



Finding Cassandra:
Alfred Lyttelton's Encounter with
Carlyle, 21 July 1878.

JOHN RUSKIN WROTE TO THOMAS CARLYLE ON 15 JANUARY 1878 in order to tell his "Dearest Papa" that he would soon come to see him again, and to ask if he might bring with him "a youth" named Alfred Lyttelton (1857–1913), at the time an outstanding cricketer for Cambridge. Both Ruskin and Lyttelton had been visiting Hawarden Castle, the home of Lyttelton's uncle William Ewart Gladstone (1809–96), then the leading member of the Liberal opposition to the government led by Benjamin Disraeli (1804–81). Before Ruskin sent the letter to Carlyle, he allowed Lyttelton to copy it. The manuscript of this letter now can be found in the Mary Gladstone Papers archive at the British Library.

Carlyle's niece and amanuensis Mary Aitken responded to Ruskin the next day, 16 January, and expressed her uncle's pleasure that he would be visiting and that he was welcome to bring his young friend. Ruskin replied to both Aitken and her uncle a month later with thanks and pleasure. Ruskin informed them that it would be a short while, perhaps "ten days," and that in the meantime Carlyle was to "make that sweet Mary tell me a little of what you would have me say in the next Fors." Less than a week later, on 23 February, Ruskin suffered what George Allan Cate calls "an attack of delirium" that would leave him debilitated until June. On 21 July Ruskin was finally able to make his promised visit to Cheyne Row, with Lyttelton duly in tow. *Fors Claveriga* would not resume until March 1880.

The correspondence related to the visit serves as preface to an account of it by Lyttelton that is also preserved in the Mary Gladstone Papers at the British Library, along with Mary Aitken's letter to Ruskin of 16 January. Lyttelton's wife Dame Edith Lyttelton published an incomplete version of the account in her *Alfred Lyttelton: An Account of His Life* (1917). There are

moments when she is not entirely faithful to the manuscript. When Lyttelton entered the house at Cheyne Row he noted the picture of the young prince Frederick beating a drum that still hangs on the wall there today. In the MS he describes the picture as “Frederick the Great beating a drum (the only sign of militarism which seemed very reluctant in youth).” His wife revised his description to read “Frederick the Great beating a drum (the only sign of militarism which seemed very antipathetic to him in his youth).” As both Lyttelton’s prose and handwriting become fragmentary and difficult to read near the end of the MS, she omits the final impressionistic passages. Lyttelton’s MS reads: “Cyprus thus to be admitted the only possible matter of interest for Englishmen ^for us a profoundly uninteresting controversy. this was between Russia and Turkey.—” Edith Lyttelton concludes her version of the account with a revision: “A profoundly uninteresting controversy, this war between Russia and Turkey” (73).

David Alec Wilson and David Wilson MacArthur published portions of Edith Lyttelton’s account in their *Carlyle in Old Age* (1934; 423–24), but their treatment of the text is marred by additional inaccuracies and by their propensity to offer running interpretive commentary. For example, when Lyttelton reports that Carlyle received “kindly enough . . . Ruskin’s kiss, most tenderly given,” they continue, “and tolerated from no other man, perhaps, but this Frenchified Puritan. It is a custom which inevitably repels the Scots temperament” (423). It certainly repelled the temperaments of Wilson and MacArthur, who also tended to revise in the interest of readability. Lyttelton in the MS reports parenthetically, “(Millais, said Ruskin, speaking of his picture of Carlyle, may represent the pathos of a moment he cannot show the pathos of a lifetime.)” Wilson and MacArthur write, “Ruskin afterwards said to Lyttelton: ‘Millais may represent the pathos of a moment, not of a life-time’” (423).

Tim Hilton’s account in *John Ruskin* (2002) relies upon the version of the account published by Edith Lyttelton, and so he repeats her errors. But Hilton also confuses the sequence of events. It was during his visit to Hawarden and not “After” (652) that Ruskin decided to take Lyttelton to see Carlyle. Hilton then provides Lyttelton’s account of the July visit before he goes on to describe Ruskin’s January decision to bring

him. Hilton misinterprets Ruskin's two letters of 17 February 1878, one to Mary Aitken and the other to Carlyle. In both he expresses his gratitude for permission to bring Lyttelton with him to Cheyne Row.

