

“A Thousand Things to Say”:
Unpublished Letters of Thomas Carlyle
to Julia Strachey in The British Library

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THESE PREVIOUSLY unpublished letters from TC to Julia Woodburn Strachey, b. Kirkpatrick (1790-1846), were found in the Strachey Collection in the India Office records at the British Library. The papers of Sir Richard Strachey (1817-1908), his wife Jane Maria, b. Grant (1840-1928), and his father-in-law, Sir John Peter Grant of Rothiemurchus (1807-93), together with those of other members of the Strachey and Grant families, were deposited on permanent loan by James Strachey (1887-1967) in 1964. They are published with the kind permission of the Strachey Trust and the British Library.

Julia Strachey was the youngest daughter of Colonel William Kirkpatrick (1750-1812), and the sister of Isabella, later Buller (d. 1849), and Clementina, later Lady Louis (d. 1861). On 31 October 1808 in Calcutta, she married Edward Strachey (1774-1832) of the East India Company. They returned to London in 1811 and settled at Strachey's family home, Sutton Court, near Bristol. In 1815, Strachey resigned from the Bengal Civil Service and in 1820 took a position as examiner at East India House, London. The Stracheys moved to Fitzroy Square and owned a summer residence at Goodenough House, Shooter's Hill, Kent. TC met them in London in 1822 through Edward Irving, whose renown and popularity as a preacher had attracted the impressionable and deeply spiritual Julia Strachey. Irving persuaded the couple to propose TC as a tutor to Isabella Buller's two sons, Charles (1806-48) and Arthur (1808-69).

In his chapter on Irving in *Reminiscences* (1881), written in 1866, TC left a vivid impression of the Stracheys in 1822: “Wife of a well-known Indian Official . . . and a man of real worth; far diverse as his worth and ways were from those of his beautiful

enthusiastic and still youngish Wife:—a bright creature, she, given wholly (though there lay silent in her a great deal of fine childlike *mirth* withal, and of innocent *secular* grace and gift) to things sacred and serious . . . emphatically what the Germans call a *Schöne Seele* [beautiful soul]” (269). Carlyle insisted that “to this day, long years after her death, I regard her as a singular pearl of a woman; pure as dew, yet full of love, incapable of unverity to herself or others. . . . [She] took to me from the first, nor ever swerved” (283–84).

These letters, written between 26 May 1839 and 1 July 1843, allude to significant moments in TC’s career: the publication of *The French Revolution* in England (1837) and the United States (1839); the preparation and publication of *Chartism* (1839) and the lectures that would comprise *Heroes and Hero-Worship* (1841); the death of JWC’s mother, Grace Welsh, 25 February 1842; and TC’s early interest in the life and world of Oliver Cromwell. The correspondence between Julia Strachey and TC had ceased in 1835, but he became reacquainted with her three years later, through her eldest son Edward (1812–1901), who was a follower of F. D. Maurice and an opponent of High Church doctrines and practices. In London, the Strachey family lived by this time at 115 Mount Street, Grosvenor Square. Julia Strachey also retained a cottage in the village of Henbury, Bristol, five miles from John Sterling, who had recently moved to Clifton. On 2 June 1838, TC informed Edward that he hoped to meet “your good mother . . . to whom, as to a friend now of many years, I beg to commend myself with all manner of good wishes” (*CL* 10: 91). On 13 April 1839, TC forwarded a letter to his mother that he had received from Mrs. Strachey: “the only one I have had from that hand for many years. I hope you will like it better than Jane does, and I do” (*CL* 11: 76).

She was evidently writing to TC about religious matters. He told his brother John Carlyle, 15 April 1839, “I have to write to Mrs Strachey: she has sent me a laudation too and a preachment” (*CL* 11: 88). But he delicately avoided challenging her views, and on 22 May, he reported that “Mrs Strachey wrote me a grand letter of eulogy about the F.R. [*The French Revolution*]; I answered yesterday” (*CL* 11: 114). In a long and informative reply, TC expressed his thanks:

5. Cheyne Row, Chelsea,
26th May, 1839—

My dear Mrs Strachey,

Several weeks ago I had a most kind letter from you; which I was very proud of; which I meant to acknowledge both sooner than this, and more at length than I have now opportunity to do.

