

Carlyle Clearing His Throat:
The Manuscript Fragments of the
Isaac W. Dyer Collection, Bowdoin College

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THE REVEREND JAMES A. S. BARRETT (D. 1937) FIGURES prominently in the correspondence of Isaac W. Dyer (1855–1937) that relates to the research and publication of his *Bibliography of Thomas Carlyle's Writings and Ana* (Portland: Southworth Press, 1928). Barrett's role in assisting Dyer was an essential one. Without Barrett, Dyer simply could never have completed the definitive bibliography of Carlyle's works, a position the work held in Carlyle studies until the publication of Rodger L. Tarr's *Thomas Carlyle: A Bibliography* (Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1989). And beyond his assistance of Dyer, as Ian Campbell astutely recognizes in this number of *Carlyle Studies Annual* (see 73–92), Barrett's role in the preservation of Carlyle materials cannot be overstated.

Among the papers contained in the Dyer collection at Bowdoin College are five fragments of Carlyle's writings. How they came to be there is explained in a letter from Barrett to Dyer of 7 June 1932 that also serves to confirm his importance to Dyer as an intermediary and a collector:

Dear Mr. Dyer,

I waited for some days before writing to Sotheby, in case a letter from you might come giving me fuller particulars of what you wish. But as none came, I have today written a very careful & detailed request to Sotheby, and hope some good may result from it. I fear the *whole* Item No 35 in the Carlyle Sale Catalogue will fetch far more

than the 10 dollars which you mentioned, as it includes the unique reprint of the article on Peel.¹ But there are several duplicate copies of the other articles, printed by John Childs & Son, Bungay; and I requested that *one* or *two* of the duplicate off-prints might be put aside for you, at a cost proportionate to the selling price of the whole Item. That, after some considerable deliberation, was the best proposal which I could devise; & trust you will approve. Of course, I could only *ask* Sotheby to comply, must thus leave the result to him.

I fully agree that Mr. Alex. Carlyle might, could, & should, have given you some piece of T.C.'s writing. He *wd* have done it, if it had occurred to him, as he was generously minded. Executors' hands are pretty well tied. But a clause in the Will seemed to permit such a thing, and therefore I put your very special claims before the lawyer & the *3rd* Trustee, & have much pleasure in enclosing for your acceptance several fragmentary sheets of T.C.'s actual MS. I fear they are not connected, or important in content, but merely some of his rejected sheets; but I dare say you will value them. I may mention that out of hundreds of sheets which I laboriously examined, to help Sotheby's Sale, I did not keep one, or even a bit of one for myself; & you are the only person to whom any sheet or writing has been given.

Also, some weeks ago, I requested Sotheby to send you a copy of the Catalogue, & hope it was done. Much interest reported from Germany & elsewhere, and the Catalogue has already been reprinted.²

Pardon brevity as I have too much on hand.

Yours Sincerely,

J.A.S.B.

The Carlyle fragments that Barrett enclosed with this letter are heavily edited on half-folded sheets of paper. From Barrett's perspective, they seemed "not connected, or important in

¹ Barrett refers to "Ireland and Sir Robert Peel" (1849), a broadsheet published by John Childs and Son, Bungay; see Tarr, *Bibliography* 119–20. The essay was also published in *The Spectator* (13 May 1848): 343–44.

² Dyer's copy of the Sotheby's *Catalogue of Printed Books*. . . . (1932) remains in his collection at Bowdoin.

content.” But for a later generation of readers trained to understand writing as a process, these fragments offer a valuable reconstruction of Carlyle’s writing practices in the period leading up to the publication of *Latter-Day Pamphlets* (1850).

Jules Seigel and Michael Goldberg have pointed out that from 1848 to 1850, Carlyle was working on a larger book project that he eventually abandoned once he decided to write a series of pamphlets on his present time. In their edition of *Latter-Day Pamphlets* (1983),³ Seigel and Goldberg offer a summary of the extant fragments of the work, since no complete manuscript of any of the eight pamphlets Carlyle completed has yet been located (see lxxii–lxxviii). According to Seigel and Goldberg, by 1849 Carlyle “had amassed a considerable volume of material from which the *Pamphlets* are derived” (lxxviii). Given Carlyle’s references to the year “1849” in Fragment 3 and to “these days of the barricades” in Fragment 4, it is clear that these five fragments were composed during this preliminary drafting phase of *Latter-Day Pamphlets*.

They touch on many topics directly related to the *Pamphlets*. He mentions Sir Robert Peel, complains bitterly about the “ballot-box,” describes his age as “long-eared,” and warns of “Anarchy.” All of these subjects would appear in “The Present Time,” the first of the *Pamphlets* (February 1850; *Works* 20: 1–47). The fragments offer a clear glimpse of Carlyle’s stubborn attempts to shape phrases and to define themes, or to find what Jules Seigel has called the “vital metaphor” that would allow him to “fuse his perceptions into a coherent statement” (191).⁴ And his expression in the fragments also suggests that when Carlyle struggles with articulation, he struggles mightily. The garbled results often reflect his frustration at being unable to find the appropriate word or expression that accurately conveys his meaning.

Perhaps the most remarkable revelation of Carlyle’s writing process occurs in the final fragment. As he runs out of room at the bottom of his sheet, Carlyle must end a consideration of immortality:

³ The edition was published by the Social Science and Research Council of Canada.

⁴ Jules Seigel, “Carlyle and Peel: The prophet’s Search for a Heroic Politician and an Unpublished Fragment.” *Victorian Studies* 26.2 (Winter 1983): 181–95.

The highest flight and victory of that grand faculty which poor pedants in our time still twaddle of by the name of Poetic Imagination. A real apotheosis of Human-kind. Call life a miracle really practically; the miraculous proscenium of a Divine Infinitude for every soul that lives. Existence emblematic; the true prefiguration of either a Heaven or else Hell— Pshaw what words! n.b. how important to write down the thing when it is in you, ~~to~~ ready to write! It dies soon, and cant be writⁿ more.

The passage offers a rare glimpse of Carlyle's vision of himself as a writer. Although Barrett may have dismissed such thoughts as disconnected and unimportant, to modern readers they offer a revealing example of Carlyle clearing his rhetorical throat in preparation for the declamatory *Latter-Day Pamphlets*.