difficulties and delicate considerations involved in it, Archdeacon Hare and I agreed that the whole task, of selecting what Writings were to be reprinted, and of drawing up a Biography to introduce them, should be left to him alone; and done without interference of mine:—as accordingly it was,[1] in a manner surely far superior to the common, in every good quality of editing; and visibly everywhere bearing testimony to the friendliness, the piety, perspicacity and other gifts and virtues of that eminent and amiable man.

In one respect, however, if in one only, the arrangement had been unfortunate. Archdeacon Hare, both by natural tendency and by his position as a Churchman, had been led, in editing a Work not free from ecclesiastical heresies, and especially in writing a Life very full of such, to dwell with preponderating emphasis on that part of his subject; by no means extenuating the fact, nor yet passing lightly over it (which a layman could have done) as needing no extenuation; but carefully searching into it, with the view of excusing and explaining it; dwelling on it, presenting all the documents of it, and as it were spreading it over the whole field of his delineation; as if religious heterodoxy had been the grand fact of Sterling's life, which even to the Archdeacon's mind it could by no means seem to be. *Hinc illae lachrymae*. For the Religious Newspapers, and Periodical Heresy-hunters, getting very lively in those years, were prompt to seize the cue; and have prosecuted and perhaps still prosecute it, in their sad way, to all lengths and breadths. John Sterling's character and writings, which had little business to be spoken of in any Church-court, have hereby been carried thither as if for an exclusive trial; and the mournfulest set of pleadings, out of which nothing but a misjudgment *can* be formed, prevail there ever since. The noble Sterling, a radiant child of the empyrean, clad in bright auroral hues in the memory of all that knew him,—what is he doing here in inquisitorial *sanbenito*, with nothing but ghastly spectralities prowling round him, and inarticulately screeching and gibbering what they call their judgment on him!

"The sin of Hare's Book," says one of my Correspondents in those years, "is easily defined, and not very condemnable, but it is nevertheless ruinous to his task as Biographer. He takes up Sterling as a clergyman merely. Sterling, I find, was a curate for exactly eight months; during eight months

[1] *John Sterling's Essays and Tales, with Life* by Archdeacon Hare. Parker; London, 1848.

and no more had he any special relation to the Church. But he was a man, and had relation to the Universe, for eight-and-thirty years: and it is in this latter character, to which all the others were but features and transitory hues, that we wish to know him. His battle with hereditary Church formulas was severe; but it was by no means his one battle with things inherited, nor indeed his chief battle; neither, according to my observation of what it was, is it successfully delineated or summed up in this Book. The truth is, nobody that had known Sterling would recognize a feature of him here; you would never dream that this Book treated of *him* at all. A pale sickly shadow in torn surplice is presented to us here; weltering bewildered amid heaps of what you call 'Hebrew Old-clothes;' wrestling, with impotent impetuosity, to free itself from the baleful imbroglio, as if that had been its one function in life: who in this miserable figure would recognize the brilliant, beautiful and cheerful John Sterling, with his ever-flowing wealth of ideas, fancies, imaginations; with his frank affections, inexhaustible hopes, audacities, activities, and general radiant vivacity of heart and intelligence, which made the presence of him an illumination and inspiration wherever he went? It is too bad. Let a man be honestly forgotten when his life ends; but let him not be misremembered in this way. To be hung up as an ecclesiastical scarecrow, as a target for heterodox and orthodox to practice archery upon, is no fate that can be due to the memory of Sterling. It was not as a ghastly phantasm, choked in Thirty-nine-article controversies, or miserable Semitic, Anti-Semitic street-riots,—in scepticisms, agonized self-seekings, that this man appeared in life; nor as such, if the world still wishes to look at him should you suffer the world's memory of him now to be. Once for all, it is unjust; emphatically untrue as an image of John Sterling: perhaps to few men that lived along with him could such an interpretation of their existence be more inapplicable."

Whatever truth there might be in these rather passionate representations, and to myself there wanted not a painful feeling of their truth, it by no means appeared what help or remedy any friend of Sterling's, and especially one so related to the matter as myself, could attempt in the interim. Perhaps endure in patience till the dust laid itself again, as all dust does if you leave it well alone? Much obscuration would thus of its own accord fall away; and, in Mr. Hare's narrative itself, apart from his commentary, many features of Sterling's true character would become decipherable to such as sought them. Censure, blame of this Work of Mr. Hare's was naturally far from my thoughts. A work which distinguishes itself by human piety and candid intelligence; which, in all details, is careful, lucid, exact; and which offers, as we say, to the observant reader that will interpret facts, many traits of Sterling besides his heterodoxy. Censure of it, from me especially, is not the thing due; from me a far other thing is due!—

On the whole, my private thought was: First, How happy it comparatively is, for a man of any earnestness of life, to have no Biography written of him; but to return silently, with his small, sorely foiled bit of work, to the Supreme Silences, who alone can judge of it or him; and not to trouble the reviewers, and greater or lesser public, with attempting to judge it! The idea of "fame," as they call it, posthumous or other, does not inspire one with much ecstasy in these points of view.—Secondly, That Sterling's performance and real or seeming importance in this world was actually not of a kind to demand an express Biography, even according to the world's usages. His character was not supremely original; neither was his fate in the world wonderful. What he did was inconsiderable enough; and as to what it lay in him to have done, this was but a problem, now beyond possibility of settlement. Why had a Biography been inflicted on this man; why had not No-biography, and the privilege of all the weary, been his lot?—Thirdly, That such lot, however, could now no longer be my good Sterling's; a tumult having risen around his name, enough to impress some pretended likeness of him (about as like as the Guy-Fauxes are, on Gunpowder-Day) upon the minds of many men: so that he could not be forgotten, and could only be misremembered, as matters now stood.

Whereupon, as practical conclusion to the whole, arose by degrees this final thought, That, at some calmer season, when the theological dust had well fallen, and both the matter itself, and my feelings on it, were in a suitabler condition, I ought to give my testimony about this friend whom I

had known so well, and record clearly what my knowledge of him was. This has ever since seemed a kind of duty I had to do in the world before leaving it.

And so, having on my hands some leisure at this time, and being bound to it by evident considerations, one of which ought to be especially sacred to me, I decide to fling down on paper some outline of what my recollections and reflections contain in reference to this most friendly, bright and beautiful human soul; who walked with me for a season in this world, and remains to me very memorable while I continue in it. Gradually, if facts simple enough in themselves can be narrated as they came to pass, it will be seen what kind of man this was; to what extent condemnable for imaginary heresy and other crimes, to what extent laudable and lovable for noble manful *orthodoxy* and other virtues;—and whether the lesson his life had to teach us is not much the reverse of what the Religious Newspapers hitherto educe from it.

Certainly it was not as a "sceptic" that you could define him, whatever his definition might be. Belief, not doubt, attended him at all points of his progress; rather a tendency to too hasty and headlong belief. Of all men he was the least prone to what you could call scepticism: diseased self-listenings, self-questionings, impotently painful dubitations, all this fatal nosology of spiritual maladies, so rife in our day, was eminently foreign to him. Quite on the other side lay Sterling's faults, such as they were. In fact, you could observe, in spite of his sleepless intellectual vivacity, he was not properly a thinker at all; his faculties were of the active, not of the passive or contemplative sort. A brilliant *improvisatore*; rapid in thought, in word and in act; everywhere the promptest and least hesitating of men. I likened him often, in my banterings, to sheet-lightning; and reproachfully prayed that he would concentrate himself into a bolt, and rive the mountain-barriers for us, instead of merely playing on them and irradiating them.

True, he had his "religion" to seek, and painfully shape together for himself, out of the abysses of conflicting disbelief and sham-belief and bedlam delusion, now filling the world, as all men of reflection have; and in this respect too,—more especially as his lot in the battle appointed for us all was, if you can understand it, victory and not defeat,—he is an expressive emblem of his time, and an instruction and possession to his contemporaries. For, I say, it is by no means as a vanquished *doubter* that he figures in the memory of those who knew him; but rather as a victorious *believer*, and under great difficulties a victorious doer. An example to us all, not of lamed misery, helpless spiritual bewilderment and sprawling despair, or any kind of *drownage* in the foul welter of our so-called religious or other controversies and confusions; but of a swift and valiant vanquisher of all these; a noble asserter of himself, as worker and speaker, in spite of all these. Continually, so far as he went, he was a teacher, by act and word, of hope, clearness, activity, veracity, and human courage and nobleness: the preacher of a good gospel to all men, not of a bad to any man. The man, whether in priest's cassock or other costume of men, who is the enemy or hater of John Sterling, may assure himself that he does not yet know him,—that miserable differences of mere costume and dialect still divide him, whatsoever is worthy, catholic and perennial in him, from a brother soul who, more than most in his day, was his brother and not his adversary in regard to all that.

Nor shall the irremediable drawback that Sterling was not current in the Newspapers, that he achieved neither what the world calls greatness nor what intrinsically is such, altogether discourage me. What his natural size, and natural and accidental limits were, will gradually appear, if my sketching be successful. And I have remarked that a true delineation of the smallest man, and his scene of pilgrimage through life, is capable of interesting the greatest man; that all men are to an unspeakable degree brothers, each man's life a strange emblem of every man's; and that Human Portraits, faithfully drawn, are of all pictures the welcomest on human walls. Monitions and moralities enough may lie in this small Work, if honestly written and honestly read;—and, in particular, if any image of John Sterling and his Pilgrimage through our poor Nineteenth Century be one day wanted by the world, and they can find some shadow of a true image here, my swift scribbling (which shall be very swift and immediate) may prove useful by and by.

CHAPTER II. BIRTH AND PARENTAGE

John Sterling was born at Kaimes Castle, a kind of dilapidated baronial residence to which a small farm was then attached, rented by his Father, in the Isle of Bute,—on the 20th July, 1806. Both his parents were Irish by birth, Scotch by extraction; and became, as he himself did, essentially English by long residence and habit. Of John himself Scotland has little or nothing to claim except the birth and genealogy, for he left it almost before the years of memory; and in his mature days regarded it, if with a little more recognition and intelligence, yet without more participation in any of its accents outward or inward, than others natives of Middlesex or Surrey, where the scene of his chief education lay.

The climate of Bute is rainy, soft of temperature; with skies of unusual depth and brilliancy, while the weather is fair. In that soft rainy climate, on that wild-wooded rocky coast, with its gnarled mountains and green silent valleys, with its seething rain-storms and many-sounding seas, was young Sterling ushered into his first schooling in this world. I remember one little anecdote his Father told me of those first years: One of the cows had calved; young John, still in petticoats, was permitted to go, holding by his father's hand, and look at the newly arrived calf; a mystery which he surveyed with open intent eyes, and the silent exercise of all the scientific faculties he had;—very strange mystery indeed, this new arrival, and fresh denizen of our Universe: "Wull't eat a-body?" said John in his first practical Scotch, inquiring into the tendencies this mystery might have to fall upon a little fellow and consume him as provision: "Will it eat one, Father?"—Poor little open-eyed John: the family long bantered him with this anecdote; and we, in far other years, laughed heartily on hearing it.—Simple peasant laborers, ploughers, house-servants, occasional fisher-people too; and the sight of ships, and crops, and Nature's doings where Art has little meddled with her: this was the kind of schooling our young friend had, first of all; on this bench of the grand world-school did he sit, for the first four years of his life.

Edward Sterling his Father, a man who subsequently came to considerable notice in the world, was originally of Waterford in Munster; son of the Episcopalian Clergyman there; and chief representative of a family of some standing in those parts. Family founded, it appears, by a Colonel Robert Sterling, called also Sir Robert Sterling; a Scottish Gustavus-Adolphus soldier, whom the breaking out of the Civil War had recalled from his German campaignings, and had before long, though not till after some waverings on his part, attached firmly to the Duke of Ormond and to the King's Party in that quarrel. A little bit of genealogy, since it lies ready to my hand, gathered long ago out of wider studies, and pleasantly connects things individual and present with the dim universal crowd of things past,—may as well be inserted here as thrown away.

This Colonel Robert designates himself Sterling "of Glorat;" I believe, a younger branch of the well-known Stirlings of Keir in Stirlingshire. It appears he prospered in his soldiering and other business, in those bad Ormond times; being a man of energy, ardor and intelligence,—probably prompt enough both with his word and with his stroke. There survives yet, in the Commons Journals,[2] dim notice of his controversies and adventures; especially of one controversy he had got into with certain victorious Parliamentary official parties, while his own party lay vanquished, during what was called the Ormond Cessation, or Temporary Peace made by Ormond with the Parliament in 1646:—in which controversy Colonel Robert, after repeated applications, journeyings to London, attendances upon committees, and such like, finds himself worsted, declared to be in the wrong; and so vanishes from the Commons Journals.

