

THE CARLYLE-BROWNING CORRESPONDENCE AND RELATIONSHIP : II¹

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THE next scene in the drama of this remarkable friendship is highly felicitous, and the onlooker feels that events are rapidly mounting to a kind of climax, significant in more ways than one. The Ashburtons had invited Carlyle to visit them in Paris in late September 1851, when they were to arrive there from Switzerland. After some hesitancy Carlyle agreed to come and made plans to leave London on Wednesday, 24 September. At Chapman's shop, on Tuesday, however, he learned that the Brownings were leaving for Paris soon and immediately walked to their residence to find out what their plans were. Browning seems to have been out at the time, but on his return he promptly wrote to Carlyle.

Letter 16. Browning to Carlyle. Tuesday [23 September 1851]. Published.²

I find to my great vexation that I have missed you—and I am unfortunately engaged this evening. Can I write anything that will serve?

We leave London on Thursday. . . . We purpose staying all night at Dieppe,—for our child's sake. . . . What our delight would be if by any combination you could accompany us, I shall not need, I hope to say. . . .

Carlyle decided to postpone his trip one day in order to travel with the Brownings. "The Brownings, and their experience and friendly qualities", he wrote in his detailed account of the visit later, "were worth waiting for during one day".³ Every-

¹ The first part of this article appeared in the preceding number of the BULLETIN.

² Hood, p. 34.

³ Carlyle's account of this trip to Paris entitled "Excursion (Futile Enough) to Paris: Autumn 1851" is to be found in the *Last Words of Thomas Carlyle* (London, 1892), 149-91. Reprinted with an Introduction by K. J. Fielding (London, 1971). Printed earlier in the *New Review*, v (October-December 1891), 298-307, 385-94, 481-90. See also the *Pall Mall Gazette*, 9 April 1891. The Pierpont Morgan Library owns the holograph manuscript. Carlyle wrote it rapidly and got some dates wrong.

thing proceeded according to plan. Carlyle wrote his wife from Paris :

The Brownings were just dismounting at London Bridge when I arrived, half an hour ahead of time : we did all extremely well together (except that Browning was a little loudish and talkative beyond need now and then) ; and certainly such company was a *treasure* compared with what one might have had ; for Browning *couriered* in the most perfect style all the way to Paris, and I had not the least thing to do, but sit still and look about me : an immense advantage in my poor case ! Our sea-voyage lasted nearly 8 hours, and did not finish till towards nine at night ; very rough and blustery, everybody sick, *sick* ; even I had to lie perfectly flat, and endure the spray and wet occasionalities, under pain of getting queasy. Then came the Custom-house, passports etc. . . .¹

Browning was among the sea-sick and, Carlyle said, “ lay in one of the bench-tents horizontal ”. Once in port, however, he sprang to life and, as Carlyle has said, managed everything. Their hotel at Dieppe was second-rate but quiet. Before going to bed, about ten-thirty, Carlyle took a night walk, as he liked to do in London : “ Walked through some streets with my cigar : high gaunt stone streets with little light but the uncertain moon’s ; sunk now in the profoundest sleep—at half-past ten.” That night he slept much better than usual. Next morning he and Browning took a walk while waiting for the train to Paris. It was a windy walk toward the sea, with “ sheer chalk cliffs some mile or two off ”. There was nothing along their way that these two were not curious about : an inscription at an old house honouring someone who had saved many persons from the sea, an old fisherman who told them the meaning of the inscription, an “ immense flaring crucifix aloft near the end of this quay ”, numerous sentries in red trousers, and “ a country ship, with fresh fish ”. Back at the hotel, Browning attended to last-minute details of business, while Carlyle “ sat out of doors on some logs at my ease, and smoked, looking over the population and their ways ”. In the noisy confusion at the railway station, “ Browning fought for us, and we—that is, the women, the child, and I—had only to wait and be silent ”. Dowden humorously observes that Carlyle got along very well even with little Pen

¹ 28 September 1851. In Trudy Bliss, *Thomas Carlyle: Letters to His Wife* (Cambridge, 1953), p. 274. See also an unpublished letter of the same date to Carlyle’s brother John, NLS, 514.24.

Browning although the child had not yet learned the meaning of the Everlasting No but that on one occasion he did exclaim to Pen : “ Why, sir, you have as many aspirations as Napoleon ! ”¹ Browning continued to fight for them until baggage had been cleared and French money had been supplied at the Paris railway station. Carlyle was soon safely bestowed in his room with the Ashburtons in the Rue de Rivoli. In Paris, despite the cordial hospitality of the Ashburtons and of Lady Ashburton’s mother Lady Sandwich, he found much that he disapproved. The French way of life, in particular, disgusted him, with “ their wretched mockeries about marriage, their canine libertinage and soulless grinning over all that is beautiful and pious in human relations ”. As he strolled about, exploring the city in his customary way, the long, straight Rue de Rivoli made him long for the crooked streets of London : “ Streets straight as a *line* have long ceased to seem the beautifullest to me.” He was struck by the “ dirt, litter of dust, fallen leaves or whatever there may be ” which he found in all public places. And the people whom he saw, some of whom he met and talked with, he scarcely liked better : the famous soldier Changarnier, whose “ small hook nose, long upper lip (all shaved), corners of which and mouth generally, and indeed face generally, express obstinacy, sulkiness, and silent long-continued labour and chagrin ” ; Thiers, whom he had seen before in London, “ a little brisk man towards sixty, with a round, white head, close-cropt and of solid business form and size ; round fat body tapering like a ninepin into small fat feet, and ditto hands ” ; Mérimée, “ a hard, logical, smooth but utterly barren man ” ; and Laborde, “ Syrian traveller ; a freer-going, jollier, but equally unproductive human soul ”. But he found a haven of refuge with the Brownings in their quiet old inn. With them he took tea, had brisk talk in native English, and took a delightful carriage excursion through the city. On the day before he left Paris he bought a collar and leash for Mrs. Carlyle’s little dog Nero ; and on Tuesday, 2 October, he returned to London. The Brownings remained in Paris. Carlyle, who had lost much sleep

¹ Pp. 140-1.

in Paris, spent several days drinking in "whole cataracts" of it.¹

Letter 17. Carlyle to Browning. 10 October 1851. Published.²

... Piccadilly and the Glass-Palace regions are still roaring with mad noise ; but here, thank Heaven, is a forgotten corner, where the wearied soul can cover itself as under a Diogenes' tub, and contemplate with what of cynic piety is left the tumultuous delirium of the world. . . .

Mazzini can at once afford you and Mrs. Browning, without any difficulty, the required introduction to Madame Dudevant [George Sand] ; only he says this sublime High-priestess of Anarchy is seldom now in Paris, only when there is some Play coming out or the like ; so you will require to be on the lookout for her advent, if you do not like to run out some time by railway (if there is a rail), and see her among her rustic neighbours,—within sound of the "Church Bell" she has lately *christened*, at the Curé's request. After all, I participate in your liking for the melody that runs through that strange "beautiful incontinent" soul,—a *Modern Magdalene*, with the "seven devils" mostly still in her ! At any rate, the introduction is most ready, the instant you write to me for it.

A certain *John* Chapman, Publisher of Liberalisms, "Extinct Socinianisms", and notable ware of that kind, in the Strand, has just been here : really a meritorious, productive kind of man, did he well know his road in these times. It appears he has just effected a purchase of the "Westminster Review" (Friend Lombe's) and has taken Lombe along with him, and other men of cash ; his intense purpose now is, To bring out a Review, Liberal in all senses, that shall charm the world. He has capital "for four years' trial", he says ; an able Editor (name can't be given),³ and such an array of "talent" as was seldom gathered before. Poor soul, I really wished him well in his enterprise, and regretted I could not help him myself, being clear for silence at present. Since his departure, I have bethought me of you ! There you are in Paris, there you were in Florence, with fiery interest in all manner of things, with whole libraries to write and say on this and the other thing ! The man means to pay, handsomely ; is indeed an *honest* kind of man, with real enthusiasm (tho' a soft and slobbery) in him, which can be predicated of very few. Think of it, whether there are not many things you could send him from Paris, and so get rid of them ? If you gave me signal, I would at once set Chapman on applying to you ;—only I fear you won't ! In which case there is nothing said, nor shall be. Adieu, dear Browning ; commend me to the gentle excellent Lady, and remember me now and then.

¹ Most of the details here come from Carlyle's "Excursion to Paris" and Mrs. Orr's *Life of Browning*, i. 249-51.

² In "Correspondence between Carlyle and Browning", pp. 655-6 ; and *Letters of Carlyle to Mill, Sterling, and Browning*, pp. 287-9. MS. : Professor Frederick W. Hilles.

³ Mary Ann Evans, who in 1857 began to publish under the pen-name George Eliot.

