

Mr. Wilson's Victoria

OWEN DUDLEY EDWARDS

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IF WE AMUSE OURSELVES BY DISTINGUISHING THE CARLYLEAN from the Carlylist, the Marxian from the Marxist, the admirer from the doctrinaire, and the student from the prisoner, then we may be helped towards a judgment on A. N. Wilson's biography of Queen Victoria. He is, on the whole, no panegyrist of Victoria. But he is sharply and justly critical of her on many points, and while clarifying her views of, and justifications for, much of her conduct, he is ready—not over-ready—to find and ably argue cases against her, as well as to proceed with tolerance, sympathy, and understanding. He has a sense of humor without excessively rubbing Victoria's nose in it. About midway through the book, he propounds the very useful, and perhaps accurate, contrast that she was not likeable but was loveable. At least it is accurate that such are his personal feelings about her just over a century after her death.

Concluding his assessment of her, Wilson ascends to the confessional as he clinches the historiographical:

Those who visited her in the latter decades of her life might have made pleasantries about her, smiled at the vehemence of her opinions, observed her vacillations between well-grounded common sense and sheer caprice. In her presence, however, they felt something like awe. Anyone who has tried to write about her develops this sense too. It is something quite other than sentimental reverence to royalty for its own sake.

Almost none of the crowned heads who followed her coffin through the streets of Windsor could inspire it. The awe is for Queen Victoria the woman. Step over the carpet to that plump little form who sits at her table, state papers or a Hindustani grammar open in front of her, the Munshi or Princess Beatrice at her side. You are approaching someone of great kindness, someone of a far sharper intelligence than you could quite have guessed, and someone who—contrary to the most tedious of all the clichés about her—was easily amused. But you are also, if you have your wits, more than a little afraid. You are in the presence of greatness. (575)

This reverence might be described as a kind of Carlylean humility, something that really existed, and occasionally was visible and audible. Wilson's opinion of himself may not be low in the end, but he had opened with a devastating acknowledgment of his biography's inferiority to that by the late Elizabeth Lady Longford ("a gigantic achievement which will never be replaced" [xi]), and of his recollections of their conversations together on the subject of the Queen. This admission puts him above most biographers of Victoria or of anyone else. He has had his previous successes (his first book was a most perceptive study of Walter Scott) and his misfortunes (his book on C. S. Lewis misread documents with fatal effects, and his book on John Betjeman unleashed controversies deplorable in all parties). But here at least one can say that this is a necessary, delightful, inspirational, and occasionally inaccurate work for anyone who wants to understand Victoria. Wilson has a Carlylean brass neck, as in his discussion of that pronunciamiento deriding "We are not amused" with its hubris imploded by *1066 and All That's* mockery of the chestnut, culminating in Her Majesty's lip being observed to tremble, according to some (seditious) historians, when she was informed of the Fiji Islands being annexed by the desire of the inhabitants. And he has an unusual ability to speak from an almost universal constituency. His apprehensive tiptoe approach to Victoria silently invites his readers to see in her all our grandmothers. The notion coexists with the undoubted fact that she was the grandmother of Kings, Kaisers, and Czars. It does not necessarily speak with unqualified respect for her, or for our grandmothers. Her grandchildren tore Europe

to pieces among themselves amid horrors that shadowed the entire twentieth century. And how far can the careers of grandmothers' grandchildren be defended?

The childless Carlyle could not have been our grandfather, which may give him a sacerdotal detachment. A sculptor or artist may be a priest in nature as well as in profession. The great Duke-Edinburgh edition of the Carlyle letters necessarily begins with readers recognizing that, like Winnie-the-Pooh, we live in a house under the name of Charles R. Sanders (although some might think it more appropriate to see the totality of the operation defined by Kenneth J. Fielding). Introducing the first volume (1812–21) in 1970, Professor Sanders declared Carlyle a Victorian phenomenon:

John Burroughs, Logan Pearsall Smith, and others have called Carlyle the Victorian Rembrandt. Certainly, no instinct in him was stronger than that which led him to observe with burning interest and intensified powers of observation men and women in the world around him. No talent in him was more marked than that through which he skilfully delineated their features. (xxxii)

