Mark Twain’s Notes on the Death of Thomas Carlyle

The news of Thomas Carlyle’s death on 5 February 1881 spread quickly on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. Soon after it reached Samuel Clemens in Hartford, Connecticut, he jotted down his initial reactions to Carlyle’s passing on a used envelope that was clearly the first bit of paper he had available. The notes read rather more like an abstract poem than a formal preparation for some longer statement, one that Clemens’s alter ego Mark Twain never did make. The front of the envelope is addressed to “S. L. Clemens / Hartford Conn.” and is postmarked “Freedonia N.Y. / 8 Feb.” On the reverse, the envelope is stamped “Hartford Conn. / 10 Feb.” Twain’s notes on the death of Carlyle are held at the Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville. The editors wish to thank Margaret Hrabe at the Small Library for her kind assistance in arranging for the publication of these remarkable notes.

BEK

[front]

Carlyle is gone. Let us adore
Like castigated spaniels round his bier.
He loathed the Yankee all his days.
The loather of the Yankee name.
Let’s wallow near the sacred dust
And shed our humble tear
And droop our tails & drop our humble tear
He loathed the very Yankee name
America was not great
—never did anything great
—no American was ever great
or good or worthy in the eyes
of this Scotch
Supreme Being.
An opinion he was entitled

[reverse]

to—but when Americans
called to pay homage it did
not become him to say so.

The late Scotch Supreme Being

Great Apostle of Force Might
<T> Shouter for both, <warriors> bloody heroes, ty-

rants.
Let’s do “reminiscences” unto
him. And “incidents” &c.
He wrote against the struggling slave
He wished to see our Union
div[i]ded—if his loftiness
too[k] the trouble to concern
[h]imself about so small
a matter.

[written vertically down the right margin]
Great loather of the Yankee name!

[upside down in the bottom margin]
TREMBLED

◊
to lab where it was care called to pay homage it did not become him to say so.

The Great Creator, Supreme Being

Great is praise of Force Mighty

For it is bloody, bloody hero

In order for both nations to

rants.

Let us "remember we are not

him. To "incidents" we.

He wrote again of the struggling

slave:

He wished to see our Union

died, not if his loftiness

for the trouble to concern

myself and not as small

matter.