Letter 18. Browning to Carlyle. October 1851. Published.¹

... I observe you say nothing about returning in the Spring ; but when the horrible " Eleven hours " have done their worst and been forgotten, won't you reconsider the matter? And if Mrs. Carlyle will so far trust me, and tell me point by point what you both require, it shall go hard but I content you in some sort. . . . Well—for Mazzini, I and my wife thank him very heartily : such a letter as you promise will oblige us greatly, and I shall no doubt be able to find out, from people here, the best way of bringing it to bear on the great person. We heard quantities about her the other night—from what may possibly be an authentic source—how she has grown visibly aged of a sudden (like Mephistopheles at the Brocken when he says he finds people ripe for the last day), and is getting more resigned to it than she had expected, seeing that with youth go " a Hell of Passions "—(which is all she knows about it). Meanwhile, the next best thing to youth, and the Hell and so on, is found to be strenuous play-writing . . . one might as well or better, try and make articles for Chapman's Review, certainly ! I saw him in London by his desire, and he told me all about it. . . . I conceive your kindness in pointing out a way to him, had I wanted it. I have just done the little thing I told you of—a mere Preface to some new letters of Shelley ; not admitting of much workmanship of any kind, if I had it to give. But I have put down a few thoughts that presented themselves—one or two, in respect of opinions of your own (I mean, that I was thinking of those opinions while I wrote. However it be done, it is what I was " up to " just now, and will soon be off my mind. I shall always hope—for a great incentive—to write my best *directly to you* some day. Will you remember me as kindly as you can to Mrs. Carlyle—whom, rather than any other woman in the world, I have always wished my wife to know—as she could tell you. . . .

Unquestionably Carlyle and the Brownings had been drawn even closer together by the recent trip to Paris. Not only did Browning think of Carlyle at times when he was writing his essay on Shelley and earnestly insist that some day he hoped to be able to write his best directly to him, but Mrs. Browning had been further impressed. On 21 October she wrote to Mrs. Jameson :

Are you aware that Carlyle travelled with us to Paris? He left a deep impression with me. It is difficult to conceive a more interesting human soul, I think. All the bitterness is love with the point reversed. He seems to me to have a profound sensibility—so profound and turbulent that it unsettles his general sympathies.²

¹ In Hood, pp. 35-36. MS. : Armstrong Browning Library, Baylor University.

² *Letters of E. B. Browning*, ii. 25. See also *E. B. Browning: Letters to Her Sister*, p. 141.

And to Miss Mitford she wrote on the next day:

Carlyle . . . I like infinitely more in his personality than I expected to like him, and I saw a great deal of him, for he travelled with us to Paris and spent several evenings with us, we three together. He is one of the most interesting men I could imagine even, deeply interesting to me ; and you come to understand perfectly, when you know him, that his bitterness is only melancholy, and his scorn sensibility. Highly picturesque too he is in conversation. The talk of writing men is very seldom as good.¹

Letter 19. Carlyle to Browning. 28 October 1851. Published.²

Here is the Mazzini Letter, not achieved till last night, the Triumvir being busy with Kossuth and other chaotic objects. . . . May it bring a little pleasure to both of you one day ! Mazzini thinks a run out by railway, some day, to the place of Address might be a welcome method. . . . There is nothing mooted here of journeys to Paris or elsewhere. . . . The profound isolation I often contrive to secure for myself is a great comparative blessing ; the wearied ear, confounded with vain noises (I mean the spiritual ear withal), catches some touch of the "Eternal Silences", with amazement, with terror, joy, and almost horror and rapture blended ; not able to express itself in any way,—except it were a day's good weeping somewhere. . . . If I were to go to France, I think my next object would be Normandy rather ; to see the Bayeux Tapestry, the grave of W. Conqueror, and the footsteps (chiefly Cathedrals I believe) of those huge old Kings of ours. . . . Pray take order with Moxon that I may see that little piece you have been doing. And get into another bigger, *quam primum* ! You are not permitted to be silent much longer. Good be with that gentle Lady and you !

The Brownings did use Mazzini's letter and get to see George Sand at a time when conferences with her were not easy to obtain. Carlyle, perhaps unfortunately, did not visit Normandy and pursue his interest in William the Conqueror, about whom he was considering writing his next book, but turned instead to Frederick II, which was to prove over a twelve-year period to be an often dismal and uncongenial subject. On the other hand, his reversal of the doctrine of silence in Browning's present case and effort to spur him into action as a poet was to bring very definite results. The years 1851-5 were highly productive for Browning ; the poems of *Men and Women*, many of which are among his best, were in the making. The healthy indolence

¹ *Letters of E. B. Browning*, ii. 27.

² In "Correspondence of Carlyle and Browning", pp. 658-9 ; and *Letters of Carlyle to Mill, Sterling, and Browning*, pp. 289-90. MS. : Professor Frederick W. Hilles.

natural to him was closely associated with tremendous energy which the provocation and stimulus of Carlyle helped to release. Browning's mind and imagination were now in a state of ferment ; all sorts of ideas which had come to him through the years, including those which pertain to the poet's nature and function, were rising again to the surface, shaping themselves, and finding appropriate embodiment.

Browning's next letter to Carlyle, which seems to have been written in February 1852, has not been published, and I have not been able to find the original. It seems to have been an extremely important one in which Browning referred once more to his essay on Shelley, now in print, to Margaret Fuller Ossoli, and to the poet Béranger, whom he got glimpses of in Paris and held in great awe. He is the " old Chansonnier " of Carlyle's next letter.

Letter 20. Carlyle to Browning. 8 March 1852. Published.¹

About a fortnight ago I received your Letter, and the little Shelley Book along with it ; a most pleasant pair of objects. . . .

I liked the Essay extremely well indeed : a solid, well wrought massive manful bit of discourse ; and interesting to me, over and above, as the first bit of *prose* I had ever seen from you ;—I hope only the first of very many. You do not know how cheering to me the authentic sound of a *human* voice is ! I get so little except *ape*-voices ; the whole universe filled with one wide tempestuous cackle, which has neither depth nor sense, nor any kind of truth or nobleness in it. . . . This Essay of yours, and another little word by Emerson are the only new things I have read with real pleasure for a great while past. I agree with what you say of Shelley's moralities and spiritual position ; I honour and respect the weighty estimate you have formed of the Poetic Art ; and I admire very much the grave expressiveness of Style (a little too elaborate here and there), and the dignified tone, in which you manage to deliver yourself on all that.²

The Letters themselves are very innocent and clear ; and deserve printing, with such a name attached to them ; but it is not they that I care for on the present occasion. In fact I am not sure but you would excommunicate me,—at least lay me under the " lesser sentence ", for a time,—if I told you all I thought of Shelley ! Weak in genius, weak in character (for these two always go together) ; a poor thin, spasmodic, hectic, shrill and pallid being. . . . The speech

¹ In " Correspondence of Carlyle and Browning ", pp. 659-61 ; and *Letters of Carlyle to Mill, Sterling, and Browning*, pp. 290-4. The original of this excellent letter is in the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library.

² Carlyle also praises Browning's essay on Shelley in his unpublished letter to the publisher W. White, 22 March 1852. MS. : NLS, 2883.201.

of such is never good for much. Poor Shelley, there is something void and Hades-like in the whole inner world of him ; his universe is all vacant azure, hung with a few frosty mournful if beautiful stars ; the very voice of him (his style etc.) shrill, shrieky, to my ear has too much of the *ghost* !—In a word, it is not with Shelley, but with Shelley's Commentator that I take up my quarters at all : and to this latter I will say with emphasis, Give us some more of *your* writing, my friend ; we decidedly need a man or two like you, if we could get them ! Seriously, dear Browning, you must at least gird up your loins again ; and give us a right stroke of work :—I do not wish to hurry you ; far the contrary : but I remind you of what is expected ; and say with what joy I for one will see it arrive.—Nor do I restrict you to Prose, in spite of all I have said and still say : Prose or Poetry, either of them you can master ; and we will wait for you with welcome in whatever form your *Daimon* bids. Only see that *he* does bid it ; and then go with your best speed ;—and on the whole forgive, at any rate, these importunities, which I feel to partake much of the nature of impertinence, if you did not kindly interpret them. . . .

We have got thro' the two first volumes (I read them yesterday) of Margaret Fuller. . . . Poor Margaret meant well, and she might have read the phenomena infinitely worse, nay it is surprising she didn't. A gigantic Aspiration : in my life I have seen nothing stranger in that kind ; and very lovable withal. Except Emerson's part, the Book is but indifferently done. . . . How I should like to see the flop hat of the old Chansonnier !—Adieu, dear Browning.

A quick glance at some of the works which Browning wrote during this period reveals evidence of Carlyle's marked influence, much of it of a very significant kind. The essay on Shelley, finished in late 1851, in contrasting the subjective poet like Shelley with the objective poet, deals with many ideas which suggest Carlyle. The objective poet is a realist who writes "with an immediate reference, in every case, to the common eye and apprehension of his fellow men", but he also has "the poet's double faculty of seeing external objects more clearly, widely, and deeply, than is possible to the average mind" and of being able to remember the way the common mind grasps objects. He shows men whatever "in the inexhaustible variety of existence may have hitherto escaped their knowledge". All the bad poetry in the world is the result of "a want of correspondency" between the poet's work and "the verities of nature". "The misapprehensiveness of his age is exactly what a poet is sent to remedy." In great poetry "the whole being" is "moved by and suffused with a music at once of the soul and the sense". Browning's subjective poet also at times suggests Carlyle. He is "a seer". "What he produces will be less a

work than an effluence", an effluence which "cannot be easily considered in abstraction from his personality". "We cannot love it without loving him". It is no wonder that Carlyle, in spite of his antipathy for Shelley, liked this essay.

"Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came", written, according to DeVane, on 2 January 1852, has as its theme the admonition to effort and courage with the promise of sure victory whatever the odds may be which Carlyle iterated and reiterated in his letters to Browning and doubtless also in conversation. Hostile, fiendish, inhuman voices close in upon Roland at the end and heighten his feeling of isolation, somewhat as exhibition noises, ape voices, and other raucous sounds had closed in upon Carlyle and made him thankful for the warmly human voices of Browning and Emerson. Furthermore, there could be no more finely imaginative expression of Teufelsdröckh's spirit in defying the "Everlasting No" which at all points had challenged and menaced his individuality and significance as a human being than this poem gives. The grotesque idiom, images, and treatment of landscape all have affinities with corresponding characteristics of Carlyle's writing at times. The whole poem is a symbol, a product of the pure imagination. As Roland, after "a life spent training for the sight", approaches the "round squat turret" and with the whole universe aflame with hostility closing in upon him nevertheless is dauntless as he blows his slughorn, he snatches victory out of the very jaws of defeat. No poem could represent the essential Browning better; and no poem could express more adequately and powerfully the invincibility of the human spirit and the spirit of Thomas Carlyle.¹

"Transcendentalism: A Poem in Twelve Books", which DeVane assumes was written in the spring of 1853, is usually taken to be Browning's half-playful protest against both Boehme's abstruse mysticism and Carlyle's advice to poets to write prose. Shall the poet, Browning asks, put aside his harp and his magician's wand? Carlyle did, of course advise poets to write prose, his age being what it was. But he disliked the abstruse

¹ The parallels to this poem in "How they Brought the Good News", "Prospice", and the "Epilogue to Asolando" are well worth noting.

and the insubstantial, as we have seen in his comments on Shelley, fully as much as Browning did, and his own mind teemed with images. As for the harp, it brings us face to face with the complicated question of what kind of music poetry should have, which has been debated in the symposium provided by the letters. Carlyle, as we have seen, did not abruptly banish song from the kingdom of poetry. But what kind of song should it be? There are various facets to Browning's ideas about this question as about almost all questions. We perhaps discover a useful hint when we turn briefly to "Saul", another important poem dealing with music, which was first published in 1845 but republished with an extremely important addition in 1855. The music of this poem, it will be remembered, ascends through three levels. First, there are the simple tunes which David plays upon the harp without singing. Second, there are songs, both played and sung, having to do with the pleasant activities of human life and the wild joys of living. Third, and this comes in the lines added for the 1855 version of the poem, there is the climax in which the mysteries of the Redemption and the Incarnation are prophetically and ecstatically announced immediately following stanza 16, an extremely emphatic stanza made up of just one line: "Then the truth came upon me. No harp more—no song more! Outbroke". The clear implication is that the only music fitting and adequate for the expression of such a message and such poetry was that of the indefinable sounds of fervid, dramatic, impassioned human speech.

In Browning's final arrangement of the poems in *Men and Women* "Transcendentalism" comes first and "How It Strikes a Contemporary" second. The close conjunction of the two is no accident. They are companion poems, both dealing with conceptions having to do with poets and poetry, both being closely related to the essay on Shelley, and both having more than vague reference to the person and teaching of Thomas Carlyle. The poet of the harp and the magic wand in "Transcendentalism" is the subjective poet of the essay on Shelley. The poet of "How It Strikes a Contemporary" is the objective poet described in the same essay. Although

Browning thought of Shelley as primarily a subjective poet, the second poem owes something to his belief that poets are the unacknowledged legislators of mankind. It also owes something to Béranger, famous for his songs and a political-minded poet with simple habits, whom Browning had seen in Paris and who had taken hold of his imagination. But the poem is in the main a portrait of Carlyle and is actually a more detailed representation of him than "The Lost Leader" is of Wordsworth or than "Memorabilia" is of Shelley. The Brownings had agreed, it will be remembered, that Carlyle was a poet, "analyzing humanity back into its elements". Browning wrote the poem in late December 1851, or in early 1852, soon after he had had abundant opportunity to observe Carlyle and at a time when his relation to Carlyle was extremely happy. The poet here is a realistic observer of human life who is a great walker of city streets. For the Valladolid of the poem one may read London, Dieppe, Paris. His habits and his clothes are seemly and simple. He scents the world, "looking it full in face", and is curious even about the minutiae of the world about him. His "scrutinizing hat" strongly suggests the broad-brimmed black one which Carlyle often wore (it appears in Ford Madox Brown's picture *Work*). He is interested in the coffee-roaster and the cobbler as they do their work. And he is interested in the quality of workmanship as he pokes the very mortar between the bricks with the ferrel of his stick. He never misses the significance of anything, but has his own very special sense of values (like Teufelsdröckh in *Sartor* and Lazarus in "Karshish"). He is keenly interested in politics and writes letters to the King which in ways that can never be fully known cause things to happen. He has great compassion for living creatures: if anyone beats a horse or curses a woman, he takes note.¹ But he does not address himself to the people or seek to entertain them. He does not seek popularity. His letters like Milton's poetry

¹ Browning in an argument with Sidney Colvin spoke of Carlyle's consideration for the lower animals, insisted that he was "the most intensely, sensitively tender-hearted of men", and said that he had been filled with angry indignation when he saw a butcher boy flog a horse (Wilson, vi. 396). He could never believe that Carlyle mistreated Mrs. Carlyle.

are for the King, although the people may indirectly derive good from them. He is every inch an individual, altogether himself, so that he does not stare at you but you stare at him. And his face is striking :

. . . such a brow
His eyes had to live under ! clear as flint
On either side the formidable nose
Curved, cut, and coloured like an eagle's claw.¹

He is a kind of Puritan, with his simple habits and black suit. There is certainly nothing to the rumour that twenty naked girls change his plate at dinner ! And there is not one word about dancing or music in the whole poem. The poet writes *letters*, which may have a conversational flavour and the tones of the speaking voice, just as Browning himself was doing in "Karshish" and "Cleon". Perhaps in this poem and in "Childe Roland" Browning was attempting to keep his promise to Carlyle "to write my best *directly to you* some day".

The various ways in which Browning has influenced modern poets are very much worth examining against the background of his relation to Carlyle. These have been indicated and discussed in a highly illuminating paper by G. Robert Stange.² A rapid survey of some of Stange's points may serve to suggest the seminal power of Carlyle's mind, which both indirectly through Browning and directly may be influencing the poetry of our time far more than we may have realized. Eliot and Pound, Stange says, have both been influenced greatly by those who taught "the importance of *verse* as speech". Browning more and more attempted to find and use the natural speech rhythms as

¹ Margaret Fuller, describing Carlyle in the midst of sarcastic talk at the expense of Petrarch and Laura, says that he spoke the word *Laura* many times, "running his chin out, when he spoke it, and his eyes glancing till they looked like the eyes and beak of a bird of prey"; that he was veritably a "Teufelsdröckh vulture"; and that it was the habit of his mind "to follow out its own impulse, as the hawk its prey, and which knows not how to stop in the chase" (*Memoirs*, ii. 186, 189). Browning's poet does not have a wife; we may merely speculate whether Browning's incompatibility with Jane Welsh Carlyle helps to explain the fact. For an important discussion concerning Carlyle and Browning's "Transcendentalism", see Richard D. Altick, "Browning's 'Transcendentalism'", *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, lviii (January 1959), 24-28.

² "Browning and Modern Poetry", *Pacific Spectator*, viii (1954), 218-28.

Donne¹ had and as Yeats and other modern poets have tried to do. At the same time, Browning could at times break forth into pure song. According to Stange, Ezra Pound believed that "no true lyrics had been written in English since the time of Waller and Campion, except by Browning". We remember how in the early days Carlyle asked Browning, "Have you ever tried to write a *song*?" Stange says that in the period following the essay on Shelley Browning worked more and more toward the ideal of the *objective* poet, the ideal of many modern poets. It is interesting, furthermore, to keep Carlyle in mind as we read this sentence from Stange on Pound's "Near Perigord":

As in Browning's Renaissance studies we find a suggested auditor, an objective tone, startling leaps of thought, strange juxtaposition of ideas or images, even a fascination with varying approaches to the same set of facts, with the blurred distinction between "truth" and fiction.

He also speaks of Browning's preference for "leaps of logic, sudden pounces and illuminations, to consecutive reasoning". Here we have an almost perfect description of the movement of *Sartor Resartus*. Stange suggests further how many modern poets follow Browning in the use of the elliptical method and omitted transitions, of their tendency to go back to the past, and of their annihilation, as in Eliot's *The Waste Land*, of space and time. Perhaps most important are the galleries of portraits which Pound, Eliot, Robinson, Frost, Yeats, and others have followed Browning (and Carlyle) in producing.²

¹ For Browning and Donne, see J. E. Duncan, *Studies in Philology*, 1 (January 1953), 81-100; and R. L. Lowe, *Notes and Queries*, cxcviii (November 1953), 491-2.