That essay remains refreshing and stimulating, one perhaps in some danger of neglect by virtue of the prominence of its location: if travelers walk all round a great ship, will they remember to look closely at its figurehead? As to this observation, Burroughs is certainly unjustly neglected as a commentator on Carlyle in long and short views scattered across his collected works. Logan Pearsall Smith would probably deserve more attention if he, like Burroughs, had met Carlyle and left evidence of what Carlyle might have said about him. Were they reaching a little too rapidly for an identification of Rembrandt and realism? If Rembrandt means anything, he surely means profundity in observation. Was Carlyle a profound observer of his contemporaries, or is he if anything a Victorian Rubens, with an instinct more for the large and grotesque? His comments on others will always be worth reading, but seldom with the finality to be revered in Rembrandt. But the real point is that he is the Victorian something, though, I would respectfully suggest (a) that Carlyle is more like a writer than a painter, (b) that it would be a good idea to let him have a voice (which in life was never easily ignored), (c) that he was the Victorian Dr.

Johnson, (d) that he knew it. All Honor goes to Sanders in his zeal for measuring Carlyle as a Victorian giant, regardless of his accuracy of fact, or even of classification. Admittedly, a little caution is warranted in so firmly labeling Carlyle “Victorian.” It is arguable—not synonymous with “accurate”—that he wrote his best work before Victoria inherited the throne.

If Sanders wanted to behold a Victorian Carlyle, A. N. Wilson begins by presenting a Carlylean Victoria. This contention provides his work with a professional interest for readers of this journal, not merely for this review, but also for the future. Whether he knows it or not, Wilson’s Victoria is a down-payment on a really good biography of Carlyle, and surely this deposit is long overdue. The precaution about accuracy normally to be observed in literary judgments is less useful here. Wilson is at times disgracefully inaccurate, no doubt for reasons of haste, but the flaw does not greatly decrease the value of his book, unless an undergraduate happens to use it in “revising” school exams in a hurry. For instance, at the outset Wilson launches his impressively sound thesis that Victoria was very much a European ruler, in some ways more German in culture than she was English (her Scottish identity was something else again). But he correctly notices the continental antecedents of the Hanoverian monarchy while carelessly overdoing their antiquity: “The English and Scottish oligarchy held the power in Britain [Even here, he is overdoing it, for Victoria’s first third of a century the greatest nobleman in the U.K. was Wellington, who was Irish]. They did not do so, as Oliver Cromwell had unsuccessfully tried to do during the 1650s, without a monarch. But they did so having acquired monarchs from the Continent who would do their bidding—first William of Orange” (17). The English find it difficult to admit the realities of 1688–89, that their chief enemy of the previous forty years, the Dutch, successfully invaded them, drove out their king, took over the kingship and feathered lucrative nests in the oligarchy. It was Britain and Ireland who had to do the Dutchman’s “bidding,” including conscription into a couple of world wars raging through most of the next quarter-century.

Elsewhere, Wilson tells his readers that “Peel was Leader of the Tory Party at a crucial period of its history. Like all parties, it was a coalition, and in the 1820s, it had been a coalition

between the Canningites, or liberal Tories, of whom Peel had been one, and the diehards such as the Duke of Wellington” (89). Peel was so hostile to Canning that he refused to serve under him in 1827, and however much he disapproved of Wellington’s adulteries, he and the Duke were permanent allies. Despite the superstition that men grow more reactionary as they age, both Peel and his follower Gladstone became more liberal. At another stage in the biography, Wilson remarks that “Melbourne became Home Secretary [under Canning], a post he continued to occupy when the Whigs came back into office under the premiership of Earl Grey” (82). Melbourne became Chief Secretary for Ireland under Canning, was out of office under Wellington, and only became Home Secretary when Grey became Prime Minister. In any normal biography of a major political figure, as Victoria was, these imbecilities concerning the two premiers of the first decade of her reign would seem good reason to cast the book aside. It is no credit to even the most conceited reviewer to discover them. And yet as clues to the book’s quality they are quite misleading.

The professional Carlylean (not to say Carlylist) might see danger in Wilson’s introduction, where he proceeds to his subject on the authority of James Anthony Froude, who is a natural casting for the bad fairy at the christening of any beauty somnolent or otherwise. And yet the opening is a matter of genius, i.e. Wilson’s, Carlyle’s—and Froude’s, whose general inaccuracies were more serious than Wilson’s (at least in this book) and more indicative of risk for the reader, but Froude’s Carlyle has genius as well as carelessness and banality. Moreover, Froude as the inventive hagiographer of St. Neot ill-wished himself from literary birth, and necessarily sports a health-warning wherever his genius might lead him. Wilson shines in an amber-light district, not a red-light. And Carlyle’s historiographical innocence was easy prey to smooth diplomacy, as his acceptance of Cromwell forgeries showed. Here is the inaugural of the Wilsonian Victoria:

