



The Articulate Prophet: Thomas Carlyle on Oliver Cromwell and Revolutionary Heroism

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The memory of the seventeenth-century "Puritan" Revolution lingers like a pall over modern English historiography. The name of its principle actor, Oliver Cromwell, still lies cloaked in a curious admixture of controversy, confusion, fear, ignominy, sympathy and admiration. At times throughout the three-and-a-third centuries since the Restoration, the Lord Protector has been called to stand before the bar of derisive scholarship on charges of hypocrisy, duplicity, fanaticism, ambition and megalomania. At other times he has been praised by statesmen and historians for the long-term consequences of his actions. Most accounts stress the significance of political, economic, social or constitutional changes in this tumultuous chapter in English history.¹

The Victorian literary hero Thomas Carlyle, however, rejected the use of eighteenth-century rational formulas which have either vilified Cromwell or have trivialised the man and his cause. He regarded both types of analyses as mired in the black falsehood of sceptical and "unheroic" ages. Carlyle believed that the age of "Enlightenment" actually rendered the age of the Puritans obscure and unintelligible for all ever since. His defense of Cromwell and castigation of modern intellectuals was consistent with and inextricably tied to his philosophy of history, revolution and the role of the great man who did their bidding. Carlyle sought to demonstrate that through the patient reading of the unrefined utterances and writings of a sincere and dedicated country gentleman, the divine light of a great age would finally pierce the thick, impenetrable fog of modern scholarship.

Much about Carlyle's philosophy flowed with the strong historiographical currents of the nineteenth century. Critics often view his exaltation of power as a part of the theoretical continuity which fed into twentieth-century totalitarianism.² His views and methods have been compared to those of the German historicists. Some analysts term his hero-worship vitalism, and many view him as a forerunner to Friedrich Nietzsche.³ Yet, much

¹Christopher Hill, *God's Englishman: Oliver Cromwell and the English Revolution* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1970), chap. 10 passim.

²Peter Gay, *Debates With Historians* (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1953), 57.

³Eric Russell Bentley, *A Century of Hero-Worship* (Philadelphia: J.E. Lipincott Company, 1944), 32.

about Carlyle is unique. His decorated literary style is highly personal and his criticisms of his predecessors and contemporaries must be taken into account by subsequent scholars on Cromwell and the English revolution. Indeed, Carlyle staked his claim in the historiography of the English Revolution. And his work remains among the most memorable.

According to Carlyle, the misdeeds of dilettante scholars, whom he grouped under the collective appellation of "English Dryasdust," rendered the seventeenth-century unintelligible to the contemporary mind.⁴ Previous historians had not cared enough to sort, edit and index the "tons and square miles" of documents, records and pamphlets of the English Revolution. Instead, Carlyle believed, historians had produced useless heaps of political and philosophical histories in the vain pursuit of personal notoriety and praise. The sum total of all of Dryasdust's "shot-rubbish" was darkness and confusion: "Here properly lies the grand unintelligibility of the Seventeenth-Century for us. From this source has proceeded our maltreatment of it, our miseditings, miswritings, and all the other 'avalanche of Human Stupidity,' wherewith...we have allowed it to be overwhelmed!"⁵

By collecting and editing the decaying manuscripts of Cromwell's letters and speeches, Carlyle sought to resuscitate the heroic age of Puritanism. Carlyle proposed that the proper editing of Cromwell's utterances could make the truth of the Puritan cause visible again. Carlyle was convinced that if the modern reader looked deeply into the heart of the period, through Cromwell's writings, he or she would understand it as an "actual flesh and blood fact; with color in its cheeks, with awful august heroic thoughts in its heart, and at last with steel sword in its hand!"⁶ This was essential in asserting the greatness of the English people. Previous civilizations, like that of the Greeks, recorded their legacies in their grand epics, such as Homer's *Iliad*. England, on the other hand, had so far produced only state papers and philosophical histories, leaving nothing for eternity but chaos and confusion: "As if we had done no brave thing at all on this Earth; as if not Men but Nightmares had written of our History!"⁷ To remedy this, Carlyle intended to leave behind an English epic. Since he considered the Puritan revolt the greatest, most fundamental epoch in English civilization, with Cromwell as its soul, he sought to create a "Cromwelliad."⁸ In order to comprehend why and how he attempted to create such an epic, an understanding of Carlyle's theory of history is essential.

