

Carlyle's *Frederick the Great* and the "sham-kings" of the American South

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CARLYLE'S RESPONSE TO THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR was characteristic of a man who courted controversy and reveled in paradox. In the relatively few public pronouncements that he delivered, his position was consistent: the war originated in the South's righteous rejection of the twin shibboleths of the epoch: abolitionism and laissez-faire. The conflict itself was the realization of his prophecy in "Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question" (1849) that the marriage of "Exeter-Hall Philanthropy and the Dismal Science" would "give birth to progenies and prodigies, dark extensive moon-calves, unnamable abortions, wide-coiled monstrosities, such as the world has not seen hitherto!" (*Works* 29: 354). Carlyle likened the event to an act of collective suicide on the part of the United States, the "self-murder of a million brother Englishmen, for the sake of sheer phantasms, and totally false theories upon the Nigger" (*Reminiscences* 183–84).

Yet he was more deeply troubled and bewildered by the scale of death and destruction than these vitriolic utterances implied.¹ His vow to remain "neutral . . . to a degree" (*CLO*: TC to John Carlyle, 30 Jan. 1862; *CL* 38: 45) was indicative of his genuine perplexity rather than his indifference or lack of concern about the event. Contrary to the impression given by the fierce racist language of the "Occasional

¹ Brent E. Kinser has rightly contended that "Carlyle's insistence that the American Civil War was an absurd tragedy about nothing at all did not mean that he was uninterested or uncaring" (*Shaping of British Democracy* 37).

Discourse”—intensified by his deliberate decision to accept a publisher’s suggestion in 1853 that in his revision of the essay, the word “Negro” in the title be replaced with the more offensive and pejorative term “Nigger”—his attitudes towards the Civil War in general, and to slavery in particular, remained elusive and enigmatic.

The mercurial quality of Carlyle’s reactions to the Civil War were rooted in his historical sense, rather than in ideology or philosophy. His resolution to write a history of Frederick the Great following the hostile reception that greeted the “Occasional Discourse” and *Latter-Day Pamphlets* (1850) was carefully calculated. In an entry in his journal in 1854, he conceded that “I am getting old, yet would grudge to depart without trying to tell a little more of my mind” (Froude 4: 172). This was an astute recognition on his own part that the critical assault against him had frequently mistaken his rhetorical smoke for the actual fire of his convictions. He knew that History, the ineffable and barely decipherable “Prophetic Manuscript” (“On History,” *Historical Essays* 8), accommodated more expansive avenues of exploration. In its complex interplay between linearity and solidity, history—particularly Carlylean history—could convey an electric feeling of the perpetual “nowness” of the past.

Carlyle did not escape from the “Colonial and Negro Question” (“Discourse,” *Works* 29: 348) by immersing himself in the world of eighteenth-century Prussia. Instead, he chose to engage the subject from a different perspective, which allowed him to probe “the complicated Depth of this Emancipation Question” (Meyers 188) outside the boundaries of conventional political debate. The popular outcry against the “Occasional Discourse,” which he had sub-titled “the precursor to *Latter-Day Pamphlets*,” had placed him in an awkward position. Abolitionists assailed him on the one side for his racist invective and his callousness, while Confederate sympathizers in London and the United States eagerly sought him out as the champion of their cause, even as he recoiled at the prospect of being identified with them. He was trapped between his desire to antagonize progressive opinion and his equally strong aversion to being aligned with Southern secessionists.

An exchange that he had in October 1851 with Nathaniel Beverly Tucker (1784–1851), professor of law at William and

Mary, judge, novelist, scholar, slaveholder, and proselytizer, alerted him to the drawbacks of paradox when addressing the topic of slavery. Tucker belonged to a group of Confederate propagandists “who rose to the defense of their agrarian, slaveholding society and unleashed a barrage of novels, poems, sermons, and tracts damning the individualistic North and praising the communal South” (Eaton 508). In his novel *The Partisan Leader* (1836), he shaped the plot around the revolt of the Southern states, the outbreak of civil war, and the heroic attempt of an embattled elite to defend their slave-owning feudal republic governed by enlightened aristocratic landowners. An ardent admirer of Sir Walter Scott, Tucker cloaked his strident racial theories behind a guise of chivalry and rural nobility.² The hero of his first novel, *The Partisan Leader* (1836) was the embodiment of Southern racial and cultural privilege, “a handsome youth, whose natural grace had been improved by his military education, and in his manners uniting the freshness of a boy with the polish and elegance of an accomplished gentleman. . . . assiduous, discreet, temperate, and disinterested” (*Partisan Leader* 1: 159). Like many of his Confederate allies, Tucker assumed—quite wrongly, as events would soon prove—that Carlyle shared his assumptions about the natural superiority of whites to blacks, and the divinely ordained right of Southern “accomplished gentlemen” to own slaves.

