CARLYLE AND HITLER

I was much struck, writes Carlyle to Emerson in 1853, some two years after the publication of *Latter Day Pamphlets* had shocked many of his most sincere admirers: "I was much struck with Plato and his ideas about Democracy, mere *Latter Day Pamphlets* saxa et faces (read *faeces*, if you like) refined into empyrean radiance and lightning of the Gods!—I for my part perceive the use of all this too, the inevitability of all this; but perceive it at the present height it has attained to be disastrous withal, to be horrible and even damnable. That Judas Iscariot should come and slap Jesus Christ on the shoulder in a familiar manner; that all heavenly nobleness should be flung out into the muddy streets there to jostle elbows with all the thickest-skinned denizens of Chaos, and get itself at every turn trampled into the gutters and annihilated: alas, the reverse of all this was, and is, and ever will be the strenuous effort and solemn heart purpose of every good citizen in every country of the world, and will reappear conspicuously as such (in New England and in Old first of all) when once this malodorous melancholy Uncle-Tommey is got all put by!

which will take some time yet I think''. So, in words as forcible as if they had been spoken by the author of *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, does Carlyle express his sincere conviction regarding the advent of Democracy as he sees it pouring in through the sluices successively opened by Whig, Radical, Tory and Liberal alike. But if Carlyle's contempt is as sincere and as vehemently expressed as that of Nietzsche he arrived at that conviction from a different angle of approach. It is with no naturally aristocratic contempt for the lower orders, or Junker's hardness of temper, that he speaks; quite otherwise. Carlyle did not share, he had not much respect for, Shakespeare's and Scott's ambition to win for themselves a place among those privileged beings who bear coats of arms, whom birth and fortune allow to cultivate the graces and splendours of life, a life that whatever its faults has a certain aesthetic appeal, the appeal of distinction if it be only of manner and tradition. Of the Scottish nobility he writes, after reading *Tales of a Grandfather*, ''Lastly, it is noteworthy that the nobles of this country have maintained a quite despicable behaviour from the time of Wallace downwards. A selfish, famishing, unprincipled set of hyaenas, though toothless now, still mischievous and greedy beyond limit''. Later indeed he said more than once in conversation that it was among the

English nobility he had met on the whole the best specimens of humanity this country had to show.

But it was with no aristocratic prejudice that Carlyle became the critic and foe of democracy; quite the opposite. The humour or temper of the young peasant who tramped to Edinburgh University and, turning away from the Presbyterian Ministry, spent bitter years in teaching, translating, hack-work of every kind, and spiritual wrestling, was more akin, he confesses, to that of a Sansculotist. You remember his description of Professor Teufelsdroeckh: "lifting his large tumbler of Gug-guk, and for a moment lowering his tobacco-pipe, he stood up in full coffee-house...and there with low soul-stirring tone and the look truly of an angel, though whether of a white or of a black one might be dubious, proposed this toast: *die Sache der Armen in Gottes und Teufels Namen*—the cause of the poor in Heaven's name and the —'s".

Die Sache der Armen, the cause of the poor, was Carlyle's abiding preoccupation, the inspiring motive of almost everything he wrote, but it did *not* make him a democrat or a philanthropist of the kind he saw around him, interested in the negroes of Borrioboolah Gha, or Jamaica, or the criminals in model prisons at home. Negroes were happiest, he thought, when made to work;

and model prisons and poor-houses were the sores, the scabs, which betrayed a deeper seated disease. It was not by doctoring the scabs at the expense of the struggling tax-payer that the disease was to be cured. It was his diagnosis of the disease that led him away from his friends, the whole Manchester school of *laissez-faire* and the Radicals—"Hide-bound Radicalism; to me a well-nigh insupportable thing—a breath as of the Sahara and the Infinite Sterile". It was this that brought him to a position not very remote from that of Nietzsche, if the spirit which animates it be different, if he demands the rule of the best not for *their* sake but for the sake of the poor, the victims of *laissez-faire*. But to understand Carlyle's political position and his doctrine of the Hero, of the relation of Might to Right, requires some consideration of the history of his thought.

For the best of a man's thinking is the work of his early years and this is pre-eminently true of the Prophet. When Christ entered on his three years' mission it was no longer as a learner but as a teacher: One who spake "with authority and not as the Scribes and Pharisees". Mohammed "was forty before he talked of any mission from Heaven". But thereafter he knew what his mission was. "I had a good talk", says Emerson, "with Carlyle last night. He says over and over for months, for years, the same thing." But

that is the note of the Prophet. "There is one God and Mahomet is his Prophet" is the burden of the Koran. The Kingdom of Heaven in the sermons of Christ is likened unto many things.

Well, Carlyle came to Edinburgh in 1808 and was a student there till 1814. He taught for two years with Edward Irving at Kirkcaldy. From 1818 to 1822 he was tutoring, hack-writing and wrestling with dyspepsia and the devil in the beautiful but draughty city of Edinburgh. In 1822 he became tutor to the Bullers, while continuing his literary work. In 1826 he married, and two years later retreated to Craigenputtock, where he composed *Sartor Resartus*, with which one may say his *Lehrjahre* end, though there were still years of suffering and financial uncertainty to follow. By that time he had come through deep waters to the message he had to deliver, religious and social. For the two foci around which his thought moved elliptically during these years were just these—religion, what to think of the Universe in which we find ourselves, and the social problem, the "condition of the people" question, as he calls it, presented in the acute forms of these years which have been so well described recently by the Hammonds.*

* *The Village Labourer*, 1760–1882 (London, 1920) and *The Town Labourer*, 1760–1882 (London, 1925), by J. L. Hammond and Barbara Hammond.