Much of Carlyle's historical philosophy stemmed from what has been called the "new spirit" in historiography during the nineteenth century.

⁴Thomas Carlyle, *Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1870), orig. pub. 1845, vol. 1, chap. 1, passim.

⁵Ibid., p. 6.

⁶Ibid., 75-6.

⁷Ibid., 2.

⁸Ibid., 7-13.

This was the Romantic rejection of the linear description of history. According to Philip Rosenberg, in *The Seventh Hero*, pre-Hegelian history provided an adequate explanation of the way in which change occurs within a framework of permanence. Thus came the dictum that history was "philosophy teaching by examples," the rejection of which stood at the beginning of Carlyle's historical insight. The nineteenth-century Romantics, according to Rosenberg, accounted for the appearance of ceaseless change and questioned the possibility of permanence. The technological, social and political revolutions of the late eighteenth century, Rosenberg stated, made evident the existence of continual change. Therefore, "the metaphor of linear succession is no longer appropriate, for what now puzzles the student of history is not how new historical orders arise from time to time but how the old order can exist from day to day."⁹

Carlyle believed, as did the German Romantics, that history was a continual process of mutation over time. Rosenberg stated that the Hegelian revolution in historiography was founded upon a new vision of "the weblike complexity of the historical process," and that Carlyle joined in by 1830 when he too turned away from sequence and causality as history.¹⁰ Carlyle came to believe that "Truly, if History is Philosophy teaching by Experience, the writer fitted to compose History is hitherto an unknown man."¹¹ The human experience was as incomplete as any man's ability to understand it. History happened not as man could observe it, that is in succession; rather actions happened simultaneously, in groups: "every single event is the offspring not of one, but of all other events, prior or contemporaneous, and will in its turn combine with all others to give birth to new: It is an ever-living, ever-working Chaos of Being, wherein shape after shape bodies itself forth from innumerable elements."¹² Therefore, deductive philosophy, with its attendant "cause-and-effect speculators,"¹³ proved incapable of truly discovering historical reality.

Carlyle did indeed feel that history was our supreme teacher. However, the lessons it yielded came not from our deduction from the universal to the particular, but rather in the way ideals were realized in the continuous unfolding of history, in the constant flux of becoming ("*das ewige Werden*").¹⁴ In his most famous work, *The French Revolution*, he clearly stated his organic view of history:

Concerning which we may not again say, that in the huge mass of Evil, as it rolls and swells, there is ever some Good working imprisoned, working towards deliverance and triumph? How

⁹Philip Rosenberg, *The Seventh Hero: Thomas Carlyle and the Theory of Radical Activism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 65-6.

¹⁰Ibid., 65-7.

¹¹Thomas Carlyle, "On History", from *The Varieties of History*, F. W. Stern, ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 96.

¹²Ibid., 94-95.

¹³Ibid., 97.

¹⁴Sunday, *A Century of Hero-Worship*, 37, 61.

such Ideals do realize themselves; and grow, wondrously, from amid the incongruous ever-fluctuating chaos of the Actual: this is what World-History, if it teach anything, has to teach us.¹⁵

Once an action is done, according to Carlyle, it is "done always; cast forth into endless Time," wherein it struggled to grow in the infinite realm of all other actions.