What became of him when Cromwell got to Ireland, and to Munster, I have not heard: his knighthood, dating from the very year of Cromwell's Invasion (1649), indicates a man expected to do

[2] *Commons Journals*, iv. 15 (l0th January, 1644-5); and again v. 307 &c., 498 (18th September, 1647-15th March, 1647-8).

his best on the occasion:—as in all probability he did; had not Tredah Storm proved ruinous, and the neck of this Irish War been broken at once. Doubtless the Colonel Sir Robert followed or attended his Duke of Ormond into foreign parts, and gave up his management of Munster, while it was yet time: for after the Restoration we find him again, safe, and as was natural, flourishing with new splendor; gifted, recompensed with lands;—settled, in short, on fair revenues in those Munster regions. He appears to have had no children; but to have left his property to William, a younger brother who had followed him into Ireland. From this William descends the family which, in the years we treat of, had Edward Sterling, Father of our John, for its representative. And now enough of genealogy.

Of Edward Sterling, Captain Edward Sterling as his title was, who in the latter period of his life became well known in London political society, whom indeed all England, with a curious mixture of mockery and respect and even fear, knew well as "the Thunderer of the Times Newspaper," there were much to be said, did the present task and its limits permit. As perhaps it might, on certain terms? What is indispensable let us not omit to say. The history of a man's childhood is the description of his parents and environment: this is his inarticulate but highly important history, in those first times, while of articulate he has yet none.

Edward Sterling had now just entered on his thirty-fourth year; and was already a man experienced in fortunes and changes. A native of Waterford in Munster, as already mentioned; born in the "Deanery House of Waterford, 27th February, 1773," say the registers. For his Father, as we learn, resided in the Deanery House, though he was not himself Dean, but only "Curate of the Cathedral" (whatever that may mean); he was withal rector of two other livings, and the Dean's friend, —friend indeed of the Dean's kinsmen the Beresfords generally; whose grand house of Curraghmore, near by Waterford, was a familiar haunt of his and his children's. This reverend gentleman, along with his three livings and high acquaintanceships, had inherited political connections;—inherited especially a Government Pension, with survivorship for still one life beyond his own; his father having been Clerk of the Irish House of Commons at the time of the Union, of which office the lost salary was compensated in this way. The Pension was of two hundred pounds; and only expired with the life of Edward, John's Father, in 1847. There were, and still are, daughters of the family; but Edward was the only son;—descended, too, from the Scottish hero Wallace, as the old gentleman would sometimes admonish him; his own wife, Edward's mother, being of that name, and boasting herself, as most Scotch Wallaces do, to have that blood in her veins.

This Edward had picked up, at Waterford, and among the young Beresfords of Curraghmore and elsewhere, a thoroughly Irish form of character: fire and fervor, vitality of all kinds, in genial abundance; but in a much more loquacious, ostentatious, much *louder* style than is freely patronized on this side of the Channel. Of Irish accent in speech he had entirely divested himself, so as not to be traced by any vestige in that respect; but his Irish accent of character, in all manner of other more important respects, was very recognizable. An impetuous man, full of real energy, and immensely conscious of the same; who transacted everything not with the minimum of fuss and noise, but with the maximum: a very Captain Whirlwind, as one was tempted to call him.

In youth, he had studied at Trinity College, Dublin; visited the Inns of Court here, and trained himself for the Irish Bar. To the Bar he had been duly called, and was waiting for the results,—when, in his twenty-fifth year, the Irish Rebellion broke out; whereupon the Irish Barristers decided to raise a corps of loyal Volunteers, and a complete change introduced itself into Edward Sterling's way of life. For, naturally, he had joined the array of Volunteers;—fought, I have heard, "in three actions with the rebels" (Vinegar Hill, for one); and doubtless fought well: but in the mess-rooms, among the young military and civil officials, with all of whom he was a favorite, he had acquired a taste for soldier life, and perhaps high hopes of succeeding in it: at all events, having a commission in the Lancashire Militia offered him, he accepted that; altogether quitted the Bar, and became Captain Sterling thenceforth. From the Militia, it appears, he had volunteered with his Company into the Line; and, under some disappointments, and official delays of expected promotion, was continuing

to serve as Captain there, "Captain of the Eighth Battalion of Reserve," say the Military Almanacs of 1803,—in which year the quarters happened to be Derry, where new events awaited him. At a ball in Derry he met with Miss Hester Coningham, the queen of the scene, and of the fair world in Derry at that time. The acquaintance, in spite of some Opposition, grew with vigor, and rapidly ripened: and "at Fehan Church, Diocese of Derry," where the Bride's father had a country-house, "on Thursday 5th April, 1804, Hester Coningham, only daughter of John Coningham, Esquire, Merchant in Derry, and of Elizabeth Campbell his wife," was wedded to Captain Sterling; she happiest to him happiest,—as by Nature's kind law it is arranged.

Mrs. Sterling, even in her later days, had still traces of the old beauty: then and always she was a woman of delicate, pious, affectionate character; exemplary as a wife, a mother and a friend. A refined female nature; something tremulous in it, timid, and with a certain rural freshness still unweakened by long converse with the world. The tall slim figure, always of a kind of quaker neatness; the innocent anxious face, anxious bright hazel eyes; the timid, yet gracefully cordial ways, the natural intelligence, instinctive sense and worth, were very characteristic. Her voice too; with its something of soft querulousness, easily adapting itself to a light thin-flowing style of mirth on occasion, was characteristic: she had retained her Ulster intonations, and was withal somewhat copious in speech. A fine tremulously sensitive nature, strong chiefly on the side of the affections, and the graceful insights and activities that depend on these:—truly a beautiful, much-suffering, much-loving house-mother. From her chiefly, as one could discern, John Sterling had derived the delicate *aroma* of his nature, its piety, clearness, sincerity; as from his Father, the ready practical gifts, the impetuosities and the audacities, were also (though in strange new form) visibly inherited. A man was lucky to have such a Mother; to have such Parents as both his were.

Meanwhile the new Wife appears to have had, for the present, no marriage-portion; neither was Edward Sterling rich,—according to his own ideas and aims, far from it. Of course he soon found that the fluctuating barrack-life, especially with no outlooks of speedy promotion, was little suited to his new circumstances: but how change it? His father was now dead; from whom he had inherited the Speaker Pension of two hundred pounds; but of available probably little or nothing more. The rents of the small family estate, I suppose, and other property, had gone to portion sisters. Two hundred pounds, and the pay of a marching captain: within the limits of that revenue all plans of his had to restrict themselves at present.

He continued for some time longer in the Army; his wife undivided from him by the hardships, of that way of life. Their first son Anthony (Captain Anthony Sterling, the only child who now survives) was born to them in this position, while lying at Dundalk, in January, 1805. Two months later, some eleven months after their marriage, the regiment was broken; and Captain Sterling, declining to serve elsewhere on the terms offered, and willingly accepting such decision of his doubts, was reduced to half-pay. This was the end of his soldiering: some five or six years in all; from which he had derived for life, among other things, a decided military bearing, whereof he was rather proud; an incapacity for practicing law;—and considerable uncertainty as to what his next course of life was now to be.

For the present, his views lay towards farming: to establish himself, if not as country gentleman, which was an unattainable ambition, then at least as some kind of gentleman-farmer which had a flattering resemblance to that. Kaimes Castle with a reasonable extent of land, which, in his inquiries after farms, had turned up, was his first place of settlement in this new capacity; and here, for some few months, he had established himself when John his second child was born. This was Captain Sterling's first attempt towards a fixed course of life; not a very wise one, I have understood:—yet on the whole, who, then and there, could have pointed out to him a wiser?

A fixed course of life and activity he could never attain, or not till very late; and this doubtless was among the important points of his destiny, and acted both on his own character and that of those who had to attend him on his wayfarings.

CHAPTER III. SCHOOLS: LLANBLETHIAN; PARIS; LONDON

Edward Sterling never shone in farming; indeed I believe he never took heartily to it, or tried it except in fits. His Bute farm was, at best, a kind of apology for some far different ideal of a country establishment which could not be realized; practically a temporary landing-place from which he could make sallies and excursions in search of some more generous field of enterprise. Stormy brief efforts at energetic husbandry, at agricultural improvement and rapid field-labor, alternated with sudden flights to Dublin, to London, whithersoever any flush of bright outlook which he could denominate practical, or any gleam of hope which his impatient ennui could represent as such, allured him. This latter was often enough the case. In wet hay-times and harvest-times, the dripping outdoor world, and lounging indoor one, in the absence of the master, offered far from a satisfactory appearance! Here was, in fact, a man much imprisoned; haunted, I doubt not, by demons enough; though ever brisk and brave withal,—iracund, but cheerfully vigorous, opulent in wise or unwise hope. A fiery energetic soul consciously and unconsciously storming for deliverance into better arenas; and this in a restless, rapid, impetuous, rather than in a strong, silent and deliberate way.

In rainy Bute and the dilapidated Kaimes Castle, it was evident, there lay no Goshen for such a man. The lease, originally but for some three years and a half, drawing now to a close, he resolved to quit Bute; had heard, I know not where, of an eligible cottage without farm attached, in the pleasant little village of Llanblethian close by Cowbridge in Glamorganshire; of this he took a lease, and thither with his family he moved in search of new fortunes. Glamorganshire was at least a better climate than Bute; no groups of idle or of busy reapers could here stand waiting on the guidance of a master, for there was no farm here;—and among its other and probably its chief though secret advantages, Llanblethian was much more convenient both for Dublin and London than Kaimes Castle had been.

The removal thither took place in the autumn of 1809. Chief part of the journey (perhaps from Greenock to Swansea or Bristol) was by sea: John, just turned of three years, could in after-times remember nothing of this voyage; Anthony, some eighteen months older, has still a vivid recollection of the gray splashing tumult, and dim sorrow, uncertainty, regret and distress he underwent: to him a "dissolving-view" which not only left its effect on the *plate* (as all views and dissolving-views doubtless do on that kind of "plate"), but remained consciously present there. John, in the close of his twenty-first year, professes not to remember anything whatever of Bute; his whole existence, in that earliest scene of it, had faded away from him: Bute also, with its shaggy mountains, moaning woods, and summer and winter seas, had been wholly a dissolving-view for him, and had left no conscious impression, but only, like this voyage, an effect.

Llanblethian hangs pleasantly, with its white cottages, and orchard and other trees, on the western slope of a green hill looking far and wide over green meadows and little or bigger hills, in the pleasant plain of Glamorgan; a short mile to the south of Cowbridge, to which smart little town it is properly a kind of suburb. Plain of Glamorgan, some ten miles wide and thirty or forty long, which they call the Vale of Glamorgan;—though properly it is not quite a Vale, there being only one range of mountains to it, if even one: certainly the central Mountains of Wales do gradually rise, in a miscellaneous manner, on the north side of it; but on the south are no mountains, not even land, only the Bristol Channel, and far off, the Hills of Devonshire, for boundary,—the "English Hills," as the natives call them, visible from every eminence in those parts. On such wide terms is it called Vale of Glamorgan. But called by whatever name, it is a most pleasant fruitful region: kind to the native, interesting to the visitor. A waving grassy region; cut with innumerable ragged lanes; dotted with sleepy unswept human hamlets, old ruinous castles with their ivy and their daws, gray sleepy churches with their ditto ditto: for ivy everywhere abounds; and generally a rank fragrant vegetation clothes all things; hanging, in rude many-colored festoons and fringed odoriferous tapestries, on your

right and on your left, in every lane. A country kinder to the sluggard husbandman than any I have ever seen. For it lies all on limestone, needs no draining; the soil, everywhere of handsome depth and finest quality, will grow good crops for you with the most imperfect tilling. At a safe distance of a day's riding lie the tartarean copper-forges of Swansea, the tartarean iron-forges of Merthyr; their sooty battle far away, and not, at such safe distance, a defilement to the face of the earth and sky, but rather an encouragement to the earth at least; encouraging the husbandman to plough better, if he only would.