It is very honourable to me that my poor Book has gained your approbation; no truer heart could any Book, with its doctrines or delineations, hope to reach and gain assent from. Besides, whom does one so wish to please, as those who have known us, and been pleased with us, when we pleased hardly any other? I will mark this too among my blessings. Further you must give me leave to think that, considering our widely opposite points of vision, much approbation is honourable to the Judge as to the Book. For surely there is some common ground of truth and genuineness in both, which thro' such external discrepancies asserts itself in both, and invites its like, as the True always does the True!

It is a wild Orson of a Book; savage as a Son of the Woods; and can at most claim to *be* a kind of Son of the Woods, and Son of Nature,—partly of kindred to Nature's other sons and products; therefore *not* entirely without value for all its savagery, which indeed, poor creature, it could not help, if you know all! For the rest, the world's tolerance of it far surpasses my hopes, which in truth stood at *zero* or lower. The Americans have sent me money for it, nay the English Bookseller has paid me money. Instead of all parties joining to condemn me, most parties find something to praise in me, and conclude that at bottom I partly belong to *their* side. So we print our new edition, and will let the thing struggle along, as far as then strength has been given it. The grand undeniable fact is that I have not such a thing to write any more, but see it fairly lying behind me forever and a day. "Tomorrow to fresh fields and pastures new."

You say nothing about Martin Luther which has not my hearty assent. I have been lecturing about "Modern Revolutions" in these weeks, and gave a flaming delineation of the man altogether in that strain. There are few men in the world whom I feel a heartier

brotherhood with; a perennial man, one of the bravest men ever born. Do you know Michelet's French Book about him? An entertaining little Book, of excerpts mainly, more apprehensible than larger books are. I forget whether you read German, and can enjoy the *Tischleden* in their vigorous idiomatic natural vesture? If not, it is almost worthwhile to learn German, were there no other object,—as there are many, very many. Luther's melancholy interests me, his visions of the Devil, his dark obscurations and fiery indomitable valour, his fierceness and his tenderness;—a man "great as the world;" a whole *chaos* of a man, struggling to become *unchaotic* and a world. One of God's soldiers; to whom the good fight, and with sore toil a great victory was ordained. Often have I thought of his poor old Mother going to the fair of Eisleben, on that winter day, with her poor Husband, to make their purchases and sales there; a few coins of money all their wealth; and how in the tumult she was taken with travail, and bore then a Mighty Man,—worth all the Sovereign Majesties we have heard of since, and, even temporally considered, *stronger* than they all! It is a miraculous lot that still at all times is appointed to all men.

Do you not read Italian? As you are an adventurous reader, I think you either have made or ought to make acquaintance with *Dante Alighieri*. His *Divine Comedy* is, with the exception of the Bible, and perhaps *Æschylus* in some parts, the deepest Book I anywhere knew.

John Sterling has taken a house at Clifton, and strongly urges us to come and see him there. In such case your accessibility were a beautiful additional outlook. I know not what is possible, what not, at the present date. Sterling I think will have a great charm for you. Could I but persuade him to *be at rest*, I say many times, he were the loveablest of all men.

We have seen but little of the Bullers this winter; yet not nothing; nor do I know why so little,—except it be the Canadas, the Durhams &c &c. Mrs Buller spoke, some three weeks ago, of quitting town now in favour of some cottage in the Hampstead quarter. I suppose Charles is sure of office one day [or] other, but when or with what issue is not to be prophesied. The Radical department of things is, of all others the least gratifying to me at present.

Will you salute Mr Strachey for me, whom I am happy to hear of as still near you, and in the way of improvement. His pure patient character made a deep and tender impression on us. One cannot but hope good for him however sore his affliction.

My wife returns you all manner of friendly regards. Is there not a possibility that you may take a glance of London this season? If not we will still hope in Clifton. Good be with you always, whether near or far!

I am always,
My dear Mrs Strachey
very truly yours
T. Carlyle

(MS: BL OIOC Mss Eur/F127/470/124)

Julia Strachey continued to correspond with TC. A letter to him dated 5 December 1839, composed entirely in German, and sent from Clifton, is in the National Library of Scotland (MS: 1766.76). In it she reported the recent visit of her cousin Catherine (“Käthe”) Aurora “Kitty” Kirkpatrick (1802–89), one of the models for “*Blumine*” in *Sartor Resartus* (1833–34) and the daughter of a Begum (an Indian Princess) who had been introduced to TC by Edward Strachey in 1824 (see *SR* 334):

5. Cheyne Row, Chelsea,
17 Decr, 1839–

My dear Mrs Strachey,

Your brave German letter found me here the other day. A thousand thanks for it;—and one poor line by way of answer: one in the hurry I am in is better than nothing, and all I can afford myself.