In an unsigned “Essay on the Moral and Political Effect of the Relation Between the Caucasian Master and the African Slave” that he wrote for the *Southern Literary Messenger* in 1844, Tucker envisaged the future of race relations in “decidedly Carlylean terms” (Meyers 185). Anticipating Dr. Philem M’Quirk’s focus on the “mights” of men in “The Occasional Discourse”—“what

² For Tucker and the legacy of Sir Walter Scott in the South, see Denise A. Riley, 7–10. Recalling Mark Twain’s “wild proposition” (328) in *Life on the Mississippi* that Scott bore major responsibility for the Civil War, Samuel Baker notes the violent appeal of the Waverley novels to the slave-owners: “They carve out retreats where violence rests, seemingly limited or lateral—epistemic, naturalistic, traditional, or historical—but nonetheless menacing in its potentiality, and sublime for those who apprehend it” (72). Carlyle’s writings exercised a similarly “sublime” effect on the imagination of the Southern planters.

portion of their 'rights' they have chance of getting sorted out, and realised, in this confused world" (*Works* 29: 373)—he predicted that the relationship between masters and slaves was gradually evolving: "The voice of command is giving place to that of courteous respect; the language of objurcation is exchanged for that of grave reproof, and it becomes daily more manifest that, whatever griefs may fall to the lot of either party, both are happy in each other, and happy in a relation, with the duties of which use has made us familiar" (Meyers 185–86).

Yet this narrative of progress evidently failed to impress Carlyle. When Tucker wrote to the "Sage of Chelsea" in October 1850, he was confident that his views—now augmented by his ambitious scheme to develop a vast Confederate slave empire reaching to the Caribbean and beyond—would be received sympathetically. But as Brent E. Kinser has painstakingly demonstrated, Tucker himself soon became a primary satirical target in the revised "Occasional Discourse," which Carlyle published two years later. In the character of "Senator Hickory Buckskin," Carlyle personified the imperial delusions of Tucker, "who in his despair appears to be entertaining very violent projects now and then, as to uniting with our West Indies (under a New Downing Street), forming a West Indian empire, etc. etc." (*Works* 29: 370). Tucker was an inspired choice for satirical treatment, since he "would come to be known as the prophet of the Civil War because of his predictions that outlined the manner in which the South would secede" (Kinser, "Fearful Symmetry" 155).

Though Carlyle began his letter by expressing a vague respect for Tucker and his colleagues, "who stand in the very coil of Negro complications" (Meyers 188), his tone changed abruptly when he began to consider their program in detail. He urged Tucker to eschew theories of race and to contemplate the circumstances of the South more seriously: "My notion is, that the relation of the White man to the Black is *not* at present a just one according to the Law of the Eternal; and tho' 'Abolition' is by no means the way to remedy it, and would be a 'remedy' equivalent to killing it (as I believe), yet, beyond all question, remedied it must be; and peace upon it not possible till a remedy be found, and begin to be visibly applied." Carlyle even questioned the link that he had forged earlier in "The

Occasional Discourse” between “Exeter-Hall Philanthropy and the Dismal Science.” The Abolitionist movement, he asserted, was a “thing *necessary*” both to relieve the suffering of slaves and to stimulate debate about the true relations between masters and servants in society. Carlyle effectively sided with “Exeter Hall” in asking Tucker to consider new solutions to alleviate the “intolerable asperities” of slavery: “Have you, for example, a Law by which a Negro, on producing a certain amount of money . . . can *demand* his Freedom?” (Meyers 188–89). Tucker had written to Carlyle seeking to enroll him as an American secessionist; what he received from him was a counter-proposal that “amount[ed] to emancipation” (Straka 57).

Tucker felt slighted and humiliated by Carlyle’s response. He wrote to his friend James Henry Hammond (1807–64), a pro-slavery propagandist, former governor (1842–44), and future U.S. Senator (1857–60) from South Carolina, that “[Carlyle] has still prejudices growing out of perverted statements which in England pass for truth, but his thoughts and feelings are strongly drawn to the cause” (qtd. in Elkins 217). Yet nowhere in his letter did Carlyle allude to “the cause.” His focus was on the complexity of the slave’s predicament, and as Stanley Elkins has remarked, “Complexity . . . at this stage, was hardly what Tucker, Hammond, or any other Southerner wanted from Carlyle, who was asking them to use intellect in the service of their own problems. And so it was, that in the end all that these men took from their British friend was his ‘real sympathy’ with their affairs” (217). Set against the initial expectations of the Confederates, this was paltry compensation for their exertions. Carlyle undoubtedly savored their discomfort.

He soon transformed this muted “sympathy” into a more aggressive form of satire in the second version of the “Discourse,” in which “his letter to Buckskin traces the precise argument he made to Tucker in his 1850s letters” (Kinser, “Fearful Symmetry” 153). What distinguished Buckskin from the narrator Philem M’Quirk was his willful ignorance of the revolutionary convulsion that he had created by his misconceived efforts to conflate “might” and “right.” Buckskin shared with the Exeter-Hall philanthropists the proclivity to govern by abstractions rather than reality. The counsel that Carlyle offered Tucker about enabling Negroes to purchase

their freedom was recast in the shape of an apocalyptic premonition of violent upheaval: "What are the wages of a Black servant, hired for life by White men? This question must be answered, in some not insupportable erroneous way: gods and men are warning you that you must answer it, if you would continue there!" ("Discourse," *Works* 29: 372)

Carlyle had decisively shifted the debate in his letter to Tucker from the theme of race to leadership and governance. In the "Occasional Discourse" he had argued that Negro slavery was but one form of a more ubiquitous tyranny undermining social relations, paralyzing government, and preventing "all men, the whitest alike and the blackest, the richest and the poorest" from doing "the work they are appointed for." This was the "slavery of Wisdom to Folly . . . of the great and noble-minded to the small and mean" (*Works* 29: 384). The logic of *laissez-faire*, enshrined in the "Dismal Science," had insured that "anybody or nobody will do well enough at the top; that money . . . is the real symbol of wisdom, and supply-and-demand the all-sufficient substitute for command and obedience" (29: 361). The result was "Tyranny and Slavery" on an unprecedented scale because it left all members of society at the mercy of abstract and ineluctable economic laws that were powerless to oppose.