He had parted from his early Christian moorings as completely as Schopenhauer or Nietzsche. Through regard for his old mother, he continued to use in a sense of his own the language to which she and he were accustomed, with an effect that has sometimes bewildered his readers, sometimes perhaps himself. But of that later. No reader of his life and conversation can doubt that he thought of Christianity as something that had had its day. "Jesuitism", the title of one of his *Latter Day Pamphlets*, means in the broad sense he uses it, just what he thought Coleridge and Maurice and others were busy doing, trying to discover esoteric reasons for believing what had ceased to be believable. "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...is forever forbidden. High treason is the name of that attempt; and it continues to be punished as such." "Strange enough:" he says of Coleridge, "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 haunt the earth in a very lamentable manner!" The effect of this definite severance of old ties is the theme of the three most famous chapters of *Sartor Resartus*, and one must ask what was the faith to which in this crisis Carlyle attained. In the chapter called "The Everlasting No" he gets down to his own consciousness of good and evil, his own rejection of evil: "Thus had the Everlasting No (*das ewige Nein*) pealed authoritatively through all the recesses of my being, of my Me: and then it was that my whole Me stood up in native God-created majesty and with emphasis recorded its Protest.... The Everlasting No had said: 'Behold thou art fatherless, outcast, and the universe is mine (the Devil's)': to which my whole Me now made answer: '*I* am not thine, but Free, and forever hate thee!'" The experience is not unlike that which Professor Elton describes as the feeling with which we contemplate the close of a great moral tragedy like *King Lear*. Here is evil apparently triumphant, no solution of the mystery of things divinable, but yet we feel that we would rather be with Lear and Cordelia than with wickedness even triumphant. Whatever the moral character of the universe, the human soul remains the impregnable citadel of its own values. The next

step is more difficult to follow. It is a step which Nietzsche and Schopenhauer felt unable to take, for it is a judgment about the moral character, the fundamental justice of the universe however mysterious its operations. There is a *saltus*, in faith. It is a little difficult to follow the exact implication of the "Everlasting Yea" chapter, but one may divine its trend towards an idealistic conception of God and the World for which Carlyle found support in the philosophy of the Germans, though he has none of Coleridge's interest in the *systems* of Kant or Schelling or Hegel. "Often also could I see the black Tempest marching in anger through the Distance: round some Schreckhorn, as yet grim-blue would the eddying vapour gather and there tumultuous eddy and flow down like a mad witch's hair; till, after a space, it vanished, and in the clear sunbeam your Schreckhorn stood smiling grim-white, for the vapour had held snow. How thou fermentest and elaboratest, in thy great fermenting vat and laboratory of an Atmosphere, of a World, O Nature!—Or what is Nature? Ha! why do I not name thee God? Art not thou the 'Living Garment of God?' O Heavens, is it in very deed, He, then, that ever speaks through thee; that lives and loves in thee, that lives and loves in me?"

And so from his own soul Carlyle makes the

saltus to God. The working of the Infinite in the Finite—is not that the explanation of the interminable controversy of the origin of evil? "Man's Unhappiness comes of his Greatness: it is because there is an Infinite in him which with all his cunning he cannot quite bury under the Finite. Will the whole Finance Ministers and Upholsterers and Confectioners of modern Europe undertake in joint stock company to make one shoeblack HAPPY? They cannot accomplish it above an hour or two; for the shoeblack also has a Soul quite other than his stomach...", and so *Es leuchtet mir ein*, I see a glimpse of it, "there is in man a Higher than Love of Happiness; he can do without Happiness and instead thereof find Blessedness....On the roaring billows of Time thou art not engulfed, but borne aloft into the azure of Eternity. Love not Pleasure, Love God. This is the Everlasting Yea, wherein all contradictions are solved: wherein whoso walks and works it is well with him". So Carlyle recovered for himself, or believed he had, a religious outlook on life, a faith that, inscrutable as is the nature of God, there is a meaning in the word God—there is justice at the heart of things.

Of the bearing of this on the doctrine of the Hero I shall speak, but first must consider briefly how he approached the other great problem—

the social problem, the condition of the People under the rule of industrial *laissez-faire*, the Creed of Manchester. *Die Sache der Armen in Gottes und Teufels Namen*. Carlyle came of poor people, had known the problem of poverty at almost as close quarters as Burns, and his life in Edinburgh had made him familiar with the darker fate of the industrial poor of the city. In the strange chapter in *Sartor* called the "Dandiacal Body"—for *Sartor* was in part a satire on the dandiacal novel of Lytton and Disraeli—he describes in two picturesque figures the ever-widening gulf in society between the two sects of the Dandies and the Drudges, and what it seemed to him likely to lead to; and the problem of industry and the poor was the theme of his most passionately felt work, *Past and Present*, *Chartism*, and *Latter Day Pamphlets*. The last of these with its "Nigger Question," "Model Prisons," "Hudson's Statue," "Jesuitism," etc. has been a sad choke-pear to liberal philanthropists and many of Carlyle's admirers, but, with all its extravagances, it is a central work. It is in the light of what he says there that one must read his earlier works, for in this he turned on the head-lights with illuminating if also with somewhat dazzling effect. From it, as from *Past and Present*, it becomes clear what was to Carlyle the central evil in the condition of the poor. It was