You must have an astonishing aptitude for languages! Last time I heard of you, not long ago, there was no whisper of this *Deutschheit*; and here you produce yourself not reading German only, but speaking and writing it, really with an amazing fluency and accuracy! You have made what I reckon a most valuable acquisition; one that can scarcely fail to be rich for you in all manner of good fruits. You stand face to face now with the most remarkable men of these later generations; by far the most remarkable, in many

senses the only remarkable: you have now but to look and learn in all ways. Whom do you read? What line of inquiry have you taken up? There are infinitely varied lines; there are men of all characters and complexions. My notion is that for you, as for myself, the chief result of reading is generally the Writer; to construe from the Book the Man who has, unconsciously or not, painted himself there, and get acquainted with *him*. There is all manner of profitable communion attainable in that. Of all Germans, moreover, I should guess that Goethe, Jean Paul, and a few others of that sort, would in the long run prove the most interesting to you. Jean Paul is difficult to read; not for grammatical reasons only: but he is a greathearted far-flashing brother man; well worthy of struggling for. In many of his modes you will at once deeply sympathize with him. As for Goethe you will find, as I conjecture, that he after all is *the* man; a great *sun* of an intellect, so serene, noiseless, all-illuminating; whom weak eyes, accordingly, and very naturally for weak eyes, pronounce to be *black!* You will not be discouraged by superficial misconceptions;—nay you cannot get rid of him, misconceive as you may! For several years I spluttered and resisted, struggling thro' the wrappings of the man; but at length I did get a sight of him, and it was for once and for always. Look at Sterling too! Nobody could be a fiercer gainsayer, mere pertinacious arguer and *Advocatus Diaboli*; yet we see now peaceably making progress in acquaintance with the man; peaceably translating his *Dichtung und Wahrheit* as a Sterling should!—

As for me, I have not been working hard this long while; indeed I have not been able to work hard; I have been reduced to *silence*,—which however I have often found to be fruitfulest kind of work at last. The only thing I have written is a kind of Essay called *Chartism*, which they are printing in these days; it pleads with due energy for the Poorer Classes; and will find, in you at least I think, some fellow-feeling and approval when you read it. I know of no excuse for Radicalism but sympathy with the dumb suffering Millions; and this, I grieve to say, is what I have found simply in *no* Parliamentary Radical now speaking and arguing; which Sect accordingly I give up to futility, and do not regret to see abandoned by the world. Of Charles

Buller I had, and still have, better hopes; but he as yet differs only in theory from the others.

By the by I saw him, the other day, at a distance in Pall Mall; but did not get to speak with him. I have seen or heard nothing authentic, except thro' yourself of Mrs Buller or the family; whom absence from London is to us a real loss.—And so “Käthe” was with you? Good *Käthe*, may good be ever with her! Pray send her my affectionate remembrances; say if I did see her once again in the world, it would be a real satisfaction to me.

Adieu, dear Mrs Strachey. My Wife, in better health than usual this winter, warmly returns your salutations.

Be well, you and yours!—Ever truly—

T. Carlyle

(MS: BL OIOC Mss Eur/F127/470/137)

On 9 November 1840, TC informed his brother John that “Mrs Strachey, as I find, has taken to the writing of Theological Books. Did you see or hear of her Book—on St. John (I think)?” (CL 12: 317). A year later, he sent her a copy of *Heroes and Hero-Worship* and speculated about a possible visit to Clifton:

Chelsea, Monday Evg

[Postmarked 16 November 1841]

Dear Mrs Strachey,

The Bookbinder, by this time, has sent you one copy of the Book on Heroes; pray lend that, till it be worn out;—then claim another of the second edition, which will perhaps have corrections! Keep Emerson's Book too, the copy that you have; and let all who want to read it, do so. Is not this enough?—

If you could find me any “Hermitage,” a place of refuge, at any and all times, against the soul-confusing loud inanity of this huge smoky Babel, when it grew too mad for me, and I too weak for it,—surely *there* were a blessing! Still better, if my bread and water, would be ministered by such a hand. But alas, alas—!—

This winter I am to be very busy. Life has that one meaning for me. The work I can do in it: the rest is all confusion, distress, despicability. Work, work, while it is called today.