Or indeed, what is this Infinite of Things itself, which men name Universe, but an Action, a sum-total of Actions and Activities? The living ready-made sum-total of these three,—which Calculation cannot add, cannot bring on its tablets; yet the sum, we say, is written visible: All that has been done, All that is doing, All that will be done! Understand it well, the Thing thou beholdest, that Thing is an Action, the product and expression of exerted force: the All of things is an infinite conjugation of the verb To do.¹⁶

Carlyle emphasized, therefore, change and action in history. He saw the practical expressions of these as revolution and biography. The first represented his belief in the inequality of various ages. Eighteenth-century thought held that since history was the expression of universal order, the internal condition of man has always been the same in all eras.¹⁷ Carlyle, on the other hand, believed that some ages were vital and heroic while others were unheroic and shallow. In fact, the majority of generations acted not upon the impulse of divine truth, but rather by "heresays, traditionalyants, black and white surplises, and inane confusions."¹⁸ Accordingly, these were such ages which, gladly, fade permanently from the memory of mankind, and crumble into "dust, as inorganic manure. Why should any memory of them continue?" He stressed the inevitability of their oblivion, and that even Dryasdust would one day cease to blather about them, since no one would care to listen.¹⁹

What accounted for the death of decadent ages and the subsequent reappearance of truth? How did change occur? Carlyle accounted for this in his theory of revolution. Carlyle's version of the dialectic in history, that familiar Hegelian metaphysical mechanism, described brief moments in history wherein God's truth reined in the hearts of men for a while. But then these eventually became buried under the thickets and brush of falsehood: "And what if a whole Nation fall into that? In such case, I answer, infallibly they will return out of it!"²⁰ When this era born of lies could no longer sustain itself, a new era of truth and justice would arise to shatter the decrepit institutions. Since history is the sum total of human action, revolutions occur in generations which can no longer substi-

¹⁵Thomas Carlyle, *The French Revolution* (New York: The Modern Library, no date given for this edition), orig. pub. 1837, 9-10.

¹⁶Ibid., 311.

¹⁷Carlyle, *Oliver Cromwell*, vol. 1, 78-80.

¹⁸Ibid., 79.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Carlyle, *French Revolution*, 44-5.

remote valleys, a whole world of Existence.²⁹ Carlyle believed that the unconscious will of the multitude of individuals was represented and carried out by a select, chosen few. These he called the "Great Men," the prophets, the Heroes in History.³⁰

Carlyle claimed, like many of his Romantic counterparts, that God, (or in more Hegelian terms, the absolute Spirit or divine Idea) was revealed in history through action. But in the final analysis, he did not have faith that the masses could realize and ascend to the highest goals of life. Certainly they served as revolutionary fodder. But they could be an ungainly mass of wasted potential without gifted, predestined leadership. So then, of all the innumerable biographies which supposedly revealed the essence of life, the ones that mattered the most were those of the great men:

For, as I take it, Universal History, the history of what man has accomplished in this world, is at bottom the History of the Great Men who have worked here. They were the leaders of men, these great ones...in a wide sense the creators, of whatsoever the general mass of men contrived to do or to attain; all things that we see standing accomplished in the world are properly...the practical realization and embodiment, of Thoughts that dwell in the Great Men sent into the world: the soul of the whole world's history... were the history of these.³¹

Unfortunately, the history of the world was replete with quacks and sham kings. Any man who claimed the right to rule over another may have indeed prospered for a day, but he was essentially a forger.³² Then, in accordance with the divine plan, a prophet would be "sent from the Infinite Unknown with tidings to us."³³ Carlyle vehemently asserted that people must be able to recognize the great man at the moment of his arrival. Otherwise, he would come to them in vain: "Not a Hero only is needed, but a world fit for him; a world not of Valets."³⁴ Once accepted, the great man, or "Hero," would expose the fraudulent rule of the unworthy king at the moment of revolutionary conflagration.³⁵

The single most important criterion of the hero was his sincerity, which only other sincere people could recognize. The hero would not proclaim himself a prophet; in fact, he would not even be aware of his divinity. But his words and deeds would flow from an inherent sincerity, and be "Direct from the inner fact of things."³⁶ The great man in revolution was the "missionary of order" and the enemy of falsehood.³⁷ The hero was the

²⁹Carlyle, "On History," 97.

³⁰Breisach, *Historiography*, 254-55.

³¹Carlyle, *Heroes*, 1.

³²Ibid., 198.

³³Ibid., 45.

³⁴Ibid., 216.

³⁵Ibid., 44-5.