² Perhaps it should be added that Carlyle, Browning, and many modern writers have attempted to make language malleable once more, as it had been in the hands of the Elizabethans. Garnett (p. 175) says that Carlyle laboured to achieve this result "with convulsive effort, as one hammers a red-hot bar", but with noteworthy success: "His supremacy is attested by the fact that he is one of the very few in whose hands language is wholly flexible and fusible." We may ask whether Carlyle's sledge-hammer blows and Browning's strong, unrelenting grip which squeezed, twisted, and reshaped conventional phrases and even idioms were required after the long period of the Enlightenment with its emphasis on set patterns and stiff rhetoric? On the other hand, we must note one significant point of contrast as we compare modern poets with Carlyle and Browning. The note of bewilderment, passive resignation, and defeatism, often struck in recent poems, is very far indeed from the courage, confidence, and

As we trace the story of the Carlyle-Browning friendship after the trip to Paris and the winter of 1852, we find it continuing in full strength but with plenty of incidents to make "earth's smoothness rough". The Brownings returned to England for the summer of 1852. Mrs. Carlyle wrote to Dr. John Carlyle on 27 July :

Oh, such a fuss the Brownings made over Mazzini this day! My private opinion of Browning is, in spite of Mr. C's favour for him, that he is "nothing", or very little more, "but a fluff of feathers!" She is *true* and *good*, and the most *womanly* creature.¹

At about the same time Mrs. Browning wrote to Miss Mitford : "Mazzini came to see us the other day. . . . Mrs. Carlyle came with him. She is a great favourite of mine : full of thought, and feeling, and character, it seems to me".² But by September even Mrs. Browning had begun to wear thin with Mrs. Carlyle. She wrote to her husband : "The Brownings brought me in their cab to Piccadilly and put me in an omnibus. It was a very dull thing indeed ; I like Browning less and less ; and even *she* does not grow on me."³

When the Brownings returned to England in the summer of 1855 after a long absence in Italy, the first news which Carlyle had of them was not pleasant to him. "The Brownings are here", he wrote to his brother John ; "have not come yet ;—hot in chase of 'spirit-rapping', we hear—*Ach Gott!*".⁴ Soon after when the Brownings saw Carlyle at John Forster's, Mrs. Browning wrote that he "was in great force, particularly in the damnatory clauses".⁵ She must not have got off lightly. In September Carlyle wrote again to his brother :

heroic willingness to battle in the face of great odds characteristic of the two Victorians.

¹ *New Letters and Memorials of Jane Welsh Carlyle*, ed. Alexander Carlyle (London and New York, 1903), p. 36. Compare Carlyle's comment on Wordsworth in a letter to his mother, 25 March 1835, after seeing him at Henry Taylor's : "Alas gude wife, nothing but a fluff o' feathers—when you come to weigh him." MS. : NLS, 520.41.

² *Letters of E. B. Browning*, ii. 78.

³ *New Letters and Memorials*, p. 44.

⁴ MS. : NLS, 525.5 ; dated 28 July. For Mrs. Browning on Carlyle and mesmerism, see *Letters of E. B. Browning to R. H. Horne*, ii. 173.

⁵ *Letters of E. B. Browning*, ii. 210.

Browning has come down too, to whom Neuberg could hardly be bridled into handsome behaviour. Browning stayed an hour after him; was really entertaining in his way. He *has* a singularly lively conception of every object that has come before him; and will give you the like, if you patiently endure, and let him haggle and wriggle thro' the strange jungle of loud speech (loud *soliloquy*, you would say, rather than dialogue) which is his way of communicating it. He has decidedly a good talent; but is unluckily, and now bids fair to continue, in the valley of the shadow of Man George-Sandism, Mazzini-ism, Leigh Huntism: one cannot help it; tho' it is a pity!¹

But when the Brownings returned to Paris for the winter, the correspondence was resumed very much on the old basis.

Letter 21. Carlyle to Browning. 4 December 1855. Published.²

Busily engaged on *Frederick the Great*, Carlyle asks Browning to get information for him relating to Voltaire and other French matters. At the end of the letter he adds:

Well, at any rate, this is all, dear Browning; and I will leave it with you,—calculating on forgiveness, if I give you labour in vain. I send my kind regards to the Lady and you: it is verily one of my sorrows and lasting regrets that you cannot be seen from night to night by me, but live on the other side of seas. I got a glimpse of your "Men and Women"; and will not rest till I have read it; There! That old "corregidor" [the poet in "How It Strikes a Contemporary"] is a diamond—unequaled since something else of yours I saw.

Courage ever, and stand to your arms!

Letter 22. Browning to Carlyle. 23 January 1856. Published.³

Browning has done the research for Carlyle which he requested and sends point-by-point answers to his questions. He also writes:

There was a precious word in your letter about one of my own things that went to my heart. Now have you understood me in another point? I was without the courage to send you the book—fearing the fate of Talleyrand's grandfather. I hold so to what kind feeling for me you express, and which I cannot have a right to doubt, therefore,—that it seemed foolish to hazard this by sending you poems to read you might like me none the better or somewhat the less for. But that fear seems stupid on reflection—you have written, beside the

¹ 26 September 1855; MS.: NLS, 525.10. Joseph Neuberg was a constant friend, helper, and disciple of Carlyle who translated some of his works into German.

² "Correspondence of Carlyle and Browning", pp. 661-3; *Letters of Carlyle to Mill, Sterling, and Browning*, pp. 294-6. MS.: sold by Sotheby, 2 May 1913.

³ Hood, pp. 43-45.

word now, many words once on a time—the best I ever got for my poems. If you do really care to give me so much honour and pleasure, you will ask Chapman for the book and take it with many fears (more than hopes) but much gratitude. So that is said to your understanding.

. . . Shall I hear from you, a sincere word such as you helped me with fifteen years ago and more? There are one or two misprints easy to rectify, however. As I believe no man a real poet or genius of any sort who does not go on improving till eighty and over, I shall begin again and again as often as you set me right. Kindest remembrances to Mrs. Carlyle from us both. . . .

Letter 23. Carlyle to Browning. 27 January 1856. Published.¹

This letter we must read in full not merely because it has not appeared in a collected edition, but also because it emphasizes again Carlyle's great delight in "How It Strikes a Contemporary" and the significant fact that Browning is now being acclaimed by the highly influential Ashburton circle.

Dear Browning,

Many thanks for the pleasant, welcome, and useful Letter I had from you the other day; one of the welcomest I have read for a long time. You have answered my questions in a most complete and successful way,—the answers turning out agreeable, too, on their own score;—and they were still perfectly "in time": alas, my bewildered tortoise-pace, in this Prussian element, is slow enough for any delay! The truth is, I had, on such glimmering evidence as there was, *taken* Du Chatelet for the man he turns out to be; and old Tally's blownup grandfather came in but as a passing phenomenon, herald of the Battle of Fontenoy, and could be turned on any side as the issue might come out. Pleasant and useful now to *know* that these two are who they are, and related to us, in this next Century, in the way we see! I will freely apply to you again, if I need the like service. Meanwhile, when you write again, please give me the full *Titles* etc. of those two books (Dictionaries, or whatever they are) which you have drawn from; their *Price* especially, and where they can be had on sale: the *London* Library, if one's own is too poor, ought to have a Copy of such Books.

I have also, in obedience to your generous order, written to Chapman for a Copy of *Men and Women*; hope to have it in a day or so further; and will certainly read it with attention,—as I may well do; as indeed I perceive all manner of intelligent people are diligently doing.² Such is the fact; beyond doubt, in this bottomless, shoreless, vilely fermenting mud-lake and general reservoir of Human Nonsense, which is called the "Literary Public". I can very well see you too have got an understanding audience scattered up and down;

¹ From the original in the Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery. Published with the permission of Robert O. Dougan, former Librarian. Published in "Some Lost and Unpublished Carlyle-Browning Correspondence".

² Browning's gift-copy of this work to Carlyle, with Carlyle's book-plate in vol. i, is in the Norman H. Strouse Collection, University of California, Santa Cruz.

and it may be satisfaction to reflect on that, in certain moods. "The great soul of this world", in spite of its outer Nonsenses, "is *just*". One has occasion to remember that, now and then; and the higher mount the floods of nonsense, the facts become the more sternly sacred to one. Courage, Courage! Brutal Delirium only *seems* to be the King of this world; and is not in reality,—much as he bothers, poor fellow, from time to time.

We were at a Country House in Hampshire, during Christmas time; and the entertainment of two evenings, much the best two that turned up, was reading (superlatively well-done) out of Browning's *Men and Women*. The Old Corregidor ("How it appears to a Contemporary"), that Devil's "Bishop and Gigadibs": we sat (being intelligent creatures, all) in rapt attention, with little ruffles of assent (chiefly *nasal*, laughter being prohibited as it were), and understood everything,—as indeed the melodious clear voice (Lady Ashburton's) had beforehand taken care to do. Two Evenings, the best two we had; and good hope there were of more, had not unluckily our reading genius "caught cold", and left us eclipsed thenceforth. Her Ladyship has one of the finest *strong* Lady voices and also one of the finest intellects capable of comprehending big and little; reads, therefore, without being the least of "a reader", better than any person I have heard.¹

You do me far too much honour, dear Browning, when you ask my poor counsel and judgment about these things. I have never been in doubt about the noble spiritual outfit I discovered in you from our first acquaintance, many years back now; and my faith still is, you have got a great deal to tell your poor fellow creatures contemporary and future. But as to the *How?* This I more and more see to be an infinitely complex question; dependent on individualities, idiosyncrasies; not to be judged by the bystander (who never will *completely* understand the question): on this way can I say, or what is the use of my saying at this stage? However, you are so loyal, you shall know what my impressions are, by and by.—I wish you lived here, Mrs. B. and you, on this side of the sea! Meanwhile, write now & then; and all good be ever with you.