By the time the Sun gets round from Capricornus again, and the sky has grown to have some brightness, I may, if I have prospered, have a kind of right to see the country once more. There seizes me sometimes when I look at the bright sky, across these gases, bogs and soot-solutions, an invincible deuil, a kind of half-insane passion, to get out of it, to be alone once more, *coute qu'il coute*, and have the azure Heaven intersecting the green Earth by a clear *unsmokyline!*— Perhaps I may run westward on the next occasion; or on some occasion. *Esperons*

If I do not see you again at Mount-Street, take my kind farewell with you; my true wish that Good may be always near you. It does me good to see you look so well and happy. In the labyrinth of this Life, you surely, for one, have chosen the better and right path: long may you persist in it, with better and better courage,— according to your own *mode* of walking, and striving. There are many modes, properly each one has his own. A heavenly voice once said, “In my Father’s House are many mansions!”——

My Wife is out tonight; and commissions me to answer you, “with many regards.” I have been scribbling many hours; and am heartily wearied.— Adieu.

Always affectionately yours
T. Carlyle

(MS: BL OIOC Mss Eur/F127/470/128)

JWC’s mother Grace Welsh died, 25 February 1842. TC spent nearly three months consoling her and settling legal and financial matters at Thornhill. In an unusually vivid display of empathy and emotion, he describes his wife’s anguished reaction to the news of her mother’s death:

Templand, Thornhill, Dumfriesshire,
8 April, 1842–

My dear Mrs Strachey,

A mournful event has occurred here; of which you, as one taking interest in all that concerns us, ought to

be apprised. My poor Mother-in-law, Mrs Welsh whose residence this was, has been unexpectedly summoned away by Death. We had heard of sickliness thro' the winter, but such had for many years been common; my Wife had suspicions, but the Doctor too when specially questioned gave cheering answer; and we had on the whole no feeling but that it was a commonplace illness, the brunt even of it now over. Our first real alarm was by a new letter from the Doctor, written on the very day which proved the last. My poor Wife, her Widow Mother's only child, started instantly from a sick-room; travelled all night, in such an agony of fear and hope as you may fancy: on the morrow morning in Liverpool, at her Uncle's door, she was met by the tidings that all had already ended. She proceeded no farther. She is now home again, with one of her Cousins, a cheery young girl whom she likes; her letters still indicate great weakness of body, and extreme disconsolateness of heart. It has been a right heavy stroke for her, poor creature. Her good Mother was nearly all the kindred of much value to her that Death had still spared: a woman of much generosity and worth; whose very faults, now that she is gone from us, awaken new pitying here,—for they were all but the excesses of some virtue or other imprisoned in the earthly element, and as it was frustrated of their effect and purpose thereby: and now, alas, the earthly element is scattered sternly asunder, and all is Silence, Clearness and Eternity! Death is forever miraculous; a holy, unutterable *miracle*, were there none other left.

As for me I have been here these five weeks; the last three of them entirely alone. Multitudes of poor businesses fall to be adjusted and concluded; for this establishment is now to cease altogether. On Thursday next, all dissipates itself here, in an uproar of Packers, Auctioneers &c &c; and thenceforth this house knows none of us any more. *Transiit*: so we have to say, some day, to all things and persons whatsoever. The Planet Earth itself is but a theatre-*scene*; the very Stars do not endure forever!—

My three weeks of solitude here, which has been nearly total, have done me much good. It is long since I have had such a *Sabbath*; left alone, alone altogether, with one's own griefs and sins, with this mystic Universe

and the Spirits of the Dead! Often I think if ever there arise (as arise there must, unless God proposes to destroy and abolish us) a spirit of true Earnestness among man once more, they will revive the old practice of retiring, at intervals, each for himself into total reclusion, into total Silence. No want is deeper in the heart of a thinking man; no practice more salutary. We grow into mere distracted Hearsays if forever in the bustle; empty sounding-boards; and yet Eternity, and Reality most real does await us,—ready or not ready!

In a week or two more I may hope to be at Chelsea;—or perhaps I shall go round by Edinburgh and Dundee. The old “Closeburn Tower” of your Kirkpatrick ancestors is within a mile of me; still alive, moving with greyhounds, poultry and spring rooks, as I passed it yesterday.— Adieu, dear Mrs Strachey.