The peasantry seem indolent and stagnant, but peaceable and well-provided; much given to Methodism when they have any character;—for the rest, an innocent good-humored people, who all drink home-brewed beer, and have brown loaves of the most excellent home-baked bread. The native peasant village is not generally beautiful, though it might be, were it swept and trimmed; it gives one rather the idea of sluttish stagnancy,—an interesting peep into the Welsh Paradise of Sleepy Hollow. Stones, old kettles, naves of wheels, all kinds of broken litter, with live pigs and etceteras, lie about the street: for, as a rule, no rubbish is removed, but waits patiently the action of mere natural chemistry and accident; if even a house is burnt or falls, you will find it there after half a century, only cloaked by the ever-ready ivy. Sluggish man seems never to have struck a pick into it; his new hut is built close by on ground not encumbered, and the old stones are still left lying.

This is the ordinary Welsh village; but there are exceptions, where people of more cultivated tastes have been led to settle, and Llanblethian is one of the more signal of these. A decidedly cheerful group of human homes, the greater part of them indeed belonging to persons of refined habits; trimness, shady shelter, whitewash, neither conveniency nor decoration has been neglected here. Its effect from the distance on the eastward is very pretty: you see it like a little sleeping cataract of white houses, with trees overshadowing and fringing it; and there the cataract hangs, and does not rush away from you.

John Sterling spent his next five years in this locality. He did not again see it for a quarter of a century; but retained, all his life, a lively remembrance of it; and, just in the end of his twenty-first year, among his earliest printed pieces, we find an elaborate and diffuse description of it and its relations to him,—part of which piece, in spite of its otherwise insignificant quality, may find place here:—

"The fields on which I first looked, and the sands which were marked by my earliest footsteps, are completely lost to my memory; and of those ancient walls among which I began to breathe, I retain no recollection more clear than the outlines of a cloud in a moonless sky. But of L–, the village where I afterwards lived, I persuade myself that every line and hue is more deeply and accurately fixed than those of any spot I have since beheld, even though borne in upon the heart by the association of the strongest feelings.

"My home was built upon the slope of a hill, with a little orchard stretching down before it, and a garden rising behind. At a considerable distance beyond and beneath the orchard, a rivulet flowed through meadows and turned a mill; while, above the garden, the summit of the hill was crowned by a few gray rocks, from which a yew-tree grew, solitary and bare. Extending at each side of the orchard, toward the brook, two scattered patches of cottages lay nestled among their gardens; and beyond this streamlet and the little mill and bridge, another slight eminence arose, divided into green fields, tufted and bordered with copsewood, and crested by a ruined castle, contemporary, as was said, with the Conquest. I know not whether these things in truth made up a prospect of much beauty. Since I was eight years old, I have never seen them; but I well know that no landscape I have since beheld, no picture of Claude or Salvator, gave me half the impression of living, heartfelt, perfect beauty which fills my mind when I think of that green valley, that sparkling rivulet, that broken fortress of dark antiquity, and that hill with its aged yew and breezy summit, from which I have so often looked over the broad stretch of verdure beneath it, and the country-town, and church-tower, silent and white beyond.

"In that little town there was, and I believe is, a school where the elements of human knowledge were communicated to me, for some hours of every day, during a considerable time. The path to it lay across the rivulet and past the mill; from which point we could either journey through the fields below the old castle, and the wood which surrounded it, or along a road at the other side of the ruin, close to the gateway of which it passed. The former track led through two or three beautiful fields, the sylvan domain of the keep on one hand, and the brook on the other; while an oak or two, like giant warders advanced from the wood, broke the sunshine of the green with a soft and graceful shadow. How often, on my way to school, have I stopped beneath the tree to collect the fallen acorns; how often run down to the stream to pluck a branch of the hawthorn which hung over the water! The road which passed the castle joined, beyond these fields, the path which traversed them. It took, I well remember, a certain solemn and mysterious interest from the ruin. The shadow of the archway, the discolorizations of time on all the walls, the dimness of the little thicket which encircled it, the traditions of its immeasurable age, made St. Quentin's Castle a wonderful and awful fabric in the imagination of a child; and long after I last saw its mouldering roughness, I never read of fortresses, or heights, or spectres, or banditti, without connecting them with the one ruin of my childhood.

"It was close to this spot that one of the few adventures occurred which marked, in my mind, my boyish days with importance. When loitering beyond the castle, on the way to school, with a brother somewhat older than myself, who was uniformly my champion and protector, we espied a round sloe high up in the hedge-row. We determined to obtain it; and I do not remember whether both of us, or only my brother, climbed the tree. However, when the prize was all but reached,—and no alchemist ever looked more eagerly for the moment of projection which was to give him immortality and omnipotence,—a gruff voice startled us with an oath, and an order to desist; and I well recollect looking back, for long after, with terror to the vision of an old and ill-tempered farmer, armed with a bill-hook, and vowing our decapitation; nor did I subsequently remember without triumph the eloquence whereby alone, in my firm belief, my brother and myself had been rescued from instant death.

"At the entrance of the little town stood an old gateway, with a pointed arch and decaying battlements. It gave admittance to the street which contained the church, and which terminated in another street, the principal one in the town of C–. In this was situated the school to which I daily wended. I cannot now recall to mind the face of its good conductor, nor of any of his scholars; but I have before me a strong general image of the interior of his establishment. I remember the reverence with which I was wont to carry to his seat a well-thumbed duodecimo, the *History of Greece* by Oliver Goldsmith. I remember the mental agonies I endured in attempting to master the art and mystery of penmanship; a craft in which, alas, I remained too short a time under Mr. R– to become as great a proficient as he made his other scholars, and which my awkwardness has prevented me from attaining in any considerable perfection under my various subsequent pedagogues. But that which has left behind it a brilliant trait of light was the exhibition of what are called 'Christmas pieces;' things unknown in aristocratic seminaries, but constantly used at the comparatively humble academy which supplied the best knowledge of reading, writing, and arithmetic to be attained in that remote neighborhood.

"The long desks covered from end to end with those painted masterpieces, the Life of Robinson Crusoe, the Hunting of Chevy-Chase, the History of Jack the Giant-Killer, and all the little eager faces and trembling hands bent over these, and filling them up with some choice quotation, sacred or profane;—no, the galleries of art, the theatrical exhibitions, the reviews and processions,—which are only not childish because they are practiced and admired by men instead of children,—all the pomps and vanities of great cities, have shown me no revelation of glory such as did that crowded school-room the week before the Christmas holidays. But these were the splendors of life. The truest and the strongest feelings do not connect themselves with any scenes of gorgeous and gaudy magnificence; they are bound up in the remembrances of home.

"The narrow orchard, with its grove of old apple-trees against one of which I used to lean, and while I brandished a beanstalk, roar out with Fitzjames,—

'Come one, come all; this rock shall fly
From its firm base as soon as I!'—

while I was ready to squall at the sight of a cur, and run valorously away from a casually approaching cow; the field close beside it, where I rolled about in summer among the hay; the brook in which, despite of maid and mother, I waded by the hour; the garden where I sowed flower-seeds, and then turned up the ground again and planted potatoes, and then rooted out the potatoes to insert acorns and apple-pips, and at last, as may be supposed, reaped neither roses, nor potatoes, nor oak-trees, nor apples; the grass-plots on which I played among those with whom I never can play nor work again: all these are places and employments,—and, alas, playmates,—such as, if it were worth while to weep at all, it would be worth weeping that I enjoy no longer.

"I remember the house where I first grew familiar with peacocks; and the mill-stream into which I once fell; and the religious awe wherewith I heard, in the warm twilight, the psalm-singing around the house of the Methodist miller; and the door-post against which I discharged my brazen artillery; I remember the window by which I sat while my mother taught me French; and the patch of garden which I dug for— But her name is best left blank; it was indeed writ in water. These recollections are to me like the wealth of a departed friend, a mournful treasure. But the public has heard enough of them; to it they are worthless: they are a coin which only circulates at its true value between the different periods of an individual's existence, and good for nothing but to keep up a commerce between boyhood and manhood. I have for years looked forward to the possibility of visiting L–; but I am told that it is a changed village; and not only has man been at work, but the old yew on the hill has fallen, and scarcely a low stump remains of the tree which I delighted in childhood to think might have furnished bows for the Norman archers."[3]

In Cowbridge is some kind of free school, or grammar-school, of a certain distinction; and this to Captain Sterling was probably a motive for settling in the neighborhood of it with his children. Of this however, as it turned out, there was no use made: the Sterling family, during its continuance in those parts, did not need more than a primary school. The worthy master who presided over these Christmas galas, and had the honor to teach John Sterling his reading and writing, was an elderly Mr. Reece of Cowbridge, who still (in 1851) survives, or lately did; and is still remembered by his old pupils as a worthy, ingenious and kindly man, "who wore drab breeches and white stockings." Beyond the Reece sphere of tuition John Sterling did not go in this locality.

In fact the Sterling household was still fluctuating; the problem of a task for Edward Sterling's powers, and of anchorage for his affairs in any sense, was restlessly struggling to solve itself, but was still a good way from being solved. Anthony, in revisiting these scenes with John in 1839, mentions going to the spot "where we used to stand with our Father, looking out for the arrival of the London mail:" a little chink through which is disclosed to us a big restless section of a human life. The Hill of Welsh Llanblethian, then, is like the mythic Caucasus in its degree (as indeed all hills and habitations where men sojourn are); and here too, on a small scale, is a Prometheus Chained! Edward Sterling, I can well understand, was a man to tug at the chains that held him idle in those the prime of his years; and to ask restlessly, yet not in anger and remorse, so much as in hope, locomotive speculation, and ever-new adventure and attempt, Is there no task nearer my own natural size, then? So he looks out from the Hill-side "for the arrival of the London mail;" thence hurries into Cowbridge to the Post-office; and has a wide web, of threads and gossamers, upon his loom, and many shuttles flying, in this world.

[3] *Literary Chronicle*, New Series; London, Saturday, 21 June, 1828, Art. II.

By the Marquis of Bute's appointment he had, very shortly after his arrival in that region, become Adjutant of the Glamorganshire Militia, "Local Militia," I suppose; and was, in this way, turning his military capabilities to some use. The office involved pretty frequent absences, in Cardiff and elsewhere. This doubtless was a welcome outlet, though a small one. He had also begun to try writing, especially on public subjects; a much more copious outlet,—which indeed, gradually widening itself, became the final solution for him. Of the year 1811 we have a Pamphlet of his, entitled *Military Reform*; this is the second edition, "dedicated to the Duke of Kent;" the first appears to have come out the year before, and had thus attained a certain notice, which of course was encouraging. He now furthermore opened a correspondence with the *Times* Newspaper; wrote to it, in 1812, a series of Letters under the signature *Vetus*: voluntary Letters I suppose, without payment or pre-engagement, one successful Letter calling out another; till *Vetus* and his doctrines came to be a distinguishable entity, and the business amounted to something. Out of my own earliest Newspaper reading, I can remember the name *Vetus*, as a kind of editorial hacklog on which able-editors were wont to chop straw now and then. Nay the Letters were collected and reprinted; both this first series, of 1812, and then a second of next year: two very thin, very dim-colored cheap octavos; stray copies of which still exist, and may one day become distillable into a drop of History (should such be wanted of our poor "Scavenger Age" in time coming), though the reading of them has long ceased in this generation.[4] The first series, we perceive, had even gone to a second edition. The tone, wherever one timidly glances into this extinct cockpit, is trenchant and emphatic: the name of *Vetus*, strenuously fighting there, had become considerable in the talking political world; and, no doubt, was especially of mark, as that of a writer who might otherwise be important, with the proprietors of the *Times*. The connection continued: widened and deepened itself,—in a slow tentative manner; passing naturally from voluntary into remunerated: and indeed proving more and more to be the true ultimate arena, and battle-field and seed-field, for the exuberant impetuosities and faculties of this man.

What the *Letters of Vetus* treated of I do not know; doubtless they ran upon Napoleon, Catholic Emancipation, true methods of national defence, of effective foreign Anti-gallicism, and of domestic ditto; which formed the staple of editorial speculation at that time. I have heard in general that Captain Sterling, then and afterwards, advocated "the Marquis of Wellesley's policy;" but that also, what it was, I have forgotten, and the world has been willing to forget. Enough, the heads of the *Times* establishment, perhaps already the Marquis of Wellesley and other important persons, had their eye on this writer; and it began to be surmised by him that here at last was the career he had been seeking.