The string of correspondence relating to the visit and Lyttelton's account transcribed from the manuscript are presented here as a means of providing a more complete picture of a poignant moment in the history of Carlyle's friendship with Ruskin. Lyttelton, writing on the day of the visit, was writing quickly and not accurately in order to set down in general terms the topics of discussion. The result is a text that evokes a sense of immediacy in the young cricketer's encounter with "The Cassandra whose message has been neglected," an interesting closing comment omitted in all of the published accounts.

Brent E. Kinser



John Ruskin to Thomas Carlyle, 15 Jan. 1878. ALS: 3 pp. MS: British Library, Mary Gladstone Papers, Add MS 46233, pp. 107–08. Copy in the hand of Alfred Lyttelton, written on Hawarden Castle stationery, with Lyttelton's note inserted at the top. Pbd: Cate 239 (Letter 191). MS: NLS 556.124.

Copy of Mr Ruskin's letter to Mr Carlyle about bringing me to see him

Hawarden Castle
Chester

15th Jan. '78

Dearest Papa

I am going home to-day¹ but ~~only~~ I think it will be only to bid the servants good new year and that I shall be quickly up in Oxford again; and the more that I want to see you again, soon—and not let you say any more "how long?"

¹ Ruskin and Lyttelton were both visiting Hawarden. Cate inserts a comma at this point of his text.

Also I want to bring with me to your quiet presence chamber a youth who deeply loves you; and for whom your face will be strength and memory in the future,² much helpful to the resolution and the beauty of his life—and so please let Mary write and say that I may bring him—and give me also better will to return to my Oxford duty from the Calypso woods of Coniston. And so believe me ever your faithful and loving son

J. Ruskin



Mary Aitken to John Ruskin, 16 Jan. 1878. ALS: 2 pp. MS: British Library, Mary Gladstone Papers, Add MS 46233, pp. 109–10. The note at the top of the MS is in another hand, possibly Ruskin's.

Please show this to Alfred, with my love to him

24 Cheyne Row
16 Jan. 1878

My Dear M^r Ruskin,

I have only one moment before the post leaves, to give you my Uncle's best love and to say that he is delighted to think he is going to see you soon. He will be most happy to see the young gentleman whom you are going to bring.

Yours respectively & affectionately

Mary Carlyle Aitken



John Ruskin to Mary Aitken, 17 Feb. 1878. Pbd: Cate 239–40 (Letter 192). MS: NLS 556.126. Here transcribed from Cate.

Brantwood, Coniston
17th February 1878

My dearest Mary,

² Cate's version, transcribed from the Ruskin MS of the letter at the NLS, reads "for whom the permission to look upon your face" (239).

It is so kind of Papa to let me bring Mr. Lyttelton, but it may be a little while yet—and please—I want to know how Ulrich is going or anything else you are about.³ I've never any time to say a word when I am there. Write me a nice long letter—there's a dear.

Ever your loving

John Ruskin



John Ruskin to Thomas Carlyle, 17 Feb. 1878. Pbd: Cate 240 (Letter 193). MS: NLS 556.127. Here transcribed from Cate.

Brantwood, Coniston
17th February 1878

Dearest Papa,

I know you don't care as much as foolish I do about Walter Scott— But please don't think it saucy of me, then to write you this with his pen, which the Master of Harrow D. Butler⁴ has lent me.— It's to thank you for—ever so many things—but lastly for

³ Apparently, both Ruskin and Carlyle had been pestering Aitken to translate a novel by Jeremias Gotthelf (1797–1854), *Uli, der Knecht* (1846). It was translated by Julia Firth and revised, edited, annotated, and prefaced by Ruskin in 1888 as *Ulric the Farm Servant* (George Allen). In Ruskin's preface he included a letter that Aitken had written to him, dated 6 June 1876: "I hardly know how to put into words the awful fact I have to communicate. I have failed utterly and ignominiously in my attempt to translate Uli into English. I have tried over and over again and can't get on at all. It is written in cramped, foreign German, largely interspersed with Swiss words, which no dictionary will explain. My uncle has goaded me on with cruel jibes; but he read the book himself, and says now that *he* could at no period of his life have translated it. I need say no more, except that I am much grieved to find what would have been a great pleasure to me so far beyond my very small powers" (iv–v). More than a year later, it would seem, Ruskin at least was still worrying her. He mentions the project in this letter and also in a letter dated 23 June 1878, the first he wrote to Carlyle after his bout of delirium: "Has Mary done any more Gotthelf—I never read him without renewed refreshment" (Cate 241).