One gusty April day in 1838, Thomas Carlyle was walking in Green Park, near Buckingham Palace in London, when he saw the young Queen ride past in her carriage. Forty-two years old, the Scotsman had been living in the English capital for a little over three years, and he had lately soared to literary fame. His study

of The French Revolution had been published in the previous year—the year in which Victoria was crowned the Queen of England—and the popularity of the two events was not disconnected. Carlyle had made what his first biographer, J. A. Froude, called a “vast phantasmagoria” culminating in the French people getting rid of their monarchy. The English were not minded, in any very organized sense, to do the same, but Victoria became queen in hungry times. The monarchy had not been popular in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Froude noted that “the hungry and injured millions will rise up and bring to justice their guilty rulers, themselves little better than those whom they throw down.” (3)

One of the almost physical moments of happiness in reading a new book is the first signal of supreme quality. Mine for this was the phrase “hungry times.” In it Wilson proclaims his genius and is armed against all comers. Without being petty towards Froude, “hungry times” has supreme Carlylean quality, for which so often Froude struggled in vain and only occasionally reached. Admittedly Froude’s prose was sufficiently purple in the quotations from which Wilson derives a well-delivered kick-start. Rather than a political imperative, Froude himself was anxious to link Carlyle’s impetus to primitive evangelicalism:

Struggling thus in pain and sorrow, he desired to tell the modern world that, destitute as it and its affairs appeared to be of Divine guidance, God or justice was still in the middle of it, sternly inexorable as ever; that modern nations were as entirely governed by God’s law as the Israelites had been in Palestine—laws self-acting and inflicting their own penalties, if man neglected or defied them. And these laws were substantially the same as those on the Tables delivered in thunder on Mount Sinai. You shall reverence your Almighty Maker. You shall speak truth. You shall do justice to your fellow-man. If you set truth aside for conventional and convenient lies; if you prefer your own pleasure, your own will, your own ambition, to purity and manliness and justice, and submission to your Maker’s commands, then are whirlwinds still provided in the constitution of things which will blow you to atoms.

. . . And Carlyle *believed* this—believed it singly and simply as Isaiah believed it, not as a mode of speech to be used in pulpits by eloquent preachers, but as actual literal fact, as a real account of the true living relations between man and his Maker. The established forms, creeds, liturgies, articles of faith, were but as the shell round the kernel. The shell in these days of ours had rotted away, and men supposed that, because the shell was gone, the entire conception had been but a dream. It was no dream. The kernel could not rot. It was the vital force by which human existence in this planet was controlled, and would be controlled to the end. In this conviction he wrote his spectral “History of the French Revolution.” Spectral, for the actors in it appear without their earthly clothes: men and women in their natural characters, but as in some vast phantasmagoria, with the supernatural shining through them, working in fancy their own wills or their own imagination; in reality, the mere instruments of a superior power, infernal or divine, whose awful presence is felt while it is unseen. (Froude [1882–84] 3: 89–90)

Froude’s almost scientific attempt to reduce to prose the force of what made Carlyle write *The French Revolution* the way he did drew its fire from Heaven or Hell, in neither of which Froude fully believed. At one moment Carlyle is as real as Isaiah. At another he is as unreal as Isaiah. Froude is writing in the early 1880s about the mid-1830s, contemplating the 1790s by the light of what little he knows of ancient Jewish history, being himself an apostatised Anglo-Catholic ascribing evangelical theology to an ex-Calvinist. Wilson draws his fire from Carlyle’s first sight of the little virgin queen to whom the state in which he lived had nominally devoted itself. And he is quite right. Carlyle imposed his French revolutionary apocalypse on the London Victoria was about to inherit in order to force coexistence on her gentle banality with the tempests distanced by space and time but still audibly raging outside. G. K. Chesterton remarked in his *The Victorian Age in Literature* (1913) that Froude followed Carlyle’s pursuit of apparently demonic heroes such as Cromwell and Frederick but fulfilled his quest by adopting more vulgar icons such as Henry VIII and Elizabeth. This would be true for his explanation of Carlyle’s intentions and implosions, the reality itself being more complex and more Teutonic. Whether Wilson

realizes it or not, his biography reveals how Victoria—sometimes involuntarily and sometimes unaware—succeeded in keeping a latter-day French Revolution at bay for 63 years. If she was great, it lay in her ignorance of her greatness. As he shows, what she was conscious of was her ability to force the fulfilments of her selfish whims and to pamper the privileges of her prejudices.