Intrinsically one of Carlyle's best letters, it reveals much concerning the nature of Carlyle's influence and also the

¹ Tyndall, who also heard this reading, testifies that Carlyle's laughter was at times more than "little ruffles of assent": "It was then I first heard the resonant laugh of Carlyle. Himself a humourist on a high plane, he keenly enjoyed humour in others. Lady Ashburton, with fine voice and expression, read for us one of Browning's poems. It was obvious from his ejaculatory remarks that Carlyle enjoyed and admired Browning" (Wilson, v. 207). See also Jessie M. Anderson, "Humour: Carlyle and Browning", *Poet-Lore*, ii (August 1890), 421-3. D. G. Rossetti wrote to Browning on 6 February 1856 that Alexander Munro had recently had a long walk and talk about Browning with Carlyle in which he said, among other things, that Lady Ashburton's reading of "How It Strikes a Contemporary" had nearly made him give up his resolution against reading poetry (A. A. Adrian, "The Browning-Rossetti Friendship", *PMLA*, lxxiii (December 1958), 542). But Carlyle avoided hearing Tennyson read "Maud". See C. and F. Brookfield, *Mrs. Brookfield and Her Circle* (London, 1906), ii. 428-9.

combination of tact, critical honesty, and personal force which made it effective.

Letter 24. Carlyle to Browning. 25 April 1856. Published.¹

There is room here to abstract only a few sentences from this letter, but the whole of it should be read, for it gives in detail Carlyle's considered estimate of *Men and Women* and of Browning's development as a poet at this stage.

... It is certain there is an excellent opulence of intellect in these two rhymed volumes : intellect in the big ingot shape and down to the smallest current coin ;— I shall look far, I believe, to find such a pair of *eyes* as I see busy there inspecting human life this long while. The keenest just insight into men and things ;—and all that goes along with really good *insight* : a fresh valiant manful character, equipped with rugged humour, with just love, just contempt, well carried and bestowed ;—in fine a most extraordinary power of expression ; such I must call it, whether it be “ expressive ” enough, or not. Rhythm there is too, endless poetic fancy, symbolical *help* to express ; and if not melody always or often (for that would mean finish and perfection), there is what the Germans call *Takt*,— fine *dancing*, if to the music only of *drums*.²

... Nay, in a private way, I admit to myself that here apparently *the finest* poetic genius, finest possibility of such, we have got vouchsafed us in this generation, and that it will be a terrible pity if we spill it in the process of elaboration. Said genius, too, I perceive, has really *grown*, in all ways, since I saw it last. . . .

Well ! but what is the shadow side of the Picture, then ? For in that too I ought to be equally honest. My friend, it is what they call “ unintelligibility ” ! . . .

Now I do not mean to say the cure is easy, or the sin a mere perversity. God knows I too understand very well what it is to be “ unintelligible ” so-called. . . . But you *must* mend it, and alter. A writing man is there to be understood : let him lay that entirely to heart, and conform to it patiently ; the sooner the better !

I do not at this point any longer forbid you *verse*, as probably I once did. I perceive it has grown to be your dialect, it comes more naturally than prose ;— and in prose too a man can be “ unintelligible ” if he like ! My private notion of what *is* Poetry—Oh, I do hope to make *you*, one day, understand that ; which hitherto no one will do. . . . If you took up some *great subject*, and tasked all your powers upon it for a long while, vowing to Heaven that you *would* be plain to mean capacities, then— ! —But I have done, *done*. Good be with you always, dear Browning ; and high victory to sore fight !

In the summer of 1856 the Brownings returned to London.

¹ “ Correspondence of Carlyle and Browning ”, pp. 665-7 ; *Letters of Carlyle to Mill, Sterling, and Browning*, pp. 297-300. MS. : Berg Collection, New York Public Library.

² Carlyle once called a volume of Browning's verse “ a cartload of stones ” (Wilson, iii. 278).

There was no improvement in their relation to Mrs. Carlyle, who seems to have doubted Browning's sincerity. She wrote on 4 July, after a visit to Mrs. Montagu :

Browning came when I was there, and dropt on one knee and kissed her hand with a fervour ! And I have heard Browning speak slightly of Mrs. Montagu. To my mind Browning is a considerable of a " fluff of feathers " in spite of his cleverness, which is undeniable. He kissed *my* hand too with a fervour—and I wouldn't give sixpence for his regard for me.¹

But Carlyle's desire for friendship and critical admiration persisted.

Letter 25. Carlyle to Browning. 16 July 1856. Published.²

Dear Browning,

I have not known, till today that I called at Chapman's, how to address a Note to you ; much less, find the House personally, tho' I ought to have remembered it. The result is, we go out of Town (for Scotland, two months) on Wednesday next ; and I have never yet seen you. It looks as if the blame were mutual ; but, in fairness, it is chiefly Browning ! I have not made three calls hardly since you saw me last ; I sit here chained to my galley-seat and oar (Brandenburg rubbish to the waist) these many moons ; nearly dead of toil and despair ; and feel almost ashamed to look in the face of my fellow creatures ; see nobody except those that come to see me ! This is far truer than it looks ; and very sad withal. Come down on Sunday Evg to tea : if Mrs. Browning will come with you, it will be a double bounty. But unless you come, that or some other lucky night *before* the Tuesday when we shall be in the throes of packing,—you perceive how it will be !

That night will be the surest. *Come*, then or some time !—

Yours ever truly,
T. Carlyle

Browning's reply, although it accepts the invitation with pleasure, is phrased in the most tortured prose :

Letter 26. Browning to Carlyle [17 July 1856]. Published.³

¹ Lawrence and Elizabeth Hanson, *Necessary Evil: The Life of Jane Welsh Carlyle* (London, 1952), p. 447. The second half of Mrs. Carlyle's last sentence here has sometimes been quoted out of context to suggest the meaning " I don't care much what Browning thinks of me ", whereas what she clearly means is, " I know very well that he does not care much for me ".

² In " Some Lost and Unpublished Carlyle-Browning Correspondence ", pp. 331-2. MS. : Norman H. Strouse Collection, University of California, Santa Cruz.

³ In " Some Lost and Unpublished Carlyle-Browning Correspondence ", p. 332. MS. : NLS, 3218.119.

39 Devonshire Place

My dear Mr. Carlyle,

Both of us will come, if possible,—certainly *I* will—next Sunday early. I wish you could know exactly how I feel about going over to you; though you & Mrs. Carlyle more than gave me leave to do so, I know very well. (You frightened me with the terrible pleasure of a letter of yours, at Paris some time ago) But I won't think about anything beyond the joy I shall have, or we shall have, at seeing you again.

Ever yours, affectionately,—
may I dare say for its truth sake—
Robert Browning

I get tired & stupid in the day-time, or, reserving myself, have to go out elsewhere in the evening,—for one excuse. My wife is less strong than usual,—for another, of hers'—

I have been unable to discover whether Mrs. Browning did accompany her husband on this visit to Chelsea. It seems very doubtful that she did. But there can be little doubt of the warmth of Carlyle's welcome. He wrote to Emerson on the very day when he expected Browning in the evening: "Browning is coming tonight to take leave. Do you know Browning at all? He is abstruse, but worth knowing."¹

John Kenyon, a relative of Elizabeth Barrett Browning and an old school friend of Browning's father, died this year, leaving a handsome bequest to the Brownings. In his letter to his brother John of 25 January 1857, Carlyle commented as follows:

You asked if Kenyon whom you know of was the *Kn* that died lately. Yes alas, he certainly is; the Brownings' friend; of whom *Bg* was speaking at the door that day. Poor *Kn* died in a few weeks (month or two) after; left a great deal of money £180,000 they say: £10,000 of it to the Brownings, £6,000 to Procter; so much to Dr. Southey, to the London University, to &c &c. It is reported he was heard to say the day before he died: "One is gratified to give so many people pleasure by one's death!" Which is a[s] curious a saying (*impossible* in any epoch but this) as I have heard for some time. His £10,000 to the Brownings struck me as probably less than they expected, but yet as the right sum. Poor Kenyon, he was a very well-disposed, fat easy-going man; trying always to do rather *good* among his fellow creatures, if he did anything."²

In November 1856 Mrs. Browning's *Aurora Leigh* had been published with great acclaim.³ Neither of the Carlyles liked

¹ Slater, *Correspondence of Emerson and Carlyle*, p. 512.

² MS. : NLS, 525.23.