⁴ Dr. H. Montague Butler, then headmaster of Harrow School. Ruskin had given a collection of minerals to Harrow in 1866 [Cate's note].

bringing that youth to see you (the Hon^e Alfred Lyttelton, of Trinity, Cambridge)—I can't come yet for ten days or so, but then I shall be so happy to be by the fireside again. And now, please, for this is my chief business, make that sweet Mary tell me a little of what you would have me say in the next Fors—of *anything*.



Alfred Lyttelton's Account of Meeting Carlyle, 21 July 1878.

MS: 5 pp., British Library, Mary Gladstone Papers, Add MS 46233, pp. 124–26. Pbd: Edith Lyttelton, *Alfred Lyttelton: An Account of His Life* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1917) 71–73 inc.; David Wilson and MacArthur, *Carlyle in Old Age (1865–1881)* (London: Kegan Paul, 1934) 423–24 inc.; Tim Hilton, *John Ruskin* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2002) 653 inc.

July 21st 1878

To-day Mr Ruskin took me to see Carlyle. Ruskin had prepared me to expect a very old man not very smooth in temper, nor did he lead me to hope that I should hear much in the way of dialogue between them, for that when less infirm Carlyle had rarely taken a ~~lead~~ successful part in dialogue, taking the bit of conversation very much in his teeth & sustaining it alone or [only?] remaining silent. I asked him if he knew the reason of ~~apparent~~ the gulf which had ever issued to be fixed between Macaulay & Carlyle but his reply that the former expressed the convictions of a party only, while the latter spoke world truths was perhaps not completely satisfactory.

We were shown in to a pretty room, pictures of some of his heroes hung round Frederick the Great beating a drum (the only sign of militarism which seemed very reluctant in youth) Cromwell, Luther & others, with several of himself. A few minutes after Carlyle came down, he looked very infirm & his hand trembled excessively while he groaned and sighed a great deal at first, receiving kindly enough however Ruskin's kiss most tenderly given & greeting me civilly. His face was far finer than his pictures led me to hope ~~they~~ not one of them have seized the wonderfully deep stamp of pathos which was the most abiding characteristic of his look as I saw him. (Millais, said Ruskin, speaking of his picture of Carlyle, may

represent the pathos of a moment he cannot show the pathos of a lifetime.) We sat down & I thought at first that beyond the great interest of seeing him not much was to be gained, for the first five or ten minutes Ruskin anxiously humoured his feeble querulous talk of the heat & the wretched fatigue from a drive to the East end & of the ill effects of a “great drench of champagne” Mary (his niece) had given him, but soon he gently lead [*sic*] him to the much loved topic of Burns “an ode of whose is worth an [eternity] of these poets” including in there our Patmore who had been mentioned rather contemptuously as ‘one who wrote poems of cathedrals and cathedral closes.’ It was very delightful to see the brilliant smile & hear the rough loud laugh with which he greeted a Burn’s quotation about a girl simulating sleep in order to get a kiss from her ~~laugh~~ lover which Ruskin made, for the smile lit up his rugged old face wonderfully & banished the pathetic look utterly.

Dizzy, an accursed being, the worst man that ever lived if lies are sin who with all the strength of his cunning has tried to get this country into war—~~but~~ & for the Turk & what the deevil has is the Turk ~~to be considered~~ but to be sent out. Cyprus thus to be admitted the only possible matter of interest for Englishmen [^]for us a profoundly uninteresting controversy.⁵ this was between Russia and Turkey.—

pair lads must read something⁶

Frederick Great.— & his mother’s grief

Unhappiness the reality of life

Dumfries.

The Cassandra whose message has been neglected.

⁵ On 4 June 1878 the Cyprus Convention secretly transferred control of Cyprus to the United Kingdom, which supported the Ottoman Turks at the Congress of Berlin (13 June–13 July 1878).

⁶ This phrase is inserted above the next line, and is in a different hand, possibly Edith Lyttelton’s insertion, although Lyttelton himself may have added the line later. According to Edith Lyttelton, her husband “added the further interesting commentary on the interview: The old man never addressed a word to me until we were leaving, when suddenly he said, ‘Does the rising generation read me?’—a question which I found it difficult to answer, although it represented obviously his chief interest in the rising generation” (73; qtd. in Hilton 653).