So Mr. Wilson's Carlylean vision, as opposed to his Froudian, ushers in the tranquillity of Victoria:

Carlyle himself was by way of being a republican, certainly one deeply read in the era of the first Republic in the seventeenth century, and a hero-worshipping biography of Oliver Cromwell. Carlyle was a sardonic and amusing man, whose stock in trade was a refusal to be impressed—by the English, who to his Scottish soul were ever alien; by the Establishment, which he found laughable; by the class hierarchy, very near the bottom of which he had been born. His hero was the German poet Goethe, and Carlyle sought, in the confused state of modern England, with its great social injustices, its teeming poor, its disease-ridden industrial cities, its Philistinism, some means of returning, with that poet, a positive attitude to life, an Everlasting Yea. Carlyle, on that breezy April day, was passed by a carriage: the Queen taking, as he said in his Scottish way, “her bit departure for Windsor. I had seen her another day at Hyde Park Corner, coming in from the daily ride. She is decidedly a pretty-looking little creature: health, clearness, graceful timidity, looking out from her young face. . . . One could not help some interest in her, situated as mortal seldom was.” (5–6)

But here, alas, as so frequently elsewhere, haste makes waste, and the historian who employs Froude's text rather than the Duke-Edinburgh *Letters* suffers accordingly.

A glance at Carlyle's letter to his brother John, 12 April 1838 (*CL* 10: 65) would have informed Wilson that Froude's mastery of Scots dialect was predictably weak, Carlyle having written “bit departure,” not “bit departure” and the final sentence continued from “She is decidedly” to conclude, “one could not help some interest in her, as in a sister situated as mortal seldom was.” One has always to allow for plain, unvarnished error on Froude's part, but in this instance the unspoken omission of “as in a sister” may

have been the result of deliberate policy. That Carlyle should have momentarily seen Victoria as his little sister is understandable if unexpected. But when Froude was writing in the early 1880s the waning and waxing of Victoria's popularity as admirably chartered by Wilson had now settled in firm course towards British apotheosis, and he who had dared defy Oxford theocracy, whether as Anglo-Catholic or as sceptic in the 1840s, may have trembled at the thought of royal displeasure at such plebeian mock-genealogy. The fact that Victoria had possibly become the morganatic wife of an even more plain-spoken Scotsman, her late consort Albert's ghillie—and the warmth of her relationship with him, whatever it was, seeped through Court and Society gossip—rendered it even less desirable. There might be false friends or dangerous enemies who could suggest that Carlyle's putative sister was well groomed to be John Brown's wife. Incidentally, Wilson's necessary study in Brown is admirably and convincingly done: he thinks they may have been married, for which there is some evidence, but he stresses that such evidence while not easily refuted, is thin.

But Froude's careless or fraudulent conclusion provides a startling vindication of Wilson's use of Carlyle's description of the new Queen. Her evolution from the object of Carlyle's protective and near-familial pity to the formidable figure intimidating Wilson and other biographers is the story of this book, very well told, above all where Wilson's narrative derives from his own primary research. His Carlylean Victoria is more credible than his dependence on Froude allowed him to see. Had he gone into the Duke-Edinburgh volumes (as he must do to write that life of Carlyle he is so well qualified to undertake), he would have found some startling modifications of commonplace commentary on Carlyle. A pursuit of Victoria through the Carlyle letters shows Carlyle in a surprisingly representative as well as fraternal light. *Heroes and Hero-Worship* has accustomed readers of Carlyle to assume his favorites might include tough nuts among the litterateurs as well as the lion-hearts, but we hardly expect frail lassies to win prominent places in such contemporary history or journalism that he might write.