As Carlyle had anticipated, his reckless use of racist rhetoric as a tool of provocation in the "Occasional Discourse" prompted liberals to group him with those who, like Tucker, grounded hierarchy exclusively in genetics. Attacking Carlyle in *Fraser's* in January 1850, John Stuart Mill assailed him for propounding "the great ethical doctrine" that "one kind of human beings are born servants to another kind" and for "imputing every difference which he finds among human beings to an original difference of nature" (29). Yet as Carlyle had explained to Tucker, "Southern gentlemen" were not entitled to enslave Negroes eternally on the basis of their hypothetical genetic superiority. Might exercised without intellect or "wisdom" would never be tolerated for long, as Europe had demonstrated in 1848, the "scandalous Year of street-barricades and fugitive sham-kings exhibits" ("Discourse," *Works* 29: 378).

In his 1866 reminiscence of Jane Welsh Carlyle, Carlyle recalled that the *Latter-Day Pamphlets* served "as a great relief

to my own conscience as a faithful citizen, and have been ever since" (*Reminiscences* 103). In effect they helped to prepare him psychologically for writing the *History of Friedrich II. of Prussia Called the Great* (1858–65). Frederick was a governor who grounded "his actions . . . on what he recognises for the truth; and . . . has nothing whatever of the Hypocrite or Phantasm" (*Works* 12: 14). The King of Prussia had solved the conundrum that Carlyle had introduced in the "Occasional Discourse," namely "How to abolish the abuses of slavery, and save the precious thing in it" (*Works* 29: 368). Frederick was not born to rule by nature, but by the strength of his character, the intensity of his intellect, and the steadfastness of his "veracity." Through an act of furious self-repression, he had overcome his own personal "Mud-gods" (12: 172) and united a fragmented nation, at once winning the loyalty and the grateful obedience of its citizens.

For Carlyle, eighteenth-century Prussia was a signal example of the axiom that "except by Mastership and Servantship, there is no conceivable difference from unjust Tyranny and Slavery" ("Discourse," *Works* 29: 496). The two most egregious examples of the failure of "kingship" and the disintegration of "Mastership" and "Servantship" in the nineteenth century were Ireland and the American South, with England moving inexorably "half-way towards" (*Works* 29: 363) them. This was not attributable to race, but to a complete breakdown of the moral and political order.³ In such conditions, "Kings themselves are grown sham-kings; and their subjects are very

³ John Morrow has argued persuasively that Carlyle's anti-Irish prejudices were attributable to politics rather than race: "An examination of Carlyle's writings on Ireland demonstrate that he attributed the parlous state of that country in the 1840s to widespread failures in leadership and social morality that were not unique to the inhabitants of Ireland and were also to be found in England" (643). The "Occasional Discourse" suggests that Carlyle was adopting a similar attitude to the "Negro Question" and to the American Civil War. He was notably silent in the essay about his close previous association with the former Young Ireland activist John Mitchel (1815–75), a self-proclaimed disciple of Carlyle who had become one of the leading Southern pro-slavery propagandists, arguing for the creation of an "Irish republic with an accompaniment of slave plantations" (*Dillon* 2: 48–49). Whereas Carlyle earlier approved of Mitchel's arguments that Negroes and Jews "could not be emancipated from the laws of nature" (*Duffy* 117), his position in the "Occasional Discourse" shifted emphatically. For Carlyle and Mitchel, see Julie M. Dugger, Sorensen, and Michael Huggins.

naturally sham-subjects, with mere lip-homage, insincere to their sham-kings" (*Works* 29: 363). In the "Occasional Discourse" M'Quirk commented sardonically that the "Hon. Hickory never acknowledged my letter; but I hope he is getting on with the advice I gave him" (29: 372). Yet as Carlyle would discover in the period between the publication of the "Occasional Discourse" and *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, and the first two volumes of *Frederick the Great* in 1858, this "advice" would be repeatedly misunderstood and eventually rejected by Southern secessionists.