Accordingly, in 1814, when victorious Peace unexpectedly arrived; and the gates of the Continent after five-and-twenty years of fierce closure were suddenly thrown open; and the hearts of all English and European men awoke staggering as if from a nightmare suddenly removed, and ran hither and thither,—Edward Sterling also determined on a new adventure, that of crossing to Paris, and trying what might lie in store for him. For curiosity, in its idler sense, there was evidently pabulum enough. But he had hopes moreover of learning much that might perhaps avail him afterwards;—hopes withal, I have understood, of getting to be Foreign Correspondent of the *Times* Newspaper, and so adding to his income in the mean while. He left Llanblethian in May; dates from Dieppe the 27th of that month. He lived in occasional contact with Parisian notabilities (all of them except Madame de Stael forgotten now), all summer, diligently surveying his ground;—returned for his family, who were still in Wales but ready to move, in the beginning of August; took them immediately across with him; a house in the neighborhood of Paris, in the pleasant village of Passy at once town and country, being now ready; and so, under foreign skies, again set up his household there.

Here was a strange new "school" for our friend John now in his eighth year! Out of which the little Anthony and he drank doubtless at all pores, vigorously as they had done in no school

[4] "The Letters of Vetus from March 10th to May 10th, 1812" (second edition, London, 1812): Ditto, "Part III., with a Preface and Notes" (ibid. 1814).

before. A change total and immediate. Somniferous green Llanblethian has suddenly been blotted out; presto, here are wakeful Passy and the noises of paved Paris instead. Innocent ingenious Mr. Reece in drab breeches and white stockings, he with his mild Christmas galas and peaceable rules of Dilworth and Butterworth, has given place to such a saturnalia of panoramic, symbolic and other teachers and monitors, addressing all the five senses at once. Who John's express tutors were, at Passy, I never heard; nor indeed, especially in his case, was it much worth inquiring. To him and to all of us, the expressly appointed schoolmasters and schoolings we get are as nothing, compared with the unappointed incidental and continual ones, whose school-hours are all the days and nights of our existence, and whose lessons, noticed or unnoticed, stream in upon us with every breath we draw. Anthony says they attended a French school, though only for about three months; and he well remembers the last scene of it, "the boys shouting *Vive l'Empereur* when Napoleon came back."

Of John Sterling's express schooling, perhaps the most important feature, and by no means a favorable one to him, was the excessive fluctuation that prevailed in it. Change of scene, change of teacher, *both* express and implied, was incessant with him; and gave his young life a nomadic character,—which surely, of all the adventitious tendencies that could have been impressed upon him, so volatile, swift and airy a being as him, was the one he needed least. His gentle pious-hearted Mother, ever watching over him in all outward changes, and assiduously keeping human pieties and good affections alive in him, was probably the best counteracting element in his lot. And on the whole, have we not all to run our chance in that respect; and take, the most victoriously we can, such schooling as pleases to be attainable in our year and place? Not very victoriously, the most of us! A wise well-calculated breeding of a young genial soul in this world, or alas of any young soul in it, lies fatally over the horizon in these epochs!—This French scene of things, a grand school of its sort, and also a perpetual banquet for the young soul, naturally captivated John Sterling; he said afterwards, "New things and experiences here were poured upon his mind and sense, not in streams, but in a Niagara cataract." This too, however, was but a scene; lasted only some six or seven months; and in the spring of the next year terminated as abruptly as any of the rest could do.

For in the spring of the next year, Napoleon abruptly emerged from Elba; and set all the populations of the world in motion, in a strange manner;—set the Sterling household afloat, in particular; the big European tide rushing into all smallest creeks, at Passy and elsewhere. In brief, on the 20th of March, 1815, the family had to shift, almost to fly, towards home and the sea-coast; and for a day or two were under apprehension of being detained and not reaching home. Mrs. Sterling, with her children and effects, all in one big carriage with two horses, made the journey to Dieppe; in perfect safety, though in continual tremor: here they were joined by Captain Sterling, who had stayed behind at Paris to see the actual advent of Napoleon, and to report what the aspect of affairs was, "Downcast looks of citizens, with fierce saturnalian acclaim of soldiery:" after which they proceeded together to London without farther apprehension;—there to witness, in due time, the tar-barrels of Waterloo, and other phenomena that followed.

Captain Sterling never quitted London as a residence any more; and indeed was never absent from it, except on autumnal or other excursions of a few weeks, till the end of his life. Nevertheless his course there was as yet by no means clear; nor had his relations with the heads of the *Times*, or with other high heads, assumed a form which could be called definite, but were hanging as a cloudy maze of possibilities, firm substance not yet divided from shadow. It continued so for some years. The Sterling household shifted twice or thrice to new streets or localities,—Russell Square or Queen Square, Blackfriars Road, and longest at the Grove, Blackheath,—before the vapors of Wellesley promotions and such like slowly sank as useless precipitate, and the firm rock, which was definite employment, ending in lucrative co-proprietorship and more and more important connection with the *Times* Newspaper, slowly disclosed itself.

These changes of place naturally brought changes in John Sterling's schoolmasters: nor were domestic tragedies wanting, still more important to him. New brothers and sisters had been born;

two little brothers more, three little sisters he had in all; some of whom came to their eleventh year beside him, some passed away in their second or fourth: but from his ninth to his sixteenth year they all died; and in 1821 only Anthony and John were left.[5] How many tears, and passionate pangs, and soft infinite regrets; such as are appointed to all mortals! In one year, I find, indeed in one half-year, he lost three little playmates, two of them within one month. His own age was not yet quite twelve. For one of these three, for little Edward, his next younger, who died now at the age of nine, Mr. Hare records that John copied out, in large school-hand, a *History of Valentine and Orson*, to beguile the poor child's sickness, which ended in death soon, leaving a sad cloud on John.

Of his grammar and other schools, which, as I said, are hardly worth enumerating in comparison, the most important seems to have been a Dr. Burney's at Greenwich; a large day-school and boarding-school, where Anthony and John gave their attendance for a year or two (1818-19) from Blackheath. "John frequently did themes for the boys," says Anthony, "and for myself when I was aground." His progress in all school learning was certain to be rapid, if he even moderately took to it. A lean, tallish, loose-made boy of twelve; strange alacrity, rapidity and joyous eagerness looking out of his eyes, and of all his ways and movements. I have a Picture of him at this stage; a little portrait, which carries its verification with it. In manhood too, the chief expression of his eyes and physiognomy was what I might call alacrity, cheerful rapidity. You could see, here looked forth a soul which was winged; which dwelt in hope and action, not in hesitation or fear. Anthony says, he was "an affectionate and gallant kind of boy, adventurous and generous, daring to a singular degree." Apt enough withal to be "petulant now and then;" on the whole, "very self-willed;" doubtless not a little discursive in his thoughts and ways, and "difficult to manage."

I rather think Anthony, as the steadier, more substantial boy, was the Mother's favorite; and that John, though the quicker and cleverer, perhaps cost her many anxieties. Among the Papers given me, is an old browned half-sheet in stiff school hand, unpunctuated, occasionally ill spelt,—John Sterling's earliest remaining Letter,—which gives record of a crowning escapade of his, the first and the last of its kind; and so may be inserted here. A very headlong adventure on the boy's part; so hasty and so futile, at once audacious and impracticable; emblematic of much that befell in the history of the man!

"*To Mrs. Sterling, Blackheath.*

"21st September, 1818.

"DEAR MAMMA,—I am now at Dover, where I arrived this morning about seven o'clock. When you thought I was going to church, I went down the Kent Road, and walked on till I came to Gravesend, which is upwards of twenty miles from Blackheath; at about seven o'clock in the evening, without having eat anything the whole time. I applied to an inkeeper (*sic*) there, pretending that I had served a haberdasher in London, who left of (*sic*) business, and turned me away. He believed me; and got me a passage in the coach here, for I said that I had an Uncle here, and that my Father and Mother were dead;—when I wandered about the quays for some time, till I met Captain Keys, whom I asked to give me a passage to Boulogne; which he promised to do, and took me home to breakfast with him: but Mrs. Keys questioned me a good deal; when I not being able to make my story good, I was obliged to confess to her that I had run away from you. Captain Keys says that he will keep me at his house till you answer my letter.

"J. STERLING."

Anthony remembers the business well; but can assign no origin to it,—some penalty, indignity or cross put suddenly on John, which the hasty John considered unbearable. His Mother's inconsolable

[5] Here, in a Note, is the tragic little Register, with what indications for us may lie in it:— (l.) Robert Sterling died, 4th June, 1815, at Queen Square, in his fourth year (John being now nine). (2.) Elizabeth died, 12th March, 1818, at Blackfriars Road, in her second year. (3.) Edward, 30th March, 1818 (same place, same month and year), in his ninth. (4.) Hester, 21st July, 1818 (three months later), at Blackheath, in her eleventh. (5.) Catherine Hester Elizabeth, 16th January, 1821, in Seymour Street.

weeping, and then his own astonishment at such a culprit's being forgiven, are all that remain with Anthony. The steady historical style of the young runaway of twelve, narrating merely, not in the least apologizing, is also noticeable.

This was some six months after his little brother Edward's death; three months after that of Hester, his little sister next in the family series to him: troubled days for the poor Mother in that small household on Blackheath, as there are for mothers in so many households in this world! I have heard that Mrs. Sterling passed much of her time alone, at this period. Her husband's pursuits, with his Wellesleys and the like, often carrying him into Town and detaining him late there, she would sit among her sleeping children, such of them as death had still spared, perhaps thriftily plying her needle, full of mournful affectionate night-thoughts,—apprehensive too, in her tremulous heart, that the head of the house might have fallen among robbers in his way homeward.

CHAPTER IV. UNIVERSITIES: GLASGOW; CAMBRIDGE

At a later stage, John had some instruction from a Dr. Waite at Blackheath; and lastly, the family having now removed into Town, to Seymour Street in the fashionable region there, he "read for a while with Dr. Trollope, Master of Christ's Hospital;" which ended his school history.

In this his ever-changing course, from Reece at Cowbridge to Trollope in Christ's, which was passed so nomadically, under ferulas of various color, the boy had, on the whole, snatched successfully a fair share of what was going. Competent skill in construing Latin, I think also an elementary knowledge of Greek; add ciphering to a small extent, Euclid perhaps in a rather imaginary condition; a swift but not very legible or handsome penmanship, and the copious prompt habit of employing it in all manner of unconscious English prose composition, or even occasionally in verse itself: this, or something like this, he had gained from his grammar-schools: this is the most of what they offer to the poor young soul in general, in these indigent times. The express schoolmaster is not equal to much at present,—while the *un*express, for good or for evil, is so busy with a poor little fellow! Other departments of schooling had been infinitely more productive, for our young friend, than the gerund-grinding one. A voracious reader I believe he all along was,—had "read the whole Edinburgh Review" in these boyish years, and out of the circulating libraries one knows not what cartloads; wading like Ulysses towards his palace "through infinite dung." A voracious observer and participator in all things he likewise all along was; and had had his sights, and reflections, and sorrows and adventures, from Kaimes Castle onward,—and had gone at least to Dover on his own score. *Puer bonae spei*, as the school-albums say; a boy of whom much may be hoped? Surely, in many senses, yes. A frank veracity is in him, truth and courage, as the basis of all; and of wild gifts and graces there is abundance. I figure him a brilliant, swift, voluble, affectionate and pleasant creature; out of whom, if it were not that symptoms of delicate health already show themselves, great things might be made. Promotions at least, especially in this country and epoch of parliaments and eloquent palavers, are surely very possible for such a one!

Being now turned of sixteen, and the family economics getting yearly more propitious and flourishing, he, as his brother had already been, was sent to Glasgow University, in which city their Mother had connections. His brother and he were now all that remained of the young family; much attached to one another in their College years as afterwards. Glasgow, however, was not properly their College scene: here, except that they had some tuition from Mr. Jacobson, then a senior fellow-student, now (1851) the learned editor of St. Basil, and Regius Professor of Divinity in Oxford, who continued ever afterwards a valued intimate of John's, I find nothing special recorded of them. The Glasgow curriculum, for John especially, lasted but one year; who, after some farther tutorage from Mr. Jacobson or Dr. Trollope, was appointed for a more ambitious sphere of education.