³⁶Ibid., 45.

³⁷Ibid., 203.

on hollow "Semblance and Sham."²¹ Revolutions were acts of divine creativity that shattered vapid institutions and social orders: "In the turbulent times life triumphs over all schemes of thought that in quiescent periods fossilize the products of bygone creativity."²² In *The French Revolution*, Carlyle argued that the age of Louis XVI was such an age. He described how the obsolete order in France was swept away and a new era was ushered in. This held true for all ages, even his own.²³

Carlyle took the notion of revolution out of the political sphere and placed it into the context of a divine plan. *The French Revolution* and *Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches* were categorical denials of political/constitutional interpretations of the great upheavals in history. Carlyle's historical method sought to bring the historical to life, and to demonstrate the true inward condition of man. Dryasdust, with his mechanistic view of the universe, and his analyses of the political events which he judged worthy of record, had obscured the truly meaningful forces in men's lives: "Laws themselves, political Constitutions, are not our Life, but only the house wherein our life is led; nay, they are but the bare walls of the house...Well may we say that of our History the more important part is lost without recovery."²⁴ For this reason he repudiated Enlightenment political theorists and the heretical followers of "the Gospel according to Jean Jacques."²⁵

The new order which was created by the "creative anarchy" of the people would then lapse into stagnation and complacency, only to be overturned again one day.²⁶ Carlyle saw the portents of revolution in his own day, and denied the ability of gradual reforms to resist the inevitable. What he observed as the condition of pre-revolutionary France, he saw as the condition of England: "...there is a stillness, not of unobstructed growth, but of passive inertness, the symptom of imminent downfall."²⁷

The second fundamental component of Carlyle's historical philosophy, which was intimately tied to the nature of revolution, was his concept of the hero. Since the universe was the sum total of human action, then the essence of Universal History consisted entirely of "innumerable biographies."²⁸ Therefore the political historian, who "dwells with disproportionate fondness in Senate-houses, in Battle-fields, nay even in King's Ante-chambers," failed to grasp any of the depth of universal history: "far away from such scenes, the mighty tide of Thought and Action was still rolling on its wondrous course, in gloom and brightness; and in a thousand

²¹Carlyle, *Heroes*, 237.

²²Breisach, *Historiography*, 252-3.

²³Carlyle, *French Revolution*, 30.

²⁴Carlyle, *Heroes*, 93-4.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Carlyle, *French Revolution*, 24.

²⁸Carlyle, *Heroes*, 93.

true leader by divine right in that he was the ablest, wisest and strongest. For Carlyle, then, laws, suffrages and constitutions were empty promises. It was rather the acknowledged hero who ruled with heavenly sanction: "Woe to him that claims obedience when it is not due; who to him who refuses it when it is!"³³

Unfortunately, for Carlyle, the age of Skepticism and formalism had left modern man in doubt over the heroic deeds of better days. The hero himself was attacked, and his contemporaries asked if the hero was an historical reality. Was the hero, and indeed hero-worship even desirable? He admonished the skeptical reader, who still clung to "the Rights of Man," and "liberty and equality." Carlyle noted that there were only two alternatives of government: "We shall either learn to know a Hero, a true Governor and Captain, somewhat better, when we see him; or else go on to be forever governed by the Unheroic;—had we ballot-boxes clattering at every street-corner, there would be no remedy in these."³⁴

Carlyle constructed and fueled his visions of historical purpose and development, as well as his hero-worship, with his deep religious convictions. These also inspired his energetic hostility toward the Enlightenment cult of reason. But Carlyle did not gather his religious assurances from traditional dogmas and creeds. Instead, he credited divine intervention in the affairs of this world to the great, God-sent hero. Consequently, he advocated the submissive, prostrate veneration of God's handymen. Religion, for him, was built upon hero-worship, as the hero was the human form of the Godliest qualities: "Is that not the gorm of Christianity itself?"³⁵