It was notable that in this same interval, Carlyle actively sought out the opinions of those who modified or contradicted his interpretation of the American "self-murder." Conversely, he either ignored those who rallied to the defense of the "Occasional Discourse" or politely welcomed their allegiance without returning the favor. Mill had rightly gauged that the "words of English writers of celebrity are words of power . . . and the owners of human flesh will welcome such an auxiliary" (31). But the Southern secessionists and their British allies who sought Carlyle's approval were frustrated by his persistent tergiversations. Perceiving his discomfort with the notion that they were entitled by "nature" to own slaves, they frequently reverted to the secure ground of his "Condition-of-England" analysis in *Chartism* (1839) and *Past and Present* (1843), and contrasted the civilized state of Southern slaves to the degraded and miserable condition of the industrial working classes in England.⁴

In an essay in *Fraser's* in October 1852, Edward J. Pringle (1826–99), a prominent South Carolinian and slave-owner, pursued this strategy in his defense of the "Occasional Discourse." Seizing on Carlyle's "eloquent definition of a freemen" as one "who is *loyal* to the laws of this Universe; who in his heart sees and knows, across all contradictions, that

⁴ This argument also allowed the secessionists to represent themselves as victims in the conflict between North and South. Eugene Genovese remarks that "The slaveholders . . . looked at the condition of the European working class, at the abolitionists' indifference and even hypocrisy concerning that condition, and at the condition of their own slaves and drew their own conclusions: they saw themselves as misunderstood, misrepresented, wronged" (504).

injustice cannot befall him *here*,” Pringle argued “that the South has already raised her ‘chattels’ far above the heirs of labours that freedom claims in the crowded districts of all the great centres of the population” (483, 480). He contrasted the rootless, atomistic, and neglected condition of Britain’s working classes—powerfully documented by Carlyle in *Past and Present*—with the secure life of the Southern slave: “[I]t is mere shortsightedness to talk of the power of the white man over the black man in slavery, when the alternative is between that and competition between the races. The one is at least a degree of protection, the other would be the extermination, to the weaker” (483). Pringle circumvented the questions as to whether the white man ruled because of the “superiority of nature,” but he insisted “that the one race has never been so highly civilized as when under the guardianship of the other” (486). Northerners preaching “emancipation” should look at their own Negro population, and ask honestly whether freedom was an indisputable benefit to them.

Carlyle ignored Pringle’s article, though he likely knew of its appearance. Four months earlier his friend Sir Arthur Helps (1813–75), an abolitionist and the author of *The Spanish Conquest in America* (1855–61) had sent him a copy of a letter that he published in *Fraser’s* in August on Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852). Helps had replied to a letter from Charles Eliot Norton (1827–1908), the American editor, scholar, and critic (and later a close friend and ally of Carlyle), who had sent him a copy of the novel together with a criticism of its exaggerated account of slavery. Carlyle dismissed the novel as “a pretty perfect sample of Yankee-Governess Romance, & I fairly could not and would not read beyond the first 100 pages of it” (*CL* 28: 15). He was sufficiently irritated by its popularity to take up the publisher Thomas Bosworth’s (1823/24?–99) suggestion that he publish a new version of the “Occasional Discourse.” In the midst of this activity, he took the time to read Helps’s letter “more than once” and was “honestly amused by the quiet irony and grave Socratic sense contained in the same” (*CLO*: TC to Helps, 27 July, 1852; *CL* 27: 185).

Significantly, Helps attacked Beecher Stowe’s misconception “respecting the condition of the English labourer.” In *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* she had unwittingly corroborated the views of

those who, like Pringle, maintained that “there is very little substantial difference between the condition of the English labourer and that of the American slave.” Helps granted the cleverness of the thesis and its popularity with both unionists and secessionists. But in his view no honest observer could ignore the distinction between “the dignified suffering of a man oppressed by untoward circumstances and the abject wretchedness of another driven about like a beast—in short between manhood and brutehood” (238). More trenchantly, he foresaw that the comparison might “soothe the bewildered conscience of many a man who seeks to justify slavery; and which, I dare say, is and has been, repeated many times in every hour of the day, by some southern slave-holder or other” (239).

Helps did not indicate whether he included Carlyle among these “others.” In a loose manner Carlyle did draw the analogy in the “Occasional Discourse”—like many other Victorian social critics, including Friedrich Engels, he saw an element of truth in it—but he also suggested its limits as a means of justification for slavery in M’Quirk’s letter to Buckskin.⁵ Negro slavery was unique in that it constituted a brazen refutation of “the eternal laws of fact as written in the Negro’s being and in ours.” The system could not be preserved much longer unless it were re-established on the foundation of a “proper code of laws . . . on the rights of Negroes and Whites” (“Discourse,” *Works* 29: 371). From Carlyle’s vantage point, Beecher Stowe’s admonitions about English industrial workers were as pointless as her sentimental effusions about Negroes. Race was incidental to the discussion of who should lead and who should be led, and how these arrangements were to be determined beyond the mechanisms of the ballot-box. It was a vital matter of instructing people to recognize leaders who were kings, “every inch of [them], though without the trappings of a king” (*Works* 12: 1).

⁵ Of Manchester factory operatives, Engels wrote in *The Condition of the English Working Classes* (1845), “They are worse slaves than the Negroes in America, for they are more sharply watched, and yet it is demanded of them that they shall live like human beings, shall think and feel like men! Verily, this they can do only under glowing hatred towards their oppressors, and towards that order of things which place them in such a position, which degrades them to machines” (194).