In the beginning of his nineteenth year, "in the autumn of 1824," he went to Trinity College, Cambridge. His brother Anthony, who had already been there a year, had just quitted this Establishment, and entered on a military life under good omens; I think, at Dublin under the Lord Lieutenant's patronage, to whose service he was, in some capacity, attached. The two brothers, ever in company hitherto, parted roads at this point; and, except on holiday visits and by frequent correspondence, did not again live together; but they continued in a true fraternal attachment while life lasted, and I believe never had any even temporary estrangement, or on either side a cause for such. The family, as I said, was now, for the last three years, reduced to these two; the rest of the young ones, with their laughter and their sorrows, all gone. The parents otherwise were prosperous in outward circumstances; the Father's position more and more developing itself into affluent security, an agreeable circle of acquaintance, and a certain real influence, though of a peculiar sort, according to his gifts for work in this world.

Sterling's Tutor at Trinity College was Julius Hare, now the distinguished Archdeacon of Lewes:—who soon conceived a great esteem for him, and continued ever afterwards, in looser or closer connection, his loved and loving friend. As the Biographical and Editorial work above alluded to abundantly evinces. Mr. Hare celebrates the wonderful and beautiful gifts, the sparkling ingenuity, ready logic, eloquent utterance, and noble generosities and pieties of his pupil;—records in particular how once, on a sudden alarm of fire in some neighboring College edifice while his lecture was proceeding, all hands rushed out to help; how the undergraduates instantly formed themselves in lines from the fire to the river, and in swift continuance kept passing buckets as was needful, till the enemy was visibly fast yielding,—when Mr. Hare, going along the line, was astonished to find Sterling, at the river-end of it, standing up to his waist in water, deftly dealing with the buckets as they came and went. You in the river, Sterling; you with your coughs, and dangerous tendencies of health!—"Somebody must be in it," answered Sterling; "why not I, as well as another?" Sterling's friends may remember many traits of that kind. The swiftest in all things, he was apt to be found at the head of the column, whithersoever the march might be; if towards any brunt of danger, there was he surest to be at the head; and of himself and his peculiar risks or impediments he was negligent at all times, even to an excessive and plainly unreasonable degree.

Mr. Hare justly refuses him the character of an exact scholar, or technical proficient at any time in either of the ancient literatures. But he freely read in Greek and Latin, as in various modern languages; and in all fields, in the classical as well, his lively faculty of recognition and assimilation had given him large booty in proportion to his labor. One cannot under any circumstances conceive of Sterling as a steady dictionary philologue, historian, or archaeologist; nor did he here, nor could he well, attempt that course. At the same time, Greek and the Greeks being here before him, he could not fail to gather somewhat from it, to take some hue and shape from it. Accordingly there is, to a singular extent, especially in his early writings, a certain tinge of Grecism and Heathen classicality traceable in him;—Classicality, indeed, which does not satisfy one's sense as real or truly living, but which glitters with a certain genial, if perhaps almost meretricious half-*japannish* splendor,—greatly distinguishable from mere gerund-grinding, and death in longs and shorts. If Classicality mean the practical conception, or attempt to conceive, what human life was in the epoch called classical,—perhaps few or none of Sterling's contemporaries in that Cambridge establishment carried away more of available Classicality than even he.

But here, as in his former schools, his studies and inquiries, diligently prosecuted I believe, were of the most discursive wide-flowing character; not steadily advancing along beaten roads towards College honors, but pulsing out with impetuous irregularity now on this tract, now on that, towards whatever spiritual Delphi might promise to unfold the mystery of this world, and announce to him what was, in our new day, the authentic message of the gods. His speculations, readings, inferences, glances and conclusions were doubtless sufficiently encyclopedic; his grand tutors the multifarious set of Books he devoured. And perhaps,—as is the singular case in most schools and educational establishments of this unexampled epoch,—it was not the express set of arrangements in this or any extant University that could essentially forward him, but only the implied and silent ones; less in the prescribed "course of study," which seems to tend no-whither, than—if you will consider it—in the generous (not ungenerous) rebellion against said prescribed course, and the voluntary spirit of endeavor and adventure excited thereby, does help lie for a brave youth in such places. Curious to consider. The fagging, the illicit boating, and the things *forbidden* by the schoolmaster,—these, I often notice in my Eton acquaintances, are the things that have done them good; these, and not their inconsiderable or considerable knowledge of the Greek accidence almost at all! What is Greek accidence, compared to Spartan discipline, if it can be had? That latter is a real and grand attainment. Certainly, if rebellion is unfortunately needful, and you can rebel in a generous manner, several things may be acquired in that operation,—rigorous mutual fidelity, reticence, steadfastness, mild stoicism, and other virtues far transcending your Greek accidence. Nor can the unwisest "prescribed course

of study" be considered quite useless, if it have incited you to try nobly on all sides for a course of your own. A singular condition of Schools and High-schools, which have come down, in their strange old clothes and "courses of study," from the monkish ages into this highly unmonkish one;—tragical condition, at which the intelligent observer makes deep pause!

One benefit, not to be dissevered from the most obsolete University still frequented by young ingenuous living souls, is that of manifold collision and communication with the said young souls; which, to every one of these coevals, is undoubtedly the most important branch of breeding for him. In this point, as the learned Huber has insisted,[6] the two English Universities,—their studies otherwise being granted to be nearly useless, and even ill done of their kind,—far excel all other Universities: so valuable are the rules of human behavior which from of old have tacitly established themselves there; so manful, with all its sad drawbacks, is the style of English character, "frank, simple, rugged and yet courteous," which has tacitly but imperatively got itself sanctioned and prescribed there. Such, in full sight of Continental and other Universities, is Huber's opinion. Alas, the question of University Reform goes deep at present; deep as the world;—and the real University of these new epochs is yet a great way from us! Another judge in whom I have confidence declares further, That of these two Universities, Cambridge is decidedly the more catholic (not Roman catholic, but Human catholic) in its tendencies and habitudes; and that in fact, of all the miserable Schools and High-schools in the England of these years, he, if reduced to choose from them, would choose Cambridge as a place of culture for the young idea. So that, in these bad circumstances, Sterling had perhaps rather made a hit than otherwise?

Sterling at Cambridge had undoubtedly a wide and rather genial circle of comrades; and could not fail to be regarded and beloved by many of them. Their life seems to have been an ardently speculating and talking one; by no means excessively restrained within limits; and, in the more adventurous heads like Sterling's, decidedly tending towards the latitudinarian in most things. They had among them a Debating Society called The Union; where on stated evenings was much logic, and other spiritual fencing and ingenuous collision,—probably of a really superior quality in that kind; for not a few of the then disputants have since proved themselves men of parts, and attained distinction in the intellectual walks of life. Frederic Maurice, Richard Trench, John Kemble, Spedding, Venables, Charles Buller, Richard Milnes and others:—I have heard that in speaking and arguing, Sterling was the acknowledged chief in this Union Club; and that "none even came near him, except the late Charles Buller," whose distinction in this and higher respects was also already notable.

The questions agitated seem occasionally to have touched on the political department, and even on the ecclesiastical. I have heard one trait of Sterling's eloquence, which survived on the wings of grinning rumor, and had evidently borne upon Church Conservatism in some form: "Have they not,"—or perhaps it was, Has she (the Church) not,—"a black dragoon in every parish, on good pay and rations, horse-meat and man's-meat, to patrol and battle for these things?" The "black dragoon," which naturally at the moment ruffled the general young imagination into stormy laughter, points towards important conclusions in respect to Sterling at this time. I conclude he had, with his usual alacrity and impetuous daring, frankly adopted the anti-superstitious side of things; and stood scornfully prepared to repel all aggressions or pretensions from the opposite quarter. In short, that he was already, what afterwards there is no doubt about his being, at all points a Radical, as the name or nickname then went. In other words, a young ardent soul looking with hope and joy into a world which was infinitely beautiful to him, though overhung with falsities and foul cobwebs as world never was before; overloaded, overclouded, to the zenith and the nadir of it, by incredible uncredited traditions, solemnly sordid hypocrisies, and beggarly deliriums old and new; which latter class of objects it was clearly the part of every noble heart to expend all its lightnings and energies in burning up without delay, and sweeping into their native Chaos out of such a Cosmos as this. Which process, it did not

[6] *History of the English Universities*. (Translated from the German.)

then seem to him could be very difficult; or attended with much other than heroic joy, and enthusiasm of victory or of battle, to the gallant operator, in his part of it. This was, with modifications such as might be, the humor and creed of College Radicalism five-and-twenty years ago. Rather horrible at that time; seen to be not so horrible now, at least to have grown very universal, and to need no concealment now. The natural humor and attitude, we may well regret to say,—and honorable not dishonorable, for a brave young soul such as Sterling's, in those years in those localities!

I do not find that Sterling had, at that stage, adopted the then prevalent Utilitarian theory of human things. But neither, apparently, had he rejected it; still less did he yet at all denounce it with the damnatory vehemence we were used to in him at a later period. Probably he, so much occupied with the negative side of things, had not yet thought seriously of any positive basis for his world; or asked himself, too earnestly, What, then, is the noble rule of living for a man? In this world so eclipsed and scandalously overhung with fable and hypocrisy, what is the eternal fact, on which a man may front the Destinies and the Immensities? The day for such questions, sure enough to come in his case, was still but coming. Sufficient for this day be the work thereof; that of blasting into merited annihilation the innumerable and immeasurable recognized deliriums, and extirpating or coercing to the due pitch those legions of "black dragoons," of all varieties and purposes, who patrol, with horse-meat and man's-meat, this afflicted earth, so hugely to the detriment of it.

Sterling, it appears, after above a year of Trinity College, followed his friend Maurice into Trinity Hall, with the intention of taking a degree in Law; which intention, like many others with him, came to nothing; and in 1827 he left Trinity Hall and Cambridge altogether; here ending, after two years, his brief University life.

CHAPTER V. A PROFESSION

Here, then, is a young soul, brought to the years of legal majority, furnished from his training-schools with such and such shining capabilities, and ushered on the scene of things to inquire practically, What he will do there? Piety is in the man, noble human valor, bright intelligence, ardent proud veracity; light and fire, in none of their many senses, wanting for him, but abundantly bestowed: a kingly kind of man;—whose "kingdom," however, in this bewildered place and epoch of the world will probably be difficult to find and conquer!

For, alas, the world, as we said, already stands convicted to this young soul of being an untrue, unblessed world; its high dignitaries many of them phantasms and players'-masks; its worthships and worships unworshipful: from Dan to Beersheba, a mad world, my masters. And surely we may say, and none will now gainsay, this his idea of the world at that epoch was nearer to the fact than at most other epochs it has been. Truly, in all times and places, the young ardent soul that enters on this world with heroic purpose, with veracious insight, and the yet unclouded "inspiration of the Almighty" which has given us our intelligence, will find this world a very mad one: why else is he, with his little outfit of heroisms and inspirations, come hither into it, except to make it diligently a little saner? Of him there would have been no need, had it been quite sane. This is true; this will, in all centuries and countries, be true.

And yet perhaps of no time or country, for the last two thousand years, was it *so* true as here in this waste-weltering epoch of Sterling's and ours. A world all rocking and plunging, like that old Roman one when the measure of its iniquities was full; the abysses, and subterranean and supernal deluges, plainly broken loose; in the wild dim-lighted chaos all stars of Heaven gone out. No star of Heaven visible, hardly now to any man; the pestiferous fogs, and foul exhalations grown continual, have, except on the highest mountaintops, blotted out all stars: will-o'-wisps, of various course and color, take the place of stars. Over the wild-surging chaos, in the leaden air, are only sudden glares of revolutionary lightning; then mere darkness, with philanthropistic phosphorescences, empty meteoric lights; here and there an ecclesiastical luminary still hovering, hanging on to its old quaking fixtures, pretending still to be a Moon or Sun,—though visibly it is but a Chinese lantern made of *paper* mainly, with candle-end foully dying in the heart of it. Surely as mad a world as you could wish!

If you want to make sudden fortunes in it, and achieve the temporary hallelujah of flunkies for yourself, renouncing the perennial esteem of wise men; if you can believe that the chief end of man is to collect about him a bigger heap of gold than ever before, in a shorter time than ever before, you will find it a most handy and every way furthersome, blessed and felicitous world. But for any other human aim, I think you will find it not furthersome. If you in any way ask practically, How a noble life is to be led in it? you will be luckier than Sterling or I if you get any credible answer, or find any made road whatever. Alas, it is even so. Your heart's question, if it be of that sort, most things and persons will answer with a "Nonsense! Noble life is in Drury Lane, and wears yellow boots. You fool, compose yourself to your pudding!"—Surely, in these times, if ever in any, the young heroic soul entering on life, so opulent, full of sunny hope, of noble valor and divine intention, is tragical as well as beautiful to us.