But his view of the monarchy began with what Wilson rightly sees as a Scottish mockery of English conventions. George III

was seldom sane during Carlyle's early life, and George IV's place as libertine and wife-hater eroded respect. William IV firmly amused Carlyle. He satirically nicknamed him "The Patriot King" in allusion to Bolingbroke's famous Tory treatise, whereas the pressures of agitation for Parliamentary reform forced William, frequently against his inclination, to conform to Whig demands. Otherwise Carlyle's attitude was exhibited in a letter he wrote to his wife Jane on 24 August 1836: "Jack said, on Saturday: 'Here is a ticket Lady Clare has sent me; will you not go and see the King prorogue Parliament.'—'Sir', I pronounced, 'if he were going to blow up Parliament with gunpowder I would hardly go, —being busy elsewhere!'" (*CL* 9: 41). Carlyle expressed civil regret at the imminence of the King's death when writing to his mother on 11 June 1837 and sounded as concerned as one might in anticipating the demise of a favorite animal at the Zoo: "The King is by many said to be dying, here, dropsy in the heart. Poor old fellow, I saw him about a fortnight ago, coming in from Windsor thro' Hyde Park: he looked fresh and decent; clean as from spring water. 'The little boys cried: 'Ha, old Billy, how d'ye do?'" The Queen they say is in very bad health too. The last hope of the Tories at present is like to go out with 'old Billy'" (*CL* 9: 32). "Old Billy" died nine days later, though his Queen, Adelaide, lasted until 1849. Carlyle shrewdly recognized that however unsuccessful William may have been throughout his seven years in rare attempts to fall back on the Tories, his under-age successor Victoria would be wholly under Whig influence from the beginning of her reign. And so it proved, until her marriage to Albert.

On aesthetic grounds at least, Jane Welsh Carlyle merits as close a scrutiny as her husband, who certainly found her no shrinking Victoria. She seems to have roughly shared her Tam's mildly iconoclastic view of Hanoverian monarchy in general and the departed William IV in particular, writing to Carlyle on 17 July 1837:

If you ran away from heat, I can only say, the heat has surely followed you:—for we have none overmuch to complain of—I have on all my flannels still; and the temperature has even helped me out of the dilemma I was in when you left; whether or no I should make any pretension to *mourn* I was going to have made a

questionable sort of figure in the general blackness, when the thermometer fell to the level of *black velvet*, and I “*trat hervor glorreich*” [came forward in splendor], as black as a crow from head to foot, without the least *outlay* in the world! Once or twice only I have found it more suitable to put on white but my black crucifix and a charming little black silk mantilla edged with lace, (which my Mother with her usual wisdom gave *four pounds* for (as much as would have bought a new carpet!) saves my loyalty, or rather I should say my giganity, from reproach—for devil a morsel of the sentiment of loyalty were discoverable, I believe, if one were to ransac[k] all the bombazeen and crape which makes the noble City at this moment look like a City “*gone to the undertaker.*” Among ill bred people the talk about the *young queen*, is sufficiently tiresome. The only criticism I put the least faith in is John Fergus,¹ “reformer,” and about to lose his seat in the election consequent in those days on change of monarchy]—he says her expression is extremely unprepossessing, petulant and unamiable, and it will be well if she do not go all into confusion. To be sure she will! what else can a “young queen” do? (*CL* 9: 246)

The ceremonies preening themselves on public expression of monarchical sentiments continued also to draw dry mockery from Carlyle, who on 9 November 1837 wrote to his mother, about the City’s Guildhall banquet for the Queen with procession and street illuminations: “We heard nothing of Queen Victoria and her dinner yesterday except the jowling of the bells” (*CL* 9: 349). By 15 February 1838 he was beginning to develop fraternal or perhaps maternal instincts about her in telling his mother of a visit to Windsor: “[O]n the highest point of the ground there is Windsor Castle or Palace; which we also saw, outside and inside; very beautiful indeed, and sufficient to lodge a much larger figure than poor little Queen Victoria. The Kings hang there, the pictures of them, all in rows with their gauderies about them, poor old King William the last: like so many shadows of a Dream,—each hovers there for a year or two, and then Eternity swallows him, and he lies as strait as old Wull Moor the Galloway Hushel” (*CL* 9: 29–30).

¹ Fergus (d. 1865) was M.P. for Kirkcaldy 1835–37.

His first sight of the Queen as reported to his brother John on 12 April 1838 is also notable: “The crowd yesterday, some two thousand strong, of loungers and children, uttered no sound whatever, except a kind of thin-spread interjection ‘Aihh’ from the infantile part of it; one old Flunkey in tarnished laced hat was the only creature I saw salute, he got a bow in return all to himself. Poor little victory!” (*CL* 10: 65–66).