The “Negro Question” belonged intrinsically to a larger one about authority and legitimacy. In his letter to Tucker, Carlyle surmised that *this* question was as “deep as the foundations of Society; and will not be settled this long while!”: “For the cry about Emancipation . . . is but the keynote of that huge anarchic roar, now rising from all nations, for good reasons, too,—which tends to abolish all mastership and obedience whatsoever in this world, and to render *Society* impossible among the Sons of Adam!” (Meyers 188). Researching *Frederick the Great*, Carlyle’s mind oscillated between the world of eighteenth-century Prussia and the present. He was in search of parallels as well as contrasts that might help him to locate and define the sources of order and stability in civil society.

On 2 November 1856 Carlyle wrote to John William Parker (1820–60), editor of *Fraser’s*, to inquire about an article he had recently read, which he presumed had been written by the American diarist and critic, Charles Astor Bristed (1820–74): “Candid, loyal, clear, intelligent, a thorough ‘gentleman,’ as we define it;—the only man who throws any real light to me on American questions. He might do a great deal of good to both countries, and gain the gratitude of all considerate men in both, by continuing and extending in all ways this fine function of International Interpreter between America and England, for which he has such capabilities” (*CL* 32: 25–26). Carlyle wanted to inquire about several “Americanisms” that Bristed had used in the article. But he was unaware that the article had been written by William Henry Hurlbert (1827–95), a South Carolinian journalist, abolitionist, and activist. Hurlbert was arrested in the South in 1861 for his anti-slavery views and confined in Richmond until he escaped in 1862. He later attacked British rule in Ireland and advocated Irish independence.

The immediate context of Hurlbert’s article was the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, which had opened the two territories to settlement on the basis of popular sovereignty. In Kansas this had led to a conflict between pro-slavery and free-soil advocates. Civil war had broken out between the two parties, and it would last until 1858. In the essay Hurlbert concentrated on “the one great fact which Americans themselves have hitherto studiously obscured and done their best to ignore, that America is not *one* America, but two Americas—not a nation, but a Union . . .

which divide themselves by irresistible natural affinities into two great groups” (612). His characterization of the North in particular may have attracted Carlyle, who was a transplanted Scotsman and the editor of Cromwell’s letters and speeches.

According to Hurlbert, the New England settlers “were Puritans, with all the virtues and all the failings of the Puritan character; and with the obnoxious Puritanism which they bequeathed to their descendants they bequeathed to them also that noble Puritanism to which we in England owe so much of good we have kept in Church and State.” To America these settlers brought “the love of constitutional liberty, the respect for religion, the just estimate of the importance of education, and the honest spirit of enterprise which distinguished the best portion of the upper and the middle classes of England in the seventeenth century” (612). His portrait of the South was far less flattering. These colonies “had been chiefly peopled by emigrants, Catholic and Episcopalian, who had been sent to the New World by the royal authority, or who had fled thither to escape the rule of the Commonwealth.”

The governing population consisted chiefly of “Cavalier gentlemen, of good family and of character, holding large estates; and Cavalier vagabonds, with pockets empty of money and heads empty of wisdom, vulgar, swaggering, lazy, making trouble for the magistrates, and fleecing the tradesmen.” Added to this were “high-spirited refugees, who had escaped the sword of Cromwell’s men; and low-spirited blackguards . . . who had been sent away . . . to rid the restored Government of Charles II of their importunity.” The remainder of the population was made up of “[c]onvicts and paupers . . . sold into servitude; poor girls . . . stolen and exported thither, and bought for tobacco” (613). Since Virginians regarded themselves as the original Americans, they looked down upon their fellow colonists with disdain. They were the aristocrats of the new world, proud of their superior lineage and the institution that distinguished them as true “gentlemen”—slavery.

In Hurlbert’s assessment, the Southerners were the real parasites of American civilization, idle and snobbish, adverse to work and industry, and keen to extend slavery in new territories, for “as all sagacious observers of the operation of the system . . . have demonstrated, the profitable employment of slave-labour is inconsistent with the development of

agricultural science, and demands a continual supply of new and unexhausted soil" (615). The aristocratic image that they cultivated was a lie, and their "superior breeding" a piece of hypocrisy: "Neither in manners, in morals, nor in mind, need the active communities of the North fear a comparison with the self-indulgent populations of the South" (617). Whereas the Northerners tended to eschew politics in preference of commerce and literature, the Southerners perfected the art of cunning diplomacy. As Hurlbert remarked, "While the Northern States have been building, and sailing, and forging, and ploughing, and inventing, and writing . . . the Southern States have been monopolizing political power and planning dominion" (619). Quoting from the *Muscogee* (Ala.) *Herald*, Hurlbert summarized the attitude of the South: "Free Society! . . . What is it but a conglomeration of *greasy mechanics, filthy operators, small-fisted farmers*, and moon-struck theorists? All the Northern and especially the New England States are devoid of society fitted for well-bred gentlemen" (622).