³ Actually published 15 November 1856, though the title-page is front-dated 1857.

the poem or the praise which it was receiving. In the letter just quoted Carlyle wrote to his brother John :

I got your *Aurora Leigh*. . . . Jane does not make very much of it. . . . Hit of the real mark to be aimed at there is clearly none, nor the dream of any. This Lady "hath a good utterance of speech"; but as to the thing *said* with it, one asks, Is it a thing at all?—A sad pack of people, these rhymesters of our time!

He also told C. G. Duffy that there was little in the poem "which suggested the probability of its living beyond its little day", that it gave "rather a beggarly account of this nineteenth century, with which one might guess future centuries would not concern themselves much", but that Mrs. Browning did not lack "a certain bright vivacity and keen womanly eye for the strange things transacted in the theatre of the world".¹ He had the most profound contempt for Ruskin when he bestowed extravagant praise on the poem and gave Carlyle a copy to read.²

Two years later the Brownings found much to complain of in Carlyle's own work. The first volumes of *Frederick II* had appeared. Mrs. Browning wrote to Isa Blagden: "Robert curses and swears over Carlyle's *Frederick*, which is a relief to my own mind too. Never was there a more immoral book in the brutal sense."³

Mrs. Browning died at Florence on 29 June 1861. In July Browning wrote John Forster a long letter giving the details of her death and Browning's own plans for the future.⁴ This letter Forster sent on for the Carlyles to read. On 9 August Carlyle wrote to his brother John :

¹ *Conversations with Carlyle*, pp. 62-63.

² Ruskin had written to Browning on 27 November 1856: "I think *Aurora Leigh* the greatest *poem* in the English language, unsurpassed by anything but Shakespeare—not surpassed by Shakespeare's *sonnets*, and therefore the greatest poem in the language", and he repeated the last part of the statement in his letter to Browning of 28 December (see E. T. Cook, *The Life of John Ruskin* (London, 1912), i. 461-2; Wilson, *Carlyle*, v. 297).

³ *Dearest Isa: Robert Browning's Letters to Isabella Blagden*, ed. E. C. McAleer (Austin, 1951), p. 35. Tennyson liked it no better. He told Allingham in 1865 that he had read part of it until he came to the statement "*They* did not strive to build the lofty rhyme", and had then flung the book into a corner (*Diary*, p. 119; Carlyle's *Frederick the Great, Works*, xii. 98; Browning barely got into the first volume).

⁴ *New Letters of Browning*, pp. 137-40.

Browning is said to be here ; I expect him in an evening or two. Poor fellow, I believe he is very sad about his loss of such a Wife : but I believe it may ultimately prove a great gain to him. If he come to England, and look after his own Tasks while it is yet Time !¹

And on 17 August he write to Forster :

I return Browning's letter, which we have read, naturally, with very great interest. The poor Lady seems to have passed away in a state of perfect peace, unconscious altogether of what was coming, the mildest end that [could] have been provided to a gentle Human Life, which is a great consolation to survivors in their sorrow. I know not whether Browning has yet come to you. I partly expected or hoped to have seen him here, but had no right either,—not having written, tho' I did not want for matter, or even for intention, but only for a few minutes of composure ; which you know are seldom if ever mine, in these sad months and years. Tell him from me to gird himself together out of those sore weeks of the Past (as indeed I see he is manfully doing) ;—and that I expect a *new epoch* for *him*, in regard to his own work in this world, now that he is coming back to England at last ; and that, in my poor opinion, which I have never changed, a noble victory lies ahead for him, if he stand to it while time yet is. This is my fixed thought ; and often my greatest sorrow over the "Swan of Italy" has been that a soul like R. B's was kept weltering, in a *hobbled* condition, amid such a mass of thorns and hopeless cobwebs ! Assure him of my deep sympathy and true regard, at any rate.²

Browning did not actually return to London until October, and Carlyle got the merest glimpse of him on the streets late that month. It may be that Forster or someone else conveyed to him the harsh truth of Carlyle's comment on the Swan of Italy. It is not to be compared, of course, in severity with Edward FitzGerald's, for which Browning could not forgive him : "Mrs. Browning's death is rather a relief to me, I must say. No more *Aurora Leighs*, thank God !"³ Browning does seem to have stayed away from Carlyle for a while after his wife's death, but he was at this time showing a tendency to shut himself off from most of his old friends. We know that he and Carlyle rode together to Broughton Castle in Oxfordshire in May 1862 to attend the funeral of Mrs. Edward Twisleton, whom Carlyle described as "a very beautiful and clever little Boston lady".⁴

¹ MS. : NLS, 517.23.

² MS. : Victoria and Albert Museum.

³ Miller, *Browning*, pp. 274-5. FitzGerald's statement, inadvertently published with his letters in 1889, provoked Browning to write a fiercely retaliatory sonnet which Miller gives. See also W. H. Griffin and H. C. Minchin, *The Life of Robert Browning* (London, 1910), pp. 292-3.

⁴ *New Letters of Browning*, p. 145.

And in November of the same year Browning wrote to Isa Blagden¹ about encountering a not too friendly Mazzini with Mrs. Carlyle at Cheyne Row. During the next four years there is only slight evidence to show that the old intimacy between Carlyle and Browning had been renewed. We do know that he attended a very small birthday party for Carlyle given by John Forster on 4 December 1865.² In these years, we know, he came to enjoy social life more and more. When in early 1866 he saw Carlyle at a large fashionable party one evening, he seemed almost surprised. Both Tennyson and Carlyle were there, "Carlyle", Browning wrote, "whom I never met at a 'drum' in my whole life, till now".³ Actually Carlyle himself enjoyed social gatherings within limits, but in Browning's attitude he found more than a tinge of worldliness and shallow optimism. On one occasion he remarked: "But there's a great contrast between him and me. He seems very content with life, and takes much satisfaction in the world. It's a very strange and curious spectacle to behold a man in these days so confidently cheerful."⁴

Carlyle lost his wife on 21 April 1866. Browning gave a detailed account of her death in a letter written to Miss Blagden at the time. He had seen her last, he said, at Forster's dinner in honour of Carlyle's seventieth birthday back in December.⁵ In another letter, written on 19 May, his comment on Mrs. Carlyle's death has perhaps even less regret in it than what Carlyle said when Mrs. Browning died :

Poor Mrs. Carlyle's death was sad & strange,—but by no means "shook" me rudely;—after all, there are people to take care of her husband,—and she might be considered fairly as entitled to go : I have not seen C.,—he talks much about her, and *shows* more deep feeling than is usual with him.⁶

It will be recalled that the poet in "How It Strikes a Contemporary" was given a dog, old, bald, and blindish (not quite answering to the description of either Mrs. Browning's "Flush" or Mrs. Carlyle's "Nero"), but not a wife.

¹ *Dearest Isa*, p. 136.

² Carlyle to John A. Carlyle, MS. : NLS, 518.18.

³ *Dearest Isa*, p. 230.

⁴ Henry Jones, *Browning as a Philosophical and Religious Teacher* (Glasgow, 1902), p. 45.

⁵ *Dearest Isa*, p. 235.

⁶ *Ibid.* p. 239.

The record of the friendship henceforth continues to be somewhat mixed and at times even turbulent, but the underlying affection and loyalty which the two men had for one another are not, I believe, ever seriously to be questioned. When Carlyle's "Shooting Niagara" with its vehement anti-democratic opinions appeared in *Macmillan's Magazine* in August 1867, Browning called it "a grin through a horse-collar".¹ And when Browning brought out *The Ring and the Book*, in writing which he may have had in mind Carlyle's advice that he attempt a large work, Carlyle's comments were almost all unfavourable. According to William Sharp, he hailed the poem with enthusiastic praise in which lurked damning irony: "What a wonderful fellow you are, Browning: you have written a whole series of 'books' about what could be summed up in a newspaper paragraph!"² Rossetti and Mrs. Anne Gilchrist report that Carlyle said:

It is a wonderful book, one of the most wonderful poems ever written. I re-read it all through—all made out of an Old Bailey story that might have been told in ten lines, and only wants forgetting.³

Carlyle told Allingham that the work was "A curiously minute picture of Italian Society: not poetry at all"; and he declared to him in 1872:

But the whole is on a most absurd basis. The real story is plain enough on looking into it. The girl and the handsome priest were lovers.⁴

In commenting on *The Ring and the Book* in a letter of 3 November 1867 to Tennyson, FitzGerald said that Carlyle in earlier years had at times spoken of Browning as "a sort of light-cavalry man to follow you" and that he had recently appraised *The Ring and the Book* as follows: "Browning's book I read—insisted on reading: it is full of talent, of energy, and effort, but totally without *backbone*, or basis of common sense. I think among the absurdest books ever written by a gifted man."⁵

¹ Conway, *Autobiography*, i. 412.

² *Life of Robert Browning* (London, 1890), p. 115.

³ Dowden, p. 255.

⁴ *Diary*, pp. 194, 207.

⁵ Wilson, *Carlyle*, vi. 175-6; *Tennyson and His Friends*, p. 119. FitzGerald later wrote to Tennyson: "I never could read Browning" (*Tennyson: A Memoir*, ii. 64).