Yours ever truly
T. Carlyle

(MS: BL OIOC Mss Eur/F127/470/130)

In August 1842, JWC was invited to stay with Charles and Isabella Buller at Troston in Suffolk, where TC later joined them to tour the Cromwell country. Julia Strachey generously offered to lend TC and JWC her cottage for two months, while she toured Italy. On 23 August, TC wrote to JWC at Troston: “This morning the enclosed kind Message from Mrs Strachey lay in the Box. What think you of a sojourn for two months in the C[1]ifton country! I will certainly go thither some time or other” (*CL* 15: 41). TC responded to the invitation several weeks later:

Chelsea, London,
14 Sepr, 1842–

Dear Mrs Strachey,

Your very kind letter has been here about three weeks; unanswered, not out of neglect, but because the hospitable and indeed most inviting offer therein made to us required some deliberation,—required a certain summoning of courage to say No to it, even when the deliberation was complete, We must not go to the West at present; alas, no, it is not possible for this year!

My Wife was in Suffolk, over at Troston on a visit to Mrs Buller, when your letter came; about a week afterwards I went to bring her home, and they kept me also for about a fortnight; my Wife in all has staid there some five weeks; and we only returned last night. This, we are forced to admit, is fairly enough of roaming for the current season. On me especially my conscience begins to be altogether clamorous: For idleness, my baleful besetting sin, "*There* where thou art, there with what health &c thou hast, be doing in God's name!" For, in very truth, the night cometh wherein no man can work.—We shall not see your pleasant friendly dwelling at Clifton this year (perhaps we shall see yourself first?)—but in any case we shall often think of it with new grateful feelings; and so you too can understand, that your generous offer of it was not of *no* use to us.

Mrs Buller is weakly and sickly but full of spirit and heart, as her wont is; I never saw so fragile a figure with such an amount of life in it! She seemed to grow somewhat stronger while my Wife staid there; she proposes Lady Louis's at Torquay for winter quarters, as in a kindlier climate than Troston. She drove about with us in all directions, was the most assiduous and kindest of hostesses; my Wife played chess nightly with good Mr Buller; for me there were endless complexities of green lanes, country churches, quiet shady hamlets, solitude, verdant silence,—and liberty to smoke: we were a most composed and reasonable little party; far happier, I believe, than parties usually are. It is now over; and the great Ink-sea has reabsorbed us; and the question rings still more unmusically thro' my heart: "Dotard, laggard, what is it thou canst do? Nothing?"—

Half of one of my weeks at Troston was spent on a riding pilgrimage into Oliver Cromwell's country, over in Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire. The memory of the mighty man is well nigh dead there; changing itself fast into an absurd *Mythus*; a [Fable] *without* the poetic fancy! Nothing can be more tragical to me than the History of Cromwell; the only religious King we ever had, the most heroic of all our Kings; and treated— as such are by the world; like a thing unworthy of the world!

Well; you will return soon, full of Italian melodies and sunshine, but with the old heart towards us? I have

a thousand things to say; but must not overflow this little scrap of paper with more of them, My Wife unites in many blessings and many thanks to you. Yours ever truly

T. Carlyle

(MS: BL OIOC Mss Eur/F127/470/132)

In May 1843, Julia Strachey renewed her invitation to TC, who arrived at Clifton for a one-night visit, 3 July, from where he went on to visit his Welsh friend Charles Redwood (1802–54) in Llandough, near Cardiff:

Chelsea, Saturday
1 July [sic], 1843

My dear Mrs Strachey,

My Welsh friend is at home. If all go well, I mean to set off on Monday; and shall hope to be with you about 5 o'clock (if the Bills prophesy correctly) by the 12 o'clock train.

The absolutely needful being all that can be written today, I subscribe myself

Yours ever truly
T. Carlyle

(MS: BL OIOC Mss Eur/F127/470/134)

The friendship between TC and Julia Strachey continued until her death, 20 November 1846, at Perugia in Italy. She was buried in the English cemetery at Florence. In a letter to her son-in-law John Hare, 7 December 1846, TC paid tribute to her: "Your noble mother was the first friend I acquired in this country, was the oldest and dearest friend I anywhere had in the world; a truer, more generous, or higher soul I have never known. And now, all on a sudden, she is snatched away" (*CL* 21: 107–08).

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