Carlyle's favorable response to Hurlbert's article is less surprising than it first appears. Once again, the past was coalescing in his imagination with the present. Hurlbert's scathing account of the ruling caste of "Southern gentlemen" highlighted their moral and political unfitness to govern. They were another set of modern "sham-kings," self-deluded precisely because they wholly believed in the myth of their own "well bred" nobility and distinction. They stood in sharp contrast to the austere and puritanical character of Friedrich Wilhelm of Prussia. In the early volumes of his Prussian history, Carlyle was determined to show how Frederick the Great's personality had been shaped by his father's detestation of aristocratic idleness, corruption, and injustice. Though an "absolute Monarch," Friedrich Wilhelm "does not dream of governing without Law." The "life-effort" of this rugged, simple, and peasant-like King is "to find-out everywhere in his affairs what was justice." He is the antithesis of the Virginians described by Hurlbert. He is no autocrat, "nor are his Prussians slaves by any means: they are patient, stout-hearted, subject men, with a very considerable quantity of radical fire, very well covered in" (*Works* 13: 73).

With the Crimean inquiries in fresh in his mind—Carlyle had been a vehement critic of the war—he regretted the absence of

men such as this, a rude genius in the mold of Samuel Johnson, who could never have risen in “modern Political Circles” and “who loves truth as truth should be loved, with all his heart and soul; and hates untruth with a corresponding perfect hatred” (*Works* 12: 339, 343). But he showed in the second volume that Friedrich Wilhelm’s strength was also the source of his weakness—he was a simple man who was victimized by the “genteel” diplomacy of the eighteenth century. He was blind to the stratagems of England and Austria, and was prone to “being coaxed about, and led by the nose, to a strange degree” (*Works* 12: 343). In the world of “first-rate conjurors,” Friedrich Wilhelm was dangerously vulnerable, despite the presence of his well-trained and disciplined army. It was his son who would realize the dangers of trusting “well-bred gentlemen,” and who would learn to penetrate the disguises of wit, diplomacy, civility and “Respectability” while concealing his own thoughts and motives behind an imperturbable mask of stoical courtesy.

If the author of the “Occasional Discourse” could not bring himself to side more openly with Hurlbert’s analysis of the United States—Carlyle stubbornly held to his pledge of neutrality—he could at least express his reservations about the South and slavery cryptically in the pages of *Frederick*. Some of his Southern disciples were not deceived by the stratagem. The Virginian lawyer, sociologist, and pro-slavery theorist George Fitzhugh (1806–81) had long regarded himself as a Carlylean disciple. He took the title and subtitle of his second book *Cannibals All! or, Slaves Without Masters* (1857) from *Past and Present*, and explained in the forward how his vision of a future Southern slave-owning aristocracy was indebted to Carlyle: “At the very time we were writing our pamphlet entitled ‘Slavery Justified,’ in which we took ground that Free Society had failed, Mr. Carlyle began to write his ‘*Latter-Day Pamphlets*,’ whose very title is the assertion of the failure of Free Society” (*Cannibals* xx).

Fitzhugh was playing on Carlyle’s conception of the spiritual as well as the physical impoverishment of the English working-classes. The “White Slave Trade,” Fitzhugh declared, was far harsher than its Black equivalent: “[I]t exacts more of its slaves, and neither protects nor governs them. . . . [I]t is more cruel, in leaving the laborer to take care of himself and family out of the pittance which skill or capital have allowed him to retain.

When the day's labor is ended, he is free, but is overburdened with the cares of family and house-hold, which makes his freedom an empty and delusive mockery. . . . The negro slave is free, too, when the labors of the day are over, and free in mind as well as body; for the master provides food, raiment, house, fuel, and everything else necessary to the physical well-being of himself and family" (*Cannibals* 26). Rather than weakening the master-slave bond, Fitzhugh sought to reinforce it through a more rigorous program of socialist paternalism. He agreed with Carlyle that an "Organization of Labour" should be the antidote to the "nomadism" of laissez-faire (*Works* 29: 357, 367), but one that was administered by Southern landowners rather than an "Industrial Aristocracy" or "Captains of Industry" (*Past and Present* 247, 266).

Confident that he was applying the prescriptions of his Scottish mentor, Fitzhugh reminded his audience of Carlyle's words in *Latter-Day Pamphlets*: "We must have a new world, if we are to have any world at all" (*Cannibals* 140). Yet this "new world" only loosely resembled the one that Carlyle envisaged, despite their mutual concentration on a form of slavery that transcended racial categories. In practice Fitzhugh and his colleagues at *De Bow's Magazine* "were primarily concerned with defending the almost universal belief in Negro inferiority" (Paskoff 390), and their ideal society was aristocratic in a far more traditional way than Carlyle approved. Fitzhugh himself gradually began to realize the extent of the breach that had opened between him and the Chelsea philosopher. In a lengthy review that he wrote of the first two volumes of *Frederick the Great* in *De Bow's* in August 1860, he felt obliged to register his dissent.

Fitzhugh expressed serious misgivings about Carlyle's anti-aristocratic bias in the biography, and castigated his false conception of Friedrich Wilhelm's "life-effort." He bluntly refused to endorse Carlyle's description of the rugged "Drill-Sergeant": "We wholly reject his theory. We don't believe . . . that Frederick William ruled and made Prussia great merely with a 'walking cane' for sceptre, and 'Tobacco Parliament' for council" (152). Carlyle had overestimated the influence of the King's character on the tenor of social relations in Prussia. Fitzhugh contested Carlyle's premise that "in organizing and determining the character of society, any one man ever had, or ever will have, much to do" (153). It was not Friedrich Wilhelm

who made Prussia in his image, but the reverse. Specifically, it was the Prussian nobility, “equal to that of early Rome,” that “owned the lands, filled all offices in state in the army, were quasi masters of the people, and, to preserve their position, kept the people in perfect subordination and ‘drill’” (154).