Of the three learned Professions none offered any likelihood for Sterling. From the Church his notions of the "black dragoon," had there been no other obstacle, were sufficient to exclude him. Law he had just renounced, his own Radical philosophies disheartening him, in face of the ponderous impediments, continual up-hill struggles and formidable toils inherent in such a pursuit: with Medicine he had never been in any contiguity, that he should dream of it as a course for him. Clearly enough the professions were unsuitable; they to him, he to them. Professions, built so largely on speciosity instead of performance; clogged, in this bad epoch, and defaced under such suspicions of fatal imposture, were hateful not lovable to the young radical soul, scornful of gross profit, and intent

on ideals and human noblenesses. Again, the professions, were they never so perfect and veracious, will require slow steady pulling, to which this individual young radical, with his swift, far-darting brilliancies, and nomadic desultory ways, is of all men the most averse and unfitted. No profession could, in any case, have well gained the early love of Sterling. And perhaps withal the most tragic element of his life is even this, That there now was none to which he could fitly, by those wiser than himself, have been bound and constrained, that he might learn to love it. So swift, light-limbed and fiery an Arab courser ought, for all manner of reasons, to have been trained to saddle and harness. Roaming at full gallop over the heaths,—especially when your heath was London, and English and European life, in the nineteenth century,—he suffered much, and did comparatively little. I have known few creatures whom it was more wasteful to send forth with the bridle thrown up, and to set to steeple-hunting instead of running on highways! But it is the lot of many such, in this dislocated time,—Heaven mend it! In a better time there will be other "professions" than those three extremely cramp, confused and indeed almost obsolete ones: professions, if possible, that are true, and do *not* require you at the threshold to constitute yourself an impostor. Human association,—which will mean discipline, vigorous wise subordination and co-ordination,—is so unspeakably important. Professions, "regimented human pursuits," how many of honorable and manful might be possible for men; and which should *not*, in their results to society, need to stumble along, in such an unwieldy futile manner, with legs swollen into such enormous elephantiasis and no go at all in them! Men will one day think of the force they squander in every generation, and the fatal damage they encounter, by this neglect.

The career likeliest for Sterling, in his and the world's circumstances, would have been what is called public life: some secretarial, diplomatic or other official training, to issue if possible in Parliament as the true field for him. And here, beyond question, had the gross material conditions been allowed, his spiritual capabilities were first-rate. In any arena where eloquence and argument was the point, this man was calculated to have borne the bell from all competitors. In lucid ingenious talk and logic, in all manner of brilliant utterance and tongue-fence, I have hardly known his fellow. So ready lay his store of knowledge round him, so perfect was his ready utterance of the same,—in coruscating wit, in jocund drollery, in compact articulated clearness or high poignant emphasis, as the case required,—he was a match for any man in argument before a crowd of men. One of the most supple-wristed, dexterous, graceful and successful fencers in that kind. A man, as Mr. Hare has said, "able to argue with four or five at once;" could do the parrying all round, in a succession swift as light, and plant his hits wherever a chance offered. In Parliament, such a soul put into a body of the due toughness might have carried it far. If ours is to be called, as I hear some call it, the Talking Era, Sterling of all men had the talent to excel in it.

Probably it was with some vague view towards chances in this direction that Sterling's first engagement was entered upon; a brief connection as Secretary to some Club or Association into which certain public men, of the reforming sort, Mr. Crawford (the Oriental Diplomatist and Writer), Mr. Kirkman Finlay (then Member for Glasgow), and other political notabilities had now formed themselves,—with what specific objects I do not know, nor with what result if any. I have heard vaguely, it was "to open the trade to India." Of course they intended to stir up the public mind into co-operation, whatever their goal or object was: Mr. Crawford, an intimate in the Sterling household, recognized the fine literary gift of John; and might think it a lucky hit that he had caught such a Secretary for three hundred pounds a year. That was the salary agreed upon; and for some months actually worked for and paid; Sterling becoming for the time an intimate and almost an inmate in Mr. Crawford's circle, doubtless not without results to himself beyond the secretarial work and pounds sterling: so much is certain. But neither the Secretaryship nor the Association itself had any continuance; nor can I now learn accurately more of it than what is here stated;—in which vague state it must vanish from Sterling's history again, as it in great measure did from his life. From himself in after-years I never heard mention of it; nor were his pursuits connected afterwards with those of Mr. Crawford, though the mutual good-will continued unbroken.

In fact, however splendid and indubitable Sterling's qualifications for a parliamentary life, there was that in him withal which flatly put a negative on any such project. He had not the slow steady-pulling diligence which is indispensable in that, as in all important pursuits and strenuous human competitions whatsoever. In every sense, his momentum depended on velocity of stroke, rather than on weight of metal; "beautifulest sheet-lightning," as I often said, "not to be condensed into thunder-bolts." Add to this,—what indeed is perhaps but the same phenomenon in another form,—his bodily frame was thin, excitable, already manifesting pulmonary symptoms; a body which the tear and wear of Parliament would infallibly in few months have wrecked and ended. By this path there was clearly no mounting. The far-darting, restlessly coruscating soul, equips beyond all others to shine in the Talking Era, and lead National Palavers with their *spolia opima* captive, is imprisoned in a fragile hectic body which quite forbids the adventure. "*Es ist dafur gesorgt*," says Goethe, "Provision has been made that the trees do not grow into the sky;"—means are always there to stop them short of the sky.

CHAPTER VI. LITERATURE: THE ATHENAEUM

Of all forms of public life, in the Talking Era, it was clear that only one completely suited Sterling,—the anarchic, nomadic, entirely aerial and unconditional one, called Literature. To this all his tendencies, and fine gifts positive and negative, were evidently pointing; and here, after such brief attempting or thoughts to attempt at other posts, he already in this same year arrives. As many do, and ever more must do, in these our years and times. This is the chaotic haven of so many frustrate activities; where all manner of good gifts go up in far-seen smoke or conflagration; and whole fleets, that might have been war-fleets to conquer kingdoms, are *consumed* (too truly, often), amid "fame" enough, and the admiring shouts of the vulgar, which is always fond to see fire going on. The true Canaan and Mount Zion of a Talking Era must ever be Literature: the extraneous, miscellaneous, self-elected, indescribable *Parliamentum*, or Talking Apparatus, which talks by books and printed papers.

A literary Newspaper called *The Athenaeum*, the same which still subsists, had been founded in those years by Mr. Buckingham; James Silk Buckingham, who has since continued notable under various figures. Mr. Buckingham's *Athenaeum* had not as yet got into a flourishing condition; and he was willing to sell the copyright of it for a consideration. Perhaps Sterling and old Cambridge friends of his had been already writing for it. At all events, Sterling, who had already privately begun writing a Novel, and was clearly looking towards Literature, perceived that his gifted Cambridge friend, Frederic Maurice, was now also at large in a somewhat similar situation; and that here was an opening for both of them, and for other gifted friends. The copyright was purchased for I know not what sum, nor with whose money, but guess it may have been Sterling's, and no great sum;—and so, under free auspices, themselves their own captains, Maurice and he spread sail for this new voyage of adventure into all the world. It was about the end of 1828 that readers of periodical literature, and quidnuncs in those departments, began to report the appearance, in a Paper called the *Athenaeum, of* writings showing a superior brilliancy, and height of aim; one or perhaps two slight specimens of which came into my own hands, in my remote corner, about that time, and were duly recognized by me, while the authors were still far off and hidden behind deep veils.

Some of Sterling's best Papers from the *Athenaeum* have been published by Archdeacon Hare: first-fruits by a young man of twenty-two; crude, imperfect, yet singularly beautiful and attractive; which will still testify what high literary promise lay in him. The ruddiest glow of young enthusiasm, of noble incipient spiritual manhood reigns over them; once more a divine Universe unveiling itself in gloom and splendor, in auroral firelight and many-tinted shadow, full of hope and full of awe, to a young melodious pious heart just arrived upon it. Often enough the delineation has a certain flowing completeness, not to be expected from so young an artist; here and there is a decided felicity of insight; everywhere the point of view adopted is a high and noble one, and the result worked out a result to be sympathized with, and accepted so far as it will go. Good reading still, those Papers, for the less-furnished mind,—thrice-excellent reading compared with what is usually going. For the rest, a grand melancholy is the prevailing impression they leave;—partly as if, while the surface was so blooming and opulent, the heart of them was still vacant, sad and cold. Here is a beautiful mirage, in the dry wilderness; but you cannot quench your thirst there! The writer's heart is indeed still too vacant, except of beautiful shadows and reflexes and resonances; and is far from joyful, though it wears commonly a smile.

In some of the Greek delineations (*The Lycian Painter*, for example), we have already noticed a strange opulence of splendor, characterizable as half-legitimate, half-meretricious,—a splendor hovering between the raffaelesque and the japannish. What other things Sterling wrote there, I never knew; nor would he in any mood, in those later days, have told you, had you asked. This period of his life he always rather accounted, as the Arabs do the idolatrous times before Mahomet's advent, the "period of darkness."

CHAPTER VII. REGENT STREET

On the commercial side the *Athenaeum* still lacked success; nor was like to find it under the highly uncommercial management it had now got into. This, by and by, began to be a serious consideration. For money is the sinews of Periodical Literature almost as much as of war itself; without money, and under a constant drain of loss, Periodical Literature is one of the things that cannot be carried on. In no long time Sterling began to be practically sensible of this truth, and that an unpleasant resolution in accordance with it would be necessary. By him also, after a while, the *Athenaeum* was transferred to other hands, better fitted in that respect; and under these it did take vigorous root, and still bears fruit according to its kind.

For the present, it brought him into the thick of London Literature, especially of young London Literature and speculation; in which turbid exciting element he swam and revelled, nothing loath, for certain months longer,—a period short of two years in all. He had lodgings in Regent Street: his Father's house, now a flourishing and stirring establishment, in South Place, Knightsbridge, where, under the warmth of increasing revenue and success, miscellaneous cheerful socialities and abundant speculations, chiefly political (and not John's kind, but that of the *Times* Newspaper and the Clubs), were rife, he could visit daily, and yet be master of his own studies and pursuits. Maurice, Trench, John Mill, Charles Buller: these, and some few others, among a wide circle of a transitory phantasmal character, whom he speedily forgot and cared not to remember, were much about him; with these he in all ways employed and disported himself: a first favorite with them all.

No pleasanter companion, I suppose, had any of them. So frank, open, guileless, fearless, a brother to all worthy souls whatsoever. Come when you might, here is he open-hearted, rich in cheerful fancies, in grave logic, in all kinds of bright activity. If perceptibly or imperceptibly there is a touch of ostentation in him, blame it not; it is so innocent, so good and childlike. He is still fonder of jingling publicly, and spreading on the table, your big purse of opulences than his own. Abrupt too he is, cares little for big-wigs and garnitures; perhaps laughs more than the real fun he has would order; but of arrogance there is no vestige, of insincerity or of ill-nature none. These must have been pleasant evenings in Regent Street, when the circle chanced to be well adjusted there. At other times, Philistines would enter, what we call bores, dullards, Children of Darkness; and then,—except in a hunt of dullards, and a *bore-baiting*, which might be permissible,—the evening was dark. Sterling, of course, had innumerable cares withal; and was toiling like a slave; his very recreations almost a kind of work. An enormous activity was in the man;—sufficient, in a body that could have held it without breaking, to have gone far, even under the unstable guidance it was like to have!

Thus, too, an extensive, very variegated circle of connections was forming round him. Besides his *Athenaeum* work, and evenings in Regent Street and elsewhere, he makes visits to country-houses, the Bullers' and others; converses with established gentlemen, with honorable women not a few; is gay and welcome with the young of his own age; knows also religious, witty, and other distinguished ladies, and is admiringly known by them. On the whole, he is already locomotive; visits hither and thither in a very rapid flying manner. Thus I find he had made one flying visit to the Cumberland Lake-region in 1828, and got sight of Wordsworth; and in the same year another flying one to Paris, and seen with no undue enthusiasm the Saint-Simonian Portent just beginning to preach for itself, and France in general simmering under a scum of impieties, levities, Saint-Simonisms, and frothy fantasticalities of all kinds, towards the boiling-over which soon made the Three Days of July famous. But by far the most important foreign home he visited was that of Coleridge on the Hill of Highgate, —if it were not rather a foreign shrine and Dodona-Oracle, as he then reckoned,—to which (onwards from 1828, as would appear) he was already an assiduous pilgrim. Concerning whom, and Sterling's all-important connection with him, there will be much to say anon.