Carlyle is reported by C. E. Norton to have met Browning in Piccadilly and told him :

Of all the strange books produced on this distracted earth, by any of the sons of Adam, this one was altogether the strangest and the most preposterous in its construction ; and where . . . do you think to find the eternal harmonies in it?¹

Carlyle himself wrote to his brother John on 11 January 1869 :

Am reading Browning's new " Poem " at nights ; I told *him* (to his amazement and chagrin) one day, " No son of Adam had ever written Poem or Book on such a plan before." Wedded to his idols ; let him alone !²

And when Moncure Conway observed that Browning had reached his public by telling his story ten times, Carlyle said that it was " like bawling into the ear of a deaf man ".³

Much more pleasant than such comments was the occasion when Carlyle and Browning met the Queen together, at her suggestion, on Thursday, 4 March 1869, at five in the afternoon. Lady Augusta Stanley arranged for the meeting to take place at the Westminster Deanery. Others invited were Mr. and Mrs. George Grote, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Lyell, and Dickens, who did not appear. Carlyle was amused when the Queen asked Browning whether he was writing anything, just after he had published one of the longest poems ever written. The Queen noticed Carlyle's shaking hand, which would soon make it necessary for him to employ an amanuensis. Pleading old age, Carlyle begged the Queen that he be allowed to sit. In talking to Browning later, the Queen exclaimed, " What a very singular person Mr. Carlyle is ! " ⁴ The *Court Circular* for 13 March reported :

Her Majesty on Thursday last had the pleasure of becoming personally acquainted with two of the most distinguished writers of the age—Mr. Carlyle and Mr. Browning. These eminent men—who, so far as intellect is concerned, stand head and shoulders above their contemporaries—were invited to meet the Queen at the residence of the Dean of Westminster.⁵

¹ *Letters*, ed. Sara Norton and M. A. DeWolfe Howe (Boston and New York, 1913), pp. 324-5.

² MS. : NLS, 526.85.

³ *Autobiography*, ii. 25.

⁴ Carlyle's letter to his sister, Mrs. Aitken, 11 March 1869, in *New Letters of Carlyle*, ii. 252-5 ; Wilson, vi. 182-8 ; Norton, *Letters*, i. 327.

⁵ Miller, *Browning*, pp. 246-7. The Queen recorded this meeting in her *Journal*, writing on 4 March : " Drove to the Deanery at Westminster, where the Dean and Augusta had invited the following celebrities to meet me : Mr.

On Christmas day, 1869, Carlyle and Browning dined together at John Forster's and Carlyle observed that Browning had grown "much hoarier, fatter, and begins to have gout and a double-chin".¹

The same distaste for Prussianism which caused Browning to dislike Carlyle's *Frederick II* brought about almost violent disagreement between the two old friends at the time of the Franco-Prussian War. Writing from France to Miss Blagden on 19 August 1870, Browning conceded that the folly, ignorance, "brag", and immorality of France required punishment; but he did not like the Prussian brand of punishment and wrote with prophetic insight:

The effect will be, that we shall all be forced into the Prussian system, of turning a nation into a camp; nothing but soldiering to concern us for the next generation.²

And on 2 November Carlyle wrote to John Forster:

The other day Browning came athwart me in the Green Park; fresh from France and two months in Normandy; looking very brisk; and, I fear, getting nothing but damage out of my loud Germanism and me till our road parted.³

As Browning's later writings were published from time to time, Carlyle continued to complain about his unintelligibility. Soon after *Balaustion's Adventure* came out in August 1871, he told Allingham:

I read it all twice through, and found out the meaning of it. Browning most ingeniously twists up the English language into riddles—"There! there is some meaning in this—can you make it out?" I wish he had taken to prose. Browning has far more ideas than Tennyson, but is not so truthful. Tennyson means what he says, poor fellow! Browning has a meaning in his twisted

Carlyle, the historian, a strange-looking eccentric old Scotchman, who holds forth, in a drawling melancholy voice, with a broad Scotch accent, upon Scotland and upon the utter degeneration of everything; Mr. and Mrs. Grote . . . ; Sir C. and Lady Lyell . . . ; Mr. Browning, the poet, a very agreeable man. It was, at first, very shy work speaking to them, when they were all drawn up; but afterwards, when tea was being drunk, Augusta got them to come and sit near me, and they were very agreeable and talked very entertainingly" (*Lady Augusta Stanley, Later Letters, 1864-76*, ed. Dean of Windsor and Hector Bolitho (London, 1929), p. 113 n.).

¹ From the original letter to his brother John, 1 January 1870. MS. : NLS, 527.1. See also Duffy's *Conversations with Carlyle*, p. 240.

² *Dearest Isa*, p. 344.

³ From the original letter in the Victoria and Albert Museum.

sentences, but he does not really go into anything, or believe much about it. He accepts conventional values.¹

Perhaps in the background here was Mrs. Carlyle's questioning of Browning's sincerity and her often-quoted phrase about the "fluff of feathers". *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau*, published in December 1871, pleased Carlyle even less. On 25 January 1872, he wrote to his brother John :

Browning's Book came duly, sad lies here : I had already seen and read it,—and nobody else would [?] consent to ! Your acct of it is perfectly exact, "worth nothing at all." Brg has been growing steadily worse for some good while ; & this is his worst hitherto. But we know not for how long.²

After hearing Carlyle talk at one of Forster's dinners, C. E. Norton entered in his journal, 13 January 1873, under "Heads of Talk" the two topics, among others, of "Browning's spoiling" and "Tennyson's decline".³ Carlyle read *Red Cotton Night-Cap Country* immediately after its publication in May 1873, and told the whole story to Allingham and added that there were "ingenious remarks here and there ; but nobody out of Bedlam ever before thought of choosing such a theme".⁴ The famous Tichborne Trial, which had begun on 12 May 1871, was still fresh in their minds. Ellis Yarnall had written that the whole case reminded him of *The Ring and the Book*.⁵ When Allingham suggested to Carlyle that it would not be surprising if Browning took up the case, he agreed. Later, when Allingham brought up the subject again and insisted that Browning *would* do the Claimant, Carlyle exclaimed : "And call it what? *Gammon and Spinach*, perhaps."⁶

Allingham also reports that on 5 November 1875, while his wife Helen was painting Carlyle's picture at Chelsea, Browning came in, fresh from another visit to Normandy. When Carlyle asked him what he had been writing, he told him about *Aristophanes' Apology* (April 1875). Carlyle proceeded to praise Browning's translation of Euripides' *Alcestis*, calling it "the very best translation I ever read", and urged him to do more of the

¹ *Diary*, p. 205.

² MS. : NLS, 527.59.

³ *Letters*, i. 457.

⁴ *Diary*, pp. 224-5. See also Charlotte G. Watkins, "Browning's 'Red Cotton Night-Cap Country' and Carlyle", *Victorian Studies*, vii (1964), 359-74.

⁵ *New Letters of Browning*, p. 207 n.

⁶ *Diary*, pp. 224-5.

same kind of work.¹ But on 13 November he wrote to his brother John: "My reading for the last week has been rather poor & unproductive, Browning's last Book, the *Apology of Aristophanes*."² Carlyle told Allingham that on 4 December, his birthday, of this year Browning came and "talked loud". He added sweepingly that Browning now agreed with him about Shelley and his poetry.³ Browning's *The Inn Album* had been published in November 1875. By 16 February following Carlyle had read it and told Allingham:

Browning's *Inn Album* is the worst of all he has given us; and he has been growing worse and worse—with the exception of his Greek translations. *The Ring and the Book*—what a thing it is! Browning has a great quantity of miscellaneous reading about him, but no solid basis of knowledge in anything. Tennyson's later things are better than B's. But Browning is a man of great abilities.⁴

Browning's translation of the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus was published on 15 October 1877. Browning's Preface ends with this sentence:

No, neither "uncommanded" nor "unrewarded"; since it was commanded of me by my venerated friend Thomas Carlyle, and rewarded will it indeed become, if I am permitted to dignify it by the prefatory insertion of his dear and noble name.

With his gift copy to Carlyle he sent a short letter in the same spirit.

Letter 27. Browning to Carlyle. 17 October 1877. Published.⁵

"I beg your kind acceptance of the translation I ventured upon at your desire...." But Carlyle did not like this translation. On 27 October he told Allingham:

Oh yes, he called down some months ago to ask if he might dedicate it to me. I told him I should be highly honoured. But—O bless me! *Can you understand it, at all?* I went carefully into some parts of it and for my soul's salvation [laughs] couldn't make out the meaning⁶

¹ Ibid. p. 240.

² MS.: NLS, 528.43.

³ *Diary*, p. 242.

⁴ Ibid. p. 244.

⁵ Hood, p. 180. John S. Blackie in a letter to Browning of October [31, 1877] declared that with all his other gifts Carlyle lacked judgment and that Browning should never have taken his advice to attempt a literal translation of the *Agamemnon* (in *Baylor University's Browning Interests*, viii. 73-74).

⁶ *Diary*, p. 257.

And, according to Allingham, he said on 5 December :

Browning came down yesterday ; he has a great deal to say about many things. I must go and see him. I told him frankly about the *Agamemnon*, after praising his fidelity, that I could make nothing of his translation—could not understand it—had to turn to the Jesuit's book. R. B. admitted that all said it was of no use.¹

Browning was now an old man, as Carlyle had observed, and Carlyle himself, born in 1795 when Keats was born, was a very old man. In the friendship of the two men there were details suggesting that the wheel was coming round full circle, as it often seems to do in human life. Pen Browning had now grown up, become an artist, and arranged to exhibit his work. He needed friendly interest and influence, as his father once had.