Peter Geyl stated that while much of Carlyle's rebellion remained typical of the nineteenth century, much of it also stemmed from his personal alienation from his time and from his Calvinist faith. Carlyle viewed himself as an outcast in an effete and superficial society dedicated to rationality and democracy. It was upon this same model, that of an outsider who wielded exclusive insights to the heavens, that Carlyle developed his great man.³⁶

Carlyle's history, which we may call his religion, sought to reinvigorate the Christian ethos from the ashes of defunct and vacant creeds. He geared his vibrant historical rhetoric toward proving what he firmly believed was the truth of Christianity. He sought to reform and rejuvenate the Calvinist distinction between the Elect and the Damned. Hence, not all generations were close to God, and at different historical moments, He sent great men to lead the masses out of the darkness. To Carlyle, this was the business of Cromwell and the Puritans; this was the meaning of the seventeenth century.³⁷

³³Ibid., 216-7.

³⁴Ibid., 199.

³⁵Ibid., 217.

³⁶Ibid., 11.

³⁷Geyl, *Debates with Historians*, 48-51.

³⁸Carlyle, *Oliver Cromwell*, vol. 1, 75-77.

Carlyle felt that the recorded, but as yet unorganized utterances of the great Puritan leaders yielded a clear insight into their divine mission.⁴⁴ The truth of these documents, he believed, was self-evident, if not for the two centuries of scholastic "owl-droppings" which had suppressed them.⁴⁵ Despite Carlyle's claims, however, Cromwell's own words must not have been sufficiently autonomous. Instead, Carlyle told most of the story in *The Letters and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*. The modern reader finds the "truth" of the seventeenth century, not so much revealed, as filtered through the biographer's historical understanding. At every stop, Carlyle interjected his own rewording and "elucidations" of Cromwell's words. This casts some doubt upon the divine truth allegedly contained therein.

If Carlyle felt the need to come to the rescue of his hero's reputation, it was because of the endless attack to which the Lord Protector had been subjected. For Carlyle, the less heretical of these was that it was not Cromwell's strong will which carried the moment, but rather the reverse. To these historians it was the exigencies of the time which not only produced the need for a man like Cromwell, but also produced him. This seemed nonsense to Carlyle since many ages had despaired for a hero, and yet one could not be found. Instead, a divine power timed the hero's appearance, whereas so called leaders or kings who ruled in the hero's absence, that is in dark ages, ruled by deception and fraud.

In light of this idea, the second common charge against Cromwell was the more reprehensible for Carlyle. This was the belief that Cromwell, too, ruled among the sham-kings of the world. In his denial of heroic possibility, Dryadust saw only self-serving ambition, hypocrisy and duplicity in Cromwell's actions, particularly in his ultimate assumption of virtual kingship of England, Scotland, and Ireland. Alas, blind pedants who recognized not the hero when he stood before him! Who were these, thought Carlyle, to question Cromwell's sincerity, while they themselves left nothing to this world but volumes of lies and worthless paper.⁴⁶ He stated that it was the eighteenth-century skeptics who could not recognize the inner genius of Cromwell. Thus they scorned him for "turning all that noble Struggle for constitutional Liberty into a sorry farce played for his own benefit." Carlyle regarded this view of Cromwell as typical of the age of science and reason. Such critics could not know a hero, and valued instead "regulated respectable Formulas...a style of speech and conduct which has got to seem 'respectable,' which can gain the suffrages of an enlightened skeptical Eighteenth-century!"⁴⁷ Instead, it was Cromwell's heroic "silence," his "belief without words," which was significant in his writings and speeches: "how noble it is in comparison to eloquent words without heroic insight!"⁴⁸

⁴⁴Ibid., chaps. I and V, passim.

⁴⁵Carlyle, *Oliver Cromwell*, vol. 2, 55.

⁴⁶Ibid., vol. 1, chap. I, passim.

⁴⁷Carlyle, *Heroes*, 208.

⁴⁸Carlyle, *Cromwell*, vol. 1, 74.