Was Carlyle the only person to nickname Victoria in these years? The derisive “victory” had its initial letter capitalised by him in subsequent correspondence. It was satirical, a laughing identification serving as an absurd echo of the vanished days of England’s hero-kings (of whom, whether Carlyle knew and Wilson knows it or not, the last was William III). But within a few years victory upon victory would blaze from Carlyle’s edition of *Cromwell*, and two decades later his readers would wallow in the blood of Frederick the Great’s victories. Victoria was almost guided by him from afar towards her destiny as a martial queen. But it was all increasingly affectionate comedy at an earlier stage, with Carlylean commentary offering an appropriate cameo for the Melbourne years. He gave his mother that first sight of the Queen on the same 12 April as he had conveyed it to brother John. This was not obsession, but he was fulfilling his social duties as son and brother in the big city, and Victoria was an object of interest for him and countless other visitors needing copy for stay-at-home relatives. The aura of protective pity he threw around her received more elaboration when a possible common source of it was being addressed:

Yesterday, going thro’ one of the Parks, I saw the poor little Queen. She was in an open carriage, preceded by three or four swift, red-coated troopers; all off to Windsor just as I happened to pass. Another carriage, or carriages, followed, with maids of honour &c: the whole drove very fast. It seemed to me the poor little Queen was a bit modest nice sonsy little lassie; blue eyes, light hair, fine skin; of extremely small stature: she looked timid, anxious, almost frightened; the people looked at her in perfect silence; one old liveryman alone touched his hat to her: I was heartily sorry for the poor bairn, —tho’ perhaps she might have said as Parson Swan did, “Greet not for me brethren; for verily

yea verily I greet not for myself." It is a strange thing to look at the fashions of this world! (*CL* 10: 69)

But the Carlyles were unlikely to accord the Coronation ceremonies more irritation than admiration. His heroes were seldom overdressed, by themselves or anyone else. Still in 1838, he enquired from his brother John, then on the continent, whether he would see the Austrian Emperor Ferdinand being arrayed in the iron crown of Lombardy. Carlyle was sardonically aware that this commemorated though not counteracted the medieval Holy Roman Emperors' least successful attempts to enforce their power outside German-speaking lands. He would have been well aware too that the day on which he was writing was the anniversary of the storming of the Bastille, 14 July, commemorating events that he had captured in the most memorable narration in the English language: "Are you to see the Coronation at Milan? We were plagued with Victory's more than enough; but it is over now well. We saw it from the Montague's window, less amusing than King Crispin's,² not more sublime" (*CL* 10: 124). On 27 July he described the event to his brother John as "Queen Victory a-crowning" (*CL* 10: 139). Yet as Wilson tells his story, "Victory" in spite—or perhaps because—of her extreme youth showed as eager an awareness of its absurdities. She wrote to a correspondent (Wilson does not say to whom) that the "Bishop of Durham [Edward Maltby] stood on one side near me, but he was, as Lord Melbourne told me, remarkably 'maladroit' and never could tell me what was to take place. . . . The Archbishop [of Canterbury, William Howley] came in and ought to have delivered the Orb to me, but I had already got it, and he (as usual) was so confused and puzzled and knew nothing—and went away" (86–87). Like the future emblem of her realm, Lewis Carroll's Alice, she was self-possessed however startled, and could usually answer the unexpected with confidence if not always with common sense. Howley had distinguished himself soon after his appointment by George IV for blocking the Anatomy Act in the House of Lords on the ground that it would interfere with Judgment Day if the bodies up for Divine verdicts had previously been

² Coronation processions for King Crispin were traditionally held on 25 October, feast day of St. Crispin, the patron saint of shoemakers.

dissected by surgeons and their students. When burking came to London, Howley was swept aside in his turn: nobody wanted to be the next audio-visual aid in a surgical demonstration.

Enough has been done here to show readers adjacent to a library with the Duke-Edinburgh Carlyle Letters how they can chart the Carlyle-victory progress in mutual regard. Mr. Wilson can give occasional landmarks, an obvious one being Carlyle's predictable enthusiasm for Prince Albert. The task is enhanced by Wilson's effective demonstration that Victoria was a very good writer herself. He is somewhat given to questionable judgments especially when the biographical field has been becomingly ploughed. He would do well to rely on himself more. When his facts are in hand he is far better worth hearing on individual figures than warming up their overvalued biographers. But he moves with heartening skill through a large and exciting cast. Necessarily he could not stay with Carlyle's vision. But he has whetted our appetites where he has used it, and the way should now be clear for the real thing. But his major source will have to be the letters, as opposed to the pieties of David Alec Wilson and James Anthony Froude. We need to see Carlyle plain, and A. N. Wilson is the person to help us achieve this aim.

University of Edinburgh