Fitzhugh was obliged to admit differences between himself and the author of *Frederick the Great*: “We dislike very much to differ with Mr. Carlyle, with whose opinions about government we, in the general, agree; our ends are the same; we differ only as to the means. We think as he does, that so-called tyrannical government is the only thing worth calling government” (155). Yet Carlyle adamantly believed that Friedrich Wilhelm valued self-discipline over the rule of the despot, and the rule of law over the rule of force. He was an opponent of the very type of aristocratic superiority that Fitzhugh celebrated as a “natural” possession of the ruling-class of the “seceding States”: “The gentlemen of the South are better horsemen, better marksmen, have more physical strength and activity, and can endure more fatigue than their slaves. Besides, they have the lofty sentiments and high morals of a master race, that would render them unconquerable” (155).⁶ To Fitzhugh’s disappointment, the members of Friedrich Wilhelm’s informal and beer-soaked “Tobacco-Parliament” never talked of “a master race.” While he enjoyed Carlyle’s satirical description of the United States as “Anarchy, plus the street-constable,” Fitzhugh regretted his admiration for the “simple despotisms” of Cromwell and Friedrich Wilhelm. Carlyle needs to visit the South, where the “constable [is] intrusted with sufficiently large powers, and armed with a big walking-stick” (163). There he would be among “gentlemen,” who would give him “a warm welcome,”

⁶ British reviewers were similarly critical of Carlyle’s veneration of the Prussian Friedrich Wilhelm, about whom T. B. Macaulay had famously declared in an 1842 essay in *The Edinburgh Review*, “The nature of Frederic William was hard and bad, and the habit of exercising arbitrary power had made him frightfully savage” (*Edinburgh Review* 221). In 1859 a critic in *The Eclectic Review* complained, “A more unpromising subject to make a hero of could hardly have been found than Friedrich Wilhelm I. Ungainly in his person, harsh and startling in his speech, . . . vulgar and sensual in his habits, low in all his tastes, and half-brutish in some of them; there was nothing in his mental endowments, nothing in his official administration . . . sufficient to redeem him from indifference” (109–10).

believing him to be “at least half-right” about their cause (161).

Northerners too were puzzled by Carlyle’s outlook, yet they drew some comfort from Carlyle’s denunciation of aristocracy and “Respectability” in the early volumes of *Frederick*. Benjamin Moran (1820–86), Assistant Secretary at the United States Embassy in London from 1857 to 1864, noted in his diary for 1 December 1858 that he had met the Duke of Marlborough in a local bookshop, voicing astonishment at the appearance of Carlyle’s biography. As Moran wryly remarked, “It is not much to the credit of the Great Marshall of Blenheim that his descendent should be ignorant of the existence of a book which has excited the literary world of both hemispheres for the past six months & been read by every body from Milliners and shopmen up—Dukes only excepted” (1: 473). The anti-aristocratic bias of the book extended to the character of Frederick himself, who in the wake of his father’s death renounced his French fashion and finery, and sublimated his unacceptable sexual energies to the cause of military conquest and Prussian autonomy.

Emerson was also impressed by *Frederick the Great*. He had corresponded intermittently with Carlyle in the period before the Civil War, politely avoiding the subject of slavery and the “Negro Question.” Writing in December 1862 to thank Carlyle for sending the third volume of *Frederick*, Emerson spoke of the book’s symbolic value: “It is mankind’s Bill of Rights & Duties, the royal proclamation of Intellect ascending the throne, announcing . . . now once for all, the world shall be governed by Commonsense & law of Morals, or shall go to ruin.” He especially appreciated “the sound sense & the absolute independence of the tone, which may put kings in fear,” and saw the biography as a warning “to all governors, English, French, Austrian, & other, to double their guards, & look carefully to the censorship of the press.” In the event that Carlyle had overlooked his reference to the “other,” Emerson concluded his letter by reminding him that in the United States, “we read no books. . . . All our bright young men go into [the war], to be misused & sacrificed. . . . One lesson they all learn—to hate slavery *tetterima causa*” (Slater 535–36).

Following the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, both North and South were more eager than ever to solicit the favor of Carlyle. As a consequence of the mixed signals he had sent, representatives from both sides arrived at Cheyne Row with

the hope of winning him to their cause. In 1863 Emerson sent his friend Moncure Conway (1832–1907), a Virginian by birth who had resigned from his pulpit because of his anti-slavery pronouncements. Conway was struck by Carlyle’s naiveté about the American South, and soon discovered what he thought was the source of his misunderstanding: “An enthusiastic Southern lady had repeatedly visited him, and found easy credence to her story that such was the inherent vitality of slavery, and the divine force attending it, that even then, when the South was blockaded . . . prosperity was springing up, and factories appearing” (Conway 93). The “enthusiast” was probably Rose O’Neal Greenhow (1817–64), the Confederate spy, renowned aristocratic beauty, and friend of President James Buchanan, who had been imprisoned by Unionists for espionage in 1861. Released a year later because of her celebrity, she was asked by Jefferson Davis to act as a courier to Confederate diplomats, James M. Mason and John Slidell, who were in London trying to persuade the British government to enter the war on the side of the Confederacy.