Here, from this period, is a Letter of Sterling's, which the glimpses it affords of bright scenes and figures now sunk, so many of them, sorrowfully to the realm of shadows, will render interesting to some of my readers. To me on the mere Letter, not on its contents alone, there is accidentally a kind of fateful stamp. A few months after Charles Buller's death, while his loss was mourned by many hearts, and to his poor Mother all light except what hung upon his memory had gone out in the world, a certain delicate and friendly hand, hoping to give the poor bereaved lady a good moment, sought out this Letter of Sterling's, one morning, and called, with intent to read it to her:—alas, the poor lady had herself fallen suddenly into the languors of death, help of another grander sort now close at hand; and to her this Letter was never read!

On "Fanny Kemble," it appears, there is an Essay by Sterling in the *Athenaeum* of this year: "16th December, 1829." Very laudatory, I conclude. He much admired her genius, nay was thought at one time to be vaguely on the edge of still more chivalrous feelings. As the Letter itself may perhaps indicate.

"*To Anthony Sterling, Esq., 24th Regiment, Dublin.*
"KNIGHTSBRIDGE, 10th Nov., 1829.

"MY DEAR ANTHONY,—Here in the Capital of England and of Europe, there is less, so far as I hear, of movement and variety than in your provincial Dublin, or among the Wicklow Mountains. We have the old prospect of bricks and smoke, the old crowd of busy stupid faces, the old occupations, the old sleepy amusements; and the latest news that reaches us daily has an air of tiresome, doting antiquity. The world has nothing for it but to exclaim with Faust, "Give me my youth again." And as for me, my month of Cornish amusement is over; and I must tie myself to my old employments. I have not much to tell you about these; but perhaps you may like to hear of my expedition to the West.

"I wrote to Polvellan (Mr. Buller's) to announce the day on which I intended to be there, so shortly before setting out, that there was no time to receive an answer; and when I reached Devonport, which is fifteen or sixteen miles from my place of destination, I found a letter from Mrs. Buller, saying that she was coming in two days to a Ball at Plymouth, and if I chose to stay in the mean while and look about me, she would take me back with her. She added an introduction to a relation of her husband's, a certain Captain Buller of the Rifles, who was with the Depot there,—a pleasant person, who I believe had been acquainted with Charlotte,[7] or at least had seen her. Under his superintendence—…

"On leaving Devonport with Mrs. Buller, I went some of the way by water, up the harbor and river; and the prospects are certainly very beautiful; to say nothing of the large ships, which I admire almost as much as you, though without knowing so much about them. There is a great deal of fine scenery all along the road to Looe; and the House itself, a very unpretending Gothic cottage, stands beautifully among trees, hills and water, with the sea at the distance of a quarter of a mile.

"And here, among pleasant, good-natured, well-informed and clever people, I spent an idle month. I dined at one or two Corporation dinners; spent a few days at the old Mansion of Mr. Buller of Morval, the patron of West Looe; and during the rest of the time, read, wrote, played chess, lounged, and ate red mullet (he who has not done this has not begun to live); talked of cookery to the philosophers, and of metaphysics to Mrs. Buller; and altogether cultivated indolence, and developed the faculty of nonsense with considerable pleasure and unexampled success. Charles Buller you know: he has just come to town, but I have not yet seen him. Arthur, his younger brother, I take to be one of the handsomest men in England; and he too has considerable talent. Mr. Buller the father is rather a clever man of sense, and particularly good-natured and gentlemanly; and his wife, who was a renowned beauty and queen of Calcutta, has still many striking and delicate traces of what she was. Her conversation is more brilliant and pleasant than that of any one I know; and, at all events, I am

[7] Mrs. Anthony Sterling, very lately Miss Charlotte Baird.

bound to admire her for the kindness with which she patronizes me. I hope that, some day or other, you may be acquainted with her.

"I believe I have seen no one in London about whom you would care to hear,—unless the fame of Fanny Kemble has passed the Channel, and astonished the Irish Barbarians in the midst of their bloody-minded politics. Young Kemble, whom you have seen, is in Germany: but I have the happiness of being also acquainted with his sister, the divine Fanny; and I have seen her twice on the stage, and three or four times in private, since my return from Cornwall. I had seen some beautiful verses of hers, long before she was an actress; and her conversation is full of spirit and talent. She never was taught to act at all; and though there are many faults in her performance of Juliet, there is more power than in any female playing I ever saw, except Pasta's Medea. She is not handsome, rather short, and by no means delicately formed; but her face is marked, and the eyes are brilliant, dark, and full of character. She has far more ability than she ever can display on the stage; but I have no doubt that, by practice and self-culture, she will be a far finer actress at least than any one since Mrs. Siddons. I was at Charles Kemble's a few evenings ago, when a drawing of Miss Kemble, by Sir Thomas Lawrence, was brought in; and I have no doubt that you will shortly see, even in Dublin, an engraving of her from it, very unlike the caricatures that have hitherto appeared. I hate the stage; and but for her, should very likely never have gone to a theatre again. Even as it is, the annoyance is much more than the pleasure; but I suppose I must go to see her in every character in which she acts. If Charlotte cares for plays, let me know, and I will write in more detail about this new Melpomene. I fear there are very few subjects on which I can say anything that will in the least interest her.

"Ever affectionately yours,
"J. STERLING."

Sterling and his circle, as their ardent speculation and activity fermented along, were in all things clear for progress, liberalism; their politics, and view of the Universe, decisively of the Radical sort. As indeed that of England then was, more than ever; the crust of old hide-bound Toryism being now openly cracking towards some incurable disruption, which accordingly ensued as the Reform Bill before long. The Reform Bill already hung in the wind. Old hide-bound Toryism, long recognized by all the world, and now at last obliged to recognize its very self, for an overgrown Imposture, supporting itself not by human reason, but by flunky blustering and brazen lying, superadded to mere brute force, could be no creed for young Sterling and his friends. In all things he and they were liberals, and, as was natural at this stage, democrats; contemplating root-and-branch innovation by aid of the hustings and ballot-box. Hustings and ballot-box had speedily to vanish out of Sterling's thoughts: but the character of root-and-branch innovator, essentially of "Radical Reformer," was indelible with him, and under all forms could be traced as his character through life.

For the present, his and those young people's aim was: By democracy, or what means there are, be all impostures put down. Speedy end to Superstition,—a gentle one if you can contrive it, but an end. What can it profit any mortal to adopt locutions and imaginations which do not correspond to fact; which no sane mortal can deliberately adopt in his soul as true; which the most orthodox of mortals can only, and this after infinite essentially *impious* effort to put out the eyes of his mind, persuade himself to "believe that he believes"? Away with it; in the name of God, come out of it, all true men!

Piety of heart, a certain reality of religious faith, was always Sterling's, the gift of nature to him which he would not and could not throw away; but I find at this time his religion is as good as altogether Ethnic, Greekish, what Goethe calls the Heathen form of religion. The Church, with her articles, is without relation to him. And along with obsolete spiritualisms, he sees all manner of obsolete thrones and big-wigged temporalities; and for them also can prophesy, and wish, only a speedy doom. Doom inevitable, registered in Heaven's Chancery from the beginning of days, doom

unalterable as the pillars of the world; the gods are angry, and all nature groans, till this doom of eternal justice be fulfilled.

With gay audacity, with enthusiasm tempered by mockery, as is the manner of young gifted men, this faith, grounded for the present on democracy and hustings operations, and giving to all life the aspect of a chivalrous battle-field, or almost of a gay though perilous tournament, and bout of "A hundred knights against all comers,"—was maintained by Sterling and his friends. And in fine, after whatever loud remonstrances, and solemn considerations, and such shaking of our wigs as is undoubtedly natural in the case, let us be just to it and him. We shall have to admit, nay it will behoove us to see and practically know, for ourselves and him and others, that the essence of this creed, in times like ours, was right and not wrong. That, however the ground and form of it might change, essentially it was the monition of his natal genius to this as it is to every brave man; the behest of all his clear insight into this Universe, the message of Heaven through him, which he could not suppress, but was inspired and compelled to utter in this world by such methods as he had. There for him lay the first commandment; *this* is what it would have been the unforgivable sin to swerve from and desert: the treason of treasons for him, it were there; compared with which all other sins are venial!

The message did not cease at all, as we shall see; the message was ardently, if fitfully, continued to the end: but the methods, the tone and dialect and all outer conditions of uttering it, underwent most important modifications!

CHAPTER VIII. COLERIDGE

Coleridge sat on the brow of Highgate Hill, in those years, looking down on London and its smoke-tumult, like a sage escaped from the inanity of life's battle; attracting towards him the thoughts of innumerable brave souls still engaged there. His express contributions to poetry, philosophy, or any specific province of human literature or enlightenment, had been small and sadly intermittent; but he had, especially among young inquiring men, a higher than literary, a kind of prophetic or magician character. He was thought to hold, he alone in England, the key of German and other Transcendentalisms; knew the sublime secret of believing by "the reason" what "the understanding" had been obliged to fling out as incredible; and could still, after Hume and Voltaire had done their best and worst with him, profess himself an orthodox Christian, and say and print to the Church of England, with its singular old rubrics and surplices at Allhallowtide, *Esto perpetua*. A sublime man; who, alone in those dark days, had saved his crown of spiritual manhood; escaping from the black materialisms, and revolutionary deluges, with "God, Freedom, Immortality" still his: a king of men. The practical intellects of the world did not much heed him, or carelessly reckoned him a metaphysical dreamer: but to the rising spirits of the young generation he had this dusky sublime character; and sat there as a kind of *Magus*, girt in mystery and enigma; his Dodona oak-grove (Mr. Gilman's house at Highgate) whispering strange things, uncertain whether oracles or jargon.

The Gilmans did not encourage much company, or excitation of any sort, round their sage; nevertheless access to him, if a youth did reverently wish it, was not difficult. He would stroll about the pleasant garden with you, sit in the pleasant rooms of the place,—perhaps take you to his own peculiar room, high up, with a rearward view, which was the chief view of all. A really charming outlook, in fine weather. Close at hand, wide sweep of flowery leafy gardens, their few houses mostly hidden, the very chimney-pots veiled under blossomy umbrage, flowed gloriously down hill; gloriously issuing in wide-tufted undulating plain-country, rich in all charms of field and town. Waving blooming country of the brightest green; dotted all over with handsome villas, handsome groves; crossed by roads and human traffic, here inaudible or heard only as a musical hum: and behind all swam, under olive-tinted haze, the illimitable limitary ocean of London, with its domes and steeples definite in the sun, big Paul's and the many memories attached to it hanging high over all. Nowhere, of its kind, could you see a grander prospect on a bright summer day, with the set of the air going southward,—southward, and so draping with the city-smoke not you but the city. Here for hours would Coleridge talk, concerning all conceivable or inconceivable things; and liked nothing better than to have an intelligent, or failing that, even a silent and patient human listener. He distinguished himself to all that ever heard him as at least the most surprising talker extant in this world,—and to some small minority, by no means to all, as the most excellent.

The good man, he was now getting old, towards sixty perhaps; and gave you the idea of a life that had been full of sufferings; a life heavy-laden, half-vanquished, still swimming painfully in seas of manifold physical and other bewilderment. Brow and head were round, and of massive weight, but the face was flabby and irresolute. The deep eyes, of a light hazel, were as full of sorrow as of inspiration; confused pain looked mildly from them, as in a kind of mild astonishment. The whole figure and air, good and amiable otherwise, might be called flabby and irresolute; expressive of weakness under possibility of strength. He hung loosely on his limbs, with knees bent, and stooping attitude; in walking, he rather shuffled than decisively steps; and a lady once remarked, he never could fix which side of the garden walk would suit him best, but continually shifted, in corkscrew fashion, and kept trying both. A heavy-laden, high-aspiring and surely much-suffering man. His voice, naturally soft and good, had contracted itself into a plaintive snuffle and singsong; he spoke as if preaching,—you would have said, preaching earnestly and also hopelessly the weightiest things. I still recollect his "object" and "subject," terms of continual recurrence in the Kantean province; and how

he sang and snuffled them into "om-m-mject" and "sum-m-mject," with a kind of solemn shake or quaver, as he rolled along. No talk, in his century or in any other, could be more surprising.

