

That was all. The handicraftsman remained exactly where he was—in a worse position than that of a slave. He had liberty, true; but the liberty to starve did not appear to Carlyle the divine thing that Bentham and Mill and Macaulay proclaimed it on the house-tops to be. Disgusted with the “Edinburgh style of mockery, its hard withering influence, its momentary solacement, fatter than any pain,” he had retired to the lonely farm house of Craigmputtock to think out for himself a scheme of the universe in which he could believe, to adjust his beliefs, religious and social and political, to the facts of life, and to meditate on the divine-diabolical nature of man. He studied history, not to read a theory into it, but to deduce rules of conduct from its lessons. The Past contained the answer to the Sphinx of the Present—an answer which must be found under penalty of death.

The nature and character of his intellectual life turned his attention to the French Revolution; his studies on “heroes and the heroic in history” to Oliver Cromwell. His “History of the French Revolution,” written in the years immediately following the first Reform Bill, contained his “poor message” to the rulers of England: his “Cromwell” was his answer to the democratization of the institutions of the country.

It is impossible in a few words to sum up the two books that have left a deeper impress on the thought of the Nineteenth Century than any other productions of that prolific period. Briefly, however, the French Revolution was the last and most signal example of “God’s revenge” overtaking the government of a nation that had failed to preserve justice between man and man, that had led the people in the worship of shams and speciosities, and that had lived for pleasure instead of for duty. The heart of Nature is just, sternly inexorable as ever, and inflicts its penalties for transgression of its laws without fear or

favour. From the sentence of the Court of Destiny there is no appeal. Execution may be delayed for a year, for a century; but outraged justice is avenged at last. The Israelites were punished for their sins by the Philistines, by the Babylonians, by the Assyrians. Hordes of barbarians swept away the Roman sensualists. Modern nations, although they may be secure from raids by savages, breed in their own hearts the instruments of their punishment. The outraged millions may endure injustice for centuries; but at last will turn and rend their oppressors.

That to Carlyle was the interpretation of the greatest event of the eighteenth century; and the deductions he drew from his studies of the Commonwealth were corollaries from this proposition. Many people held, and indeed still hold, that had not the Ironsides pushed the quarrel with Charles to extremities, had the Parliament been allowed to conclude its treaty with the King, England would have secured the fruits of that ever-memorable struggle without suffering the violent reaction produced by the execution of Charles. Cromwell, however, judged differently, and his great biographer agreed with him. The Protector could see that wearied England, content with having secured the control of the purse, would have handed the Puritans over to the vengeance of Charles, and that all he had fought for would have been inevitably lost. Carlyle, from this, drew two practical inferences. Taking the Long Parliament as a whole it was the finest representative body ever gathered together. Its members were men of ability and statesmanship, imbued with lofty ideals of patriotism, and with a love of that righteousness that exalteth a nation. Yet they failed and had to be prevented by force from ruining themselves and the real interests of the country. Would it be reasonable, then, to expect any similar body to be more successful? As