According to Carlyle, Cromwell's very confusion of speech had everything to do with his sincerity and the authenticity of his heroism. He believed that Cromwell's unrefined and unhearn words revealed a state of mind which was more concerned with the highest concerns. The inner Cromwell was more attuned to God's wishes than to political squabbings. This is why modern pedants irritated Carlyle when they stressed the constitutional significance of the seventeenth-century revolution.⁴⁹

While Carlyle granted that there were "grand social improvements" born of the Puritan efforts, he felt that these were merely their happy consequences.⁵⁰ Surely such a religious view of history scoffed at the notion that great epochs born of revolution were brought about for the "Liberty to tax one's self."⁵¹ It was not for such things that men surrendered their lives:

The purse is any Highwayman's who might meet me with a loaded pistol; but the Self is mine and God my Maker's; it is not yours; and I will resist you to the death, and revolt against you.....Really, it seems to me the one reason which could justify revolting, this of the Puritans. It has been the soul of all just revolts among men.⁵²

Carlyle's status as the defender of Oliver Cromwell and advocate for a rebirth of Puritanism is significant. He admitted that Cromwell appeared rough and ineloquent, in speech and in manner: "Poor Cromwell,—Great Cromwell! The inarticulate Prophet; Prophet who could not speak."⁵³ But Carlyle was interested, or so he claimed, in presenting this hero in his natural and true light. He said that the job which fell upon him was to portray Cromwell in the same way as the artist who painted him. That was, not to hide Cromwell's warts and rugged features, but rather to "wash the natural face clean." He used this analogy to explain that his purpose in editing the letters and speeches was to erase the soot and dubious scholarship, which over the years had tarnished the Protector's real significance.⁵⁴

And what of Cromwell's career in general? Carlyle believed his most pressing duty was to refute the rumors that Cromwell had planned all along, through the careful manipulation of factions and overall treachery, to assume exclusive hold on political power in England.⁵⁵ Instead, he argued that Cromwell, again owing to the sincerity of such a hero, had always been more content to plow the fields at Cambridgeshire and to live a humble life following the scriptures. He was content to do so until old age. But his thoughts were always occupied by otherworldly concerns. It was rather, for Carlyle, a matter of inevitability that Cromwell

⁴⁹Carlyle, *Heroes*, 231-2.

⁵⁰Carlyle, *Cromwell*, vol. 1, 77.

⁵¹Carlyle, *Heroes*, 210.

⁵²Ibid., 210.

⁵³Ibid., 217.

⁵⁴Carlyle, *Cromwell*, vol. 2, 106.

⁵⁵Carlyle, *Heroes*, 221.

should one day become the sole authority in all England. To Carlyle, the obligation to seek one's place was nothing less than the "meaning of life" and the noblest pursuit for a man.⁵⁶ Carlyle argued that, in the end, Cromwell had no choice. It was the "heavy burden of Providence" which he bore throughout his dealings with an uncompromising king, and a series of ineffectual Parliaments.⁵⁷ His successes, won not for himself, but for the true liberty of the people, were honest and he ceded proper credit to the God who made them possible.⁵⁸ As proof, Carlyle repeatedly referred to Cromwell's personal unhappiness, his hypochondria, and his expressed desire to be released from the duties of public life.⁵⁹ Carlyle described Cromwell's life's work as what the German Romantic poet Novalis called "*Selbstötung*, a killing of Self...the beginning of all morality."⁶⁰ Why, asked Carlyle, would Cromwell suffer in this way for the trappings of dignified kingship? Carlyle viewed the times as the most perilous for all of England, and even more so for Cromwell's position: "Perhaps no more perilous place than I know clearly of, was ever deliberately accepted by a man." His explanation was that he did it for the same reasons which guided all of his actions—there was no other choice for the safety of England. There was no "able-man" left to guide them through the frightful times.⁶¹ There was too much danger of the return of sham-kingship, threatened by hostile alliances and cowardly overtures of compromise. Cromwell, according to Carlyle, had only military rule left to stem resurgent royalism and to secure for England the title of "Queen of Protestant Christianity."⁶² His hope for the settlement of peace in England after the victory at Worcester, he told Parliament, was disappointed by the designs of certain factions in Parliament.⁶³ Before the public, Cromwell accepted the title of Protector after the failure of a resolution within Parliament.⁶⁴ In the same speech he told the assembly, "Of that God is witness...I called not myself to this place!"⁶⁵ Thus, Carlyle concluded, it was not ambition but heroic duty, and upon the orders of God that Cromwell became ruler of England, Scotland, and Ireland. His actions embodied the best of the entire Puritan mission to bring the rule of the Bible into practice on Earth. His will was, according to Carlyle's view of the heroic in history, the unconscious will of the people of England and the guarantor of their rights and liberties.⁶⁶