Greenhow’s views on slavery were shaped by her class and her race. In the diary she wrote between 5 August 1863 and 10 August 1864, she recorded her impressions of Bermuda, Paris, and London. She described the Negroes of St. George as “lazy, vicious, and insubordinate . . . constantly encroaching upon the prerogatives of white settlers.”⁷ Told that the agricultural productivity of Bermuda had declined since the emancipation of Negroes in 1834, she recommended the Southern system of “servile labor” as remedy. Like many Southerners, she was familiar with Carlyle’s “Negro Question” and *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, and she tried to enlist him as a propagandist. Through Geraldine Jewsbury, she received an invitation to Cheyne Row on 24 February 1864. Greenhow was overwhelmed by Carlyle’s kindness, understanding, and sympathy. Her diary records their exchanges about the Civil War: “He asked me a great many questions—amongst others ‘What sort of a looking animal was Lincoln? . . . He asked about our President Mr. Davis and I described him. He placed his fingers over his eyes—and said I see him ‘God has made the situation for the man.’ He

⁷ Extracts from the Rose O’Neal Greenhow Papers are published with kind permission from the North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh.

spoke in strong language of the crimes and imbecility of the North and when I arose to go at a late hour 11 1/2. He said, 'I will do anything for your country' I said an article, a few words from you Sir will carry weight and will be deeply gratifying to our President and people."

Two months later, she was still trying to extract a statement from him. On 23 April, she reported that Carlyle "is very kind to me. Strong sympathy with the South. My words not lost in a barren soil." On 19 June, she received a "very kind and sympathetic" letter from Carlyle, who says "he wishes to write something upon the American war. Letter entirely Carlyslian." Despite these promises, Carlyle knew that he would not respond to Greenhow's requests. He was not clear in his own mind about the Civil War, and given the scale of the tragedy, his paradoxical insights no longer seemed sufficient. Carlyle thought himself "ignorant about the matter . . . foreign to the whole abominable fratricidal 'War'" (*Reminiscences* 183-84). In private, he found Greenhow and her cause tiresome, and reported to Jane on 17 August 1864, "*item*, that Greenhow, into the fire with it. Ask her 'to write to me'? Neva-a!" In the margin to this letter, written after Greenhow's drowning on 30 September, he writes "Greenow lost? tant mieux [so much the better]."

On the Union side, it was left to Moncure Conway to try and salvage something positive from Carlyle's attitudes to the Civil War and to present them in the best possible light. According to Conway, it was Emerson who convinced Carlyle's that his own Negro "theories" were "phantasms." In his letter to his friend in 1864, Emerson broke through the customary awkward politeness of their correspondence, and appealed to Carlyle to join with those who waged "the battle for Humanity" in the United States. Emerson wished that Carlyle had visited America in his younger years: "It would have made it impossible that your name should be cited for one moment on the side of the enemies of mankind" (Slater 541). Carlyle was apparently humbled by the letter, and was astonished that Emerson could write in such a "quasi-miraculous" manner. Reported Conway, "Never again, after that letter . . . did I hear Carlyle speak with his former confidence concerning the issue in America" (Conway 97, 102).

But Conway may have exaggerated in an admirable endeavor to rescue his friend from the harsh verdict of history. Carlyle's

cruel racist stereotypes of “Quashee,”⁸ however rhetorical in purpose, would not be forgotten by those brutalized by slavery, or by those intent on insuring that these crimes would never be obliterated from the “Prophetic Manuscript” of the history of the United States. The middle course that Carlyle sought between abolitionism and slavery was a chimera: this was the grim “Fact” that he could not sidestep by appealing to the enlightened despotism of Frederick the Great. Emerson may have been accurate in his supposition that Carlyle had failed to play a part in the “battle for humanity” less from racial prejudice than from a furious need to be idiosyncratic. Nonetheless, Carlyle’s reputation never recovered from the dubious role he played in distorting the historical significance of the American “Iliad.” For Emerson, as well as for all of those admirers of Carlyle who chose the wiser path of “humanity,” there was at least the consolation “that one good head & great heart remained in England, immoveable,—superior to his own eccentricities & perversities . . . for the better securing . . . the very ends which the idlers fancy he resists” (Slater 541).

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⁸ Genovese suggests indirectly that Carlyle was familiar with African nomenclature in the “Occasional Discourse”: “Slave names that seemed strange or ridiculous to white outsiders often had African origins. Africans commonly would name a child after the day or month of birth (day-name), or they might name him or her after a particular personality trait discerned immediately. The slaves of the South Carolina and Georgia low country never gave up the practice, which echoed across the South. A slave named Quack would be taken by white travelers to be the victim of some master’s bad taste, but probably his own parents had simply adapted the African Quaco, meaning a male born on Wednesday. A woman named Squash probably got her name from Quashee—a female born on Sunday” (448).

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