Letter 28. Browning to Carlyle. 26 March 1878. Published.²

... a picture by my son will be on view at my house till next Sunday ... should any happy chance bring you to this neighbourhood any afternoon, my son's work would be rewarded indeed by your notice. You knew him when a child and were kind as he even yet well remembers : he is now some years older than was his father when you were more than kind to

Your ever grateful and affectionate
Robert Browning

Letter 29. Browning to Carlyle. 27 March 1879. Published.³

You did indeed inaugurate most auspiciously Robert's first appearance as a would-be painter last year. I believe the kindness shown him has been by no means thrown away. He is sending to London some new pictures which, I am told, show decided progress. They are to arrive today, and will be on view at a house much nearer your own than that which you honoured with a visit on the former occasion. If therefore you could again so much indulge us,—the pictures will be ready for your inspection next Friday and the three following days from 2 till 5 p.m., at 17, Queen's Gate Gardens, South Kensington. . . .

When Allingham called at Chelsea on Carlyle's birthday this year, he learned that Browning and Ruskin had just gone.⁴ About 1880 John Tyndall found Carlyle and Browning seated comfortably before the fire at Chelsea and was impressed by Browning's "reverent affection" when he spoke. On this occasion Carlyle told Browning that it was his heroic Browning

¹ *Ibid.* p. 260.

³ *Ibid.* p. 186.

² Hood, p. 183.

⁴ Wilson, vi. 454.

ancestor who "broke the boom stretched across Foyle, and relieved Derry, when the city was besieged by James's army", an incident which must have been gratifying to the poet who wrote "Hervé Riel".¹ Browning told Allingham of Carlyle's last attempt to call on him :

He called one day at Warwick Crescent when I was out, and said from his carriage window to my sister, "I should like to see him once more."

And Browning also told him of his last visit to see the dying Carlyle :

The last time I went to Cheyne Row his niece said he was not speaking to any one, but I might go up and see him. He was lying on the sofa, wrapt in a shawl. I stooped over him and said a word or two, and he put his arm round my neck. That was all.²

Almost immediately after Carlyle's death in early 1881, Froude published the *Reminiscences*, and the controversy burst out over how well Carlyle had treated his wife and how trustworthy Froude had been in dealing with the literary materials which Carlyle had placed in his hands. Unlike Ruskin, Browning refused to go along with Froude or with many of Froude's readers who were now attacking Carlyle. The following passage from his letter to Madame Bessie Rayner Belloc, 18 March 1881, is the nearest approximation we have to the kind of statement which Norton later tried to draw from him :

I do indeed regret deeply the conception, execution and publication of those memoirs, equally unwise in their praise and unworthy in their blame: but I knew the extraordinary limitations of my dear old friend—and of his "woman" too—just as well forty years ago as today. His opinions about men and things one inch out of his own little circle never moved me with the force of a feather—or I should hardly have lived five minutes of my whole life as I have done, and, for the remainder of,—please God,—shall do. But we must not ourselves prove ingrates for a deal of love, or at least benevolence, in deed and wish,—I must not, anyhow,—so instead of "burning Carlyle and scattering his ashes to the winds", I am on the committee for erecting a monument to "True Thomas"—whose arm was laid on my shoulder a very few weeks ago. He confessed once to me that, on the first occasion of my visiting him, he was anything but favourably impressed by my "'smart' green coat"—I being in riding-costume; and if then and there had begun and ended our acquaintance, very likely I might have figured in some corner of a page as a poor scribbling-man with proclivities for the

¹ Ibid. p. 459. Macaulay records the incident in chapter XII of *The History of England* and gives the name of Browning's heroic ancestor, Micaiah Browning.

² *Diary*, pp. 374-5.

turf and scamphood. What then? He wrote *Sartor*—and such letters to me in those old days! No, I am his devotedly. . . .¹

Two days after he had written this letter he told Allingham :

I never minded what Carlyle said of things outside his own little circle [Allingham says that he drew a circle in the air with his forefinger]—what was it to me what he thought of Poetry or Music?²

Perhaps he should have said this only once. And perhaps the gesture with the finger is over-emphatic. Carlyle, it will be remembered, had observed that Browning sometimes talked too much and too loudly. When Browning repeated himself and made his gesture, the ghost of Jane Welsh Carlyle certainly must have arched its eyebrows and shot at him its sharpest glance. But Browning went on to tell Allingham one or two things which Mrs. Carlyle had said many years before in her letter on Keats. Speaking in particular about “Isabella” and “The Eve of St. Agnes”, she had declared :

Almost any young gentleman with a sweet tooth might be expected to write such things. *Isabella* might have been written by a seamstress who had eaten something too rich for supper and slept upon her back.

After which Browning commented : “Do you think I cared about this more than for the barking of a little dog?”³

Among the comments which Browning sent to F. J. Furnivall on 21 October 1881, after he had read the proofs for the first volume of the *Browning Society Papers*, is the following :

Page 109 : I am astounded at the notion, as to how it could possibly arise, that there was ever the slightest “falling out” between Carlyle and myself. Nothing of the kind ever happened during our long acquaintance.⁴

W. C. DeVane, whose opinions on all matters relating to Browning deserve respect, has followed Mrs. Sutherland Orr in believing that Browning’s *Parleyings*, begun in September 1885, and published in January 1887, contains in the “Mandeville” an attack on Carlyle. DeVane argues that Browning objected to Carlyle’s “magisterial” way, to his “groaning” and “bilious

¹ *New Letters of Browning*, pp. 262-3. The work of the committee resulted in the statue of Carlyle by Boehm placed on the Chelsea Embankment.

² *Diary*, pp. 310 ff.

³ *Idem*. Cf. the last line of “Popularity” : “What porridge had John Keats?”

⁴ Hood, p. 201.

mood", to his failure to praise him in public as well as in private in the early days, to his opinions on the American Civil War, to his general pessimism and lack of faith, and to Mrs. Carlyle's opinion concerning the "fluff of feathers".¹ Much of his argument, which cannot be given in detail or even adequately represented here, is, of course, sound. There can be little doubt that Carlyle was in Browning's mind when he conceived the antagonist of the "Mandeville". But here even more than in interpreting "The Lost Leader" we must be on guard against absolute and complete identifications and make large allowance for the freedom of the artist painting the portrait. And in speaking of Carlyle's pessimism, we must never forget how again and again he used such words as *Courage!* and *Victory!* in order to speak "bracingly" to Browning in the long years when he needed encouragement and how he emphatically assured him that the great soul of the world was just. Browning's strongest feelings toward Carlyle were those of deep affection and gratitude. We must read the "Mandeville" in the context of the whole story of the Carlyle-Browning relationship. We must always remember, too, what Browning wrote to Norton in December 1885. It is worth repeating here :

I cannot undertake to write any account of our beloved friend at present. I feel just as you do respecting the misunderstanders, but am hardly able to say my whole mind aright just now, from abundance rather than lack of matter.

Blessed with the perspective which time has given to us, we too may now understand the richness and many-sidedness of this friendship and realize further that in it were important elements that glanced back toward Keats, Shelley, Burns, Donne and Shakespeare ; around at the various activities of the imagination and doings of men in the Victorian world ; and forward toward

¹ *Browning's Parleyings*, pp. 14-36 ; "Parleyings" and "Transcendentalism" in DeVane's *A Browning Handbook* : Mrs. Orr, *Life of Browning*, ii. 530-2. For new light on the nature of Browning's optimism, which was not altogether soft but had something in common with Pope's, see H. N. Fairchild, "Browning's 'Whatever Is, Is Right'", *College English*, 12 (April 1951), 377-82. In religion, Browning, himself a liberal, was simply willing to go much farther than Carlyle in subscribing to particular tenets of faith and arguing for them. The difference is chiefly one of degree. Essentially both were champions of the Christian religion interpreted in spirit, not in letter.

Hardy, Pound, Eliot, Yeats, and much else in the poetry that is characteristic of our time. A matrix is nearly always a strange, complex, mysterious thing, off-spring of another such matrix, and parent of still others.

The last piece of documentation which I have found for the story of this remarkable friendship comes from a time late in Browning's life, 10 June 1888. It is another one of the many good things that William Allingham put in his diary, for which we are all in his debt. Luckily, since we are to end with it, without benefit of chorus, it has its own dramatic adequacy, does justice to the spirit of both Carlyle and Browning, and ends cheerfully, as matters should end relating to two old friends who had often laughed together at the manifold absurdities of this fantastic world. Browning told Allingham :

C. said many things that I mentally dissented from, and he said something about a certain lady [Allingham says that he knew that this was E.B.B.] which was reported to me and made me, for a time, hold aloof from him altogether. But I feel towards him as John Forster did to Landor : . . . " If he were standing here before me—I'd hug the old man !"—and so would I Carlyle.

Then Allingham adds : " In saying this, B. hugged me closely with his broad chest and strong arms, and laughed merrily."¹

¹ *Diary*, p. 374.