Sterling, who assiduously attended him, with profound reverence, and was often with him by himself, for a good many months, gives a record of their first colloquy.[8] Their colloquies were numerous, and he had taken note of many; but they are all gone to the fire, except this first, which Mr. Hare has printed,—unluckily without date. It contains a number of ingenious, true and half-true observations, and is of course a faithful epitome of the things said; but it gives small idea of Coleridge's way of talking;—this one feature is perhaps the most recognizable, "Our interview lasted for three hours, during which he talked two hours and three quarters." Nothing could be more copious than his talk; and furthermore it was always, virtually or literally, of the nature of a monologue; suffering no interruption, however reverent; hastily putting aside all foreign additions, annotations, or most ingenuous desires for elucidation, as well-meant superfluities which would never do. Besides, it was talk not flowing any-whither like a river, but spreading every-whither in inextricable currents and regurgitations like a lake or sea; terribly deficient in definite goal or aim, nay often in logical intelligibility; *what* you were to believe or do, on any earthly or heavenly thing, obstinately refusing to appear from it. So that, most times, you felt logically lost; swamped near to drowning in this tide of ingenious vocables, spreading out boundless as if to submerge the world.

To sit as a passive bucket and be pumped into, whether you consent or not, can in the long-run be exhilarating to no creature; how eloquent soever the flood of utterance that is descending. But if it be withal a confused unintelligible flood of utterance, threatening to submerge all known landmarks of thought, and drown the world and you!—I have heard Coleridge talk, with eager musical energy, two stricken hours, his face radiant and moist, and communicate no meaning whatsoever to any individual of his hearers,—certain of whom, I for one, still kept eagerly listening in hope; the most had long before given up, and formed (if the room were large enough) secondary humming groups of their own. He began anywhere: you put some question to him, made some suggestive observation: instead of answering this, or decidedly setting out towards answer of it, he would accumulate formidable apparatus, logical swim-bladders, transcendental life-preservers and other precautionary and vehiculatory gear, for setting out; perhaps did at last get under way,—but was swiftly solicited, turned aside by the glance of some radiant new game on this hand or that, into new courses; and ever into new; and before long into all the Universe, where it was uncertain what game you would catch, or whether any.

His talk, alas, was distinguished, like himself, by irresolution: it disliked to be troubled with conditions, abstinences, definite fulfilments;—loved to wander at its own sweet will, and make its auditor and his claims and humble wishes a mere passive bucket for itself! He had knowledge about many things and topics, much curious reading; but generally all topics led him, after a pass or two, into the high seas of theosophic philosophy, the hazy infinitude of Kantean transcendentalism, with its "sum-m-mjects" and "om-m-mjects." Sad enough; for with such indolent impatience of the claims and ignorances of others, he had not the least talent for explaining this or anything unknown to them; and you swam and fluttered in the mistiest wide unintelligible deluge of things, for most part in a rather profitless uncomfortable manner.

Glorious islets, too, I have seen rise out of the haze; but they were few, and soon swallowed in the general element again. Balmy sunny islets, islets of the blest and the intelligible:—on which occasions those secondary humming groups would all cease humming, and hang breathless upon the eloquent words; till once your islet got wrapt in the mist again, and they could recommence humming. Eloquent artistically expressive words you always had; piercing radiances of a most subtle insight came at intervals; tones of noble pious sympathy, recognizable as pious though strangely colored, were never wanting long: but in general you could not call this aimless, cloud-capt, cloud-based, lawlessly

[8] *Biography*, by Hare, pp. xvi-xxvi.

meandering human discourse of reason by the name of "excellent talk," but only of "surprising;" and were reminded bitterly of Hazlitt's account of it: "Excellent talker, very,—if you let him start from no premises and come to no conclusion." Coleridge was not without what talkers call wit, and there were touches of prickly sarcasm in him, contemptuous enough of the world and its idols and popular dignitaries; he had traits even of poetic humor: but in general he seemed deficient in laughter; or indeed in sympathy for concrete human things either on the sunny or on the stormy side. One right peal of concrete laughter at some convicted flesh-and-blood absurdity, one burst of noble indignation at some injustice or depravity, rubbing elbows with us on this solid Earth, how strange would it have been in that Kantean haze-world, and how infinitely cheering amid its vacant air-castles and dim-melting ghosts and shadows! None such ever came. His life had been an abstract thinking and dreaming, idealistic, passed amid the ghosts of defunct bodies and of unborn ones. The moaning singsong of that theosophico-metaphysical monotony left on you, at last, a very dreary feeling.

In close colloquy, flowing within narrower banks, I suppose he was more definite and apprehensible; Sterling in after-times did not complain of his unintelligibility, or imputed it only to the abtruse high nature of the topics handled. Let us hope so, let us try to believe so! There is no doubt but Coleridge could speak plain words on things plain: his observations and responses on the trivial matters that occurred were as simple as the commonest man's, or were even distinguished by superior simplicity as well as pertinency. "Ah, your tea is too cold, Mr. Coleridge!" mourned the good Mrs. Gilman once, in her kind, reverential and yet protective manner, handing him a very tolerable though belated cup.—"It's better than I deserve!" snuffled he, in a low hoarse murmur, partly courteous, chiefly pious, the tone of which still abides with me: "It's better than I deserve!"

But indeed, to the young ardent mind, instinct with pious nobleness, yet driven to the grim deserts of Radicalism for a faith, his speculations had a charm much more than literary, a charm almost religious and prophetic. The constant gist of his discourse was lamentation over the sunk condition of the world; which he recognized to be given up to Atheism and Materialism, full of mere sordid misbeliefs, mispursuits and misresults. All Science had become mechanical; the science not of men, but of a kind of human beavers. Churches themselves had died away into a godless mechanical condition; and stood there as mere Cases of Articles, mere Forms of Churches; like the dried carcasses of once swift camels, which you find left withering in the thirst of the universal desert, —ghastly portents for the present, beneficent ships of the desert no more. Men's souls were blinded, hebetated; and sunk under the influence of Atheism and Materialism, and Hume and Voltaire: the world for the present was as an extinct world, deserted of God, and incapable of well-doing till it changed its heart and spirit. This, expressed I think with less of indignation and with more of long-drawn querulousness, was always recognizable as the ground-tone:—in which truly a pious young heart, driven into Radicalism and the opposition party, could not but recognize a too sorrowful truth; and ask of the Oracle, with all earnestness, What remedy, then?

The remedy, though Coleridge himself professed to see it as in sunbeams, could not, except by processes unspeakably difficult, be described to you at all. On the whole, those dead Churches, this dead English Church especially, must be brought to life again. Why not? It was not dead; the soul of it, in this parched-up body, was tragically asleep only. Atheistic Philosophy was true on its side, and Hume and Voltaire could on their own ground speak irrefragably for themselves against any Church: but lift the Church and them into a higher sphere. Of argument, *they* died into inanition, the Church revivified itself into pristine florid vigor,—became once more a living ship of the desert, and invincibly bore you over stock and stone. But how, but how! By attending to the "reason" of man, said Coleridge, and duly chaining up the "understanding" of man: the *Vernunft* (Reason) and *Verstand* (Understanding) of the Germans, it all turned upon these, if you could well understand them, —which you couldn't. For the rest, Mr. Coleridge had on the anvil various Books, especially was about to write one grand Book *On the Logos*, which would help to bridge the chasm for us. So much appeared, however: Churches, though proved false (as you had imagined), were still true (as you were

to imagine): here was an Artist who could burn you up an old Church, root and branch; and then as the Alchemists professed to do with organic substances in general, distil you an "Astral Spirit" from the ashes, which was the very image of the old burnt article, its air-drawn counterpart,—this you still had, or might get, and draw uses from, if you could. Wait till the Book on the Logos were done; —alas, till your own terrene eyes, blind with conceit and the dust of logic, were purged, subtilized and spiritualized into the sharpness of vision requisite for discerning such an "om-m-mject."—The ingenuous young English head, of those days, stood strangely puzzled by such revelations; uncertain whether it were getting inspired, or getting infatuated into flat imbecility; and strange effulgence, of new day or else of deeper meteoric night, colored the horizon of the future for it.

Let me not be unjust to this memorable man. Surely there was here, in his pious, ever-laboring, subtle mind, a precious truth, or prefigurement of truth; and yet a fatal delusion withal. Prefigurement that, in spite of beaver sciences and temporary spiritual hebetude and cecity, man and his Universe were eternally divine; and that no past nobleness, or revelation of the divine, could or would ever be lost to him. Most true, surely, and worthy of all acceptance. Good also to do what you can with old Churches and practical Symbols of the Noble: nay quit not the burnt ruins of them while you find there is still gold to be dug there. But, on the whole, do not think you can, by logical alchemy, distil astral spirits from them; or if you could, that said astral spirits, or defunct logical phantasms, could serve you in anything. What the light of your mind, which is the direct inspiration of the Almighty, pronounces incredible,—that, in God's name, leave uncredited; at your peril do not try believing that. No subtlest hocus-pocus of "reason" versus "understanding" will avail for that feat;—and it is terribly perilous to try it in these provinces!

The truth is, I now see, Coleridge's talk and speculation was the emblem of himself: in it as in him, a ray of heavenly inspiration struggled, in a tragically ineffectual degree, with the weakness of flesh and blood. He says once, he "had skirted the howling deserts of Infidelity;" this was evident enough: but he had not had the courage, in defiance of pain and terror, to press resolutely across said deserts to the new firm lands of Faith beyond; he preferred to create logical fata-morganas for himself on this hither side, and laboriously solace himself with these.

To the man himself Nature had given, in high measure, the seeds of a noble endowment; and to unfold it had been forbidden him. A subtle lynx-eyed intellect, tremulous pious sensibility to all good and all beautiful; truly a ray of empyrean light;—but embedded in such weak laxity of character, in such indolences and esuriences as had made strange work with it. Once more, the tragic story of a high endowment with an insufficient will. An eye to discern the divineness of the Heaven's spendors and lightnings, the insatiable wish to revel in their godlike radiances and brilliances; but no heart to front the scathing terrors of them, which is the first condition of your conquering an abiding place there. The courage necessary for him, above all things, had been denied this man. His life, with such ray of the empyrean in it, was great and terrible to him; and he had not valiantly grappled with it, he had fled from it; sought refuge in vague daydreams, hollow compromises, in opium, in theosophic metaphysics. Harsh pain, danger, necessity, slavish harnessed toil, were of all things abhorrent to him. And so the empyrean element, lying smothered under the terrene, and yet inextinguishable there, made sad writhings. For pain, danger, difficulty, steady slaving toil, and other highly disagreeable behests of destiny, shall in nowise be shirked by any brightest mortal that will approve himself loyal to his mission in this world; nay precisely the higher he is, the deeper will be the disagreeableness, and the detestability to flesh and blood, of the tasks laid on him; and the heavier too, and more tragic, his penalties if he neglect them.

For the old Eternal Powers do live forever; nor do their laws know any change, however we in our poor wigs and church-tippets may attempt to read their laws. To *steal* into Heaven,—by the modern method, of sticking ostrich-like your head into fallacies on Earth, equally as by the ancient and by all conceivable methods,—is forever forbidden. High-treason is the name of that attempt; and it continues to be punished as such. Strange enough: here once more was a kind of Heaven-scaling

Ixion; and to him, as to the old one, the just gods were very stern! The ever-revolving, never-advancing Wheel (of a kind) was his, through life; and from his Cloud-Juno did not he too procreate strange Centaurs, spectral Puseyisms, monstrous illusory Hybrids, and ecclesiastical Chimeras,—which now roam the earth in a very lamentable manner!

CHAPTER IX. SPANISH EXILES

This magical ingredient thrown into the wild caldron of such a mind, which we have seen occupied hitherto with mere Ethnicism, Radicalism and revolutionary tumult, but hungering all along for something higher and better, was sure to be eagerly welcomed and imbibed, and could not fail to produce important fermentations there. Fermentations; important new directions, and withal important new perversions, in the spiritual life of this man, as it has since done in the lives of so many. Here then is the new celestial manna we were all in quest of? This thrice-refined pabulum of transcendental moonshine? Whoso eateth thereof,—yes, what, on the whole, will *he*

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.