Carlyle noted that there were numerous revolts throughout English history that faded into appropriate obscurity. The Puritan revolution, on

⁵⁶Ibid., 225.

⁵⁷Ibid., 236.

⁵⁸Ibid., 212-3.

⁵⁹Carlyle, *Oliver Cromwell*, vol. 2, 111.

⁶⁰Ibid., 100.

⁶¹Ibid., 70.

⁶²Carlyle, *Heroes*, 235.

⁶³Carlyle, *Oliver Cromwell*, vol. 2, 111.

⁶⁴Ibid., 114-15.

⁶⁵Ibid., 110.

⁶⁶Ibid., 50.

the other hand, seemed part of a larger historical struggle which comprised "the true history of the World,—the war of Belief against Unbelief!"⁶⁷ It was the opening act in this divine drama, wherein devout Puritanism faced off with "dignified Ceremonialism," (i.e. Laudianism and idolatry in general) for the first time.⁶⁸ The whole history of the seventeenth century in England and throughout Europe he described in terms of this very struggle. In England, the "armed appeal of Puritanism to the Invisible God of Heaven against many very visible Devils, on Earth and Elsewhere, was, so to speak, beginning."⁶⁹

Carlyle's strident stance against the legions of the Pope and related evils fueled his vitriolic musings regarding the rebellion in Ireland. Indeed, the criminal actions of the Puritan Army in Ireland would be difficult to justify. But here, too, Carlyle championed his hero against what he viewed as slanderous biographies. The massacre at Drogheda and the victory in Ireland, for Carlyle, represented another act of divine justice, wherein Cromwell, "like the Hammer of Thor," settled the Irish question once and for all, as it pleased God to have it done. The letters in Carlyle's edition which described this "terrible surgery," he noted, must have seemed reprehensible to those loyal to "Rousseau Sentimentalism" and "Universal Pardon and Benevolence." Carlyle's perennial enemies notwithstanding, the Army's assault was led by an understanding and reverence of God's laws. Thus, such "punishments" were terrible but necessary to defeat rampant idolatry. It was only later, less Godly generations who through their philosophical pretensions, engaged in the "indiscriminate Mashing-up of Good and Evil." Carlyle lashed out against those who thought that "a land of Sanguinary Quacks can be heated by sprinkling it with rose-water.... Oliver Cromwell did believe in God's judgement; and did not believe in the rose-water plan of Surgery,—which, in fact, is this Editor's case too!"⁷⁰

Carlyle felt that the rebellion in his native Scotland had also been doomed to fail, yet not for the same inherent flaws that cursed the Irish. Instead, his assessment followed the pattern of his hero philosophy. The Scots were the first to begin the revolution which was to establish God's law in this world. Unfortunately, they were handicapped because God sent down no one to lead them. If He had, thought Carlyle, if Cromwell had been born there, with a unified nation behind him, then surely Protestantism and the "divine Hebrew Gospel" would have reigned supreme throughout the Earth.⁷¹ But, as Cromwell recounted in a speech to his first Parliament, enemies in Parliament inflamed passions in order to stall the work of God in both Ireland and Scotland. With internal dissension and

⁶⁷Carlyle, *Heroes*, 204.

⁶⁸Carlyle, *Cromwell*, vol. 1, 37.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 38-40.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 374-77, passim.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, 433.

war abroad, Cromwell could claim divine sanction for his actions toward securing the peace of the nation.⁷²

Regardless, Cromwell ultimately failed, and the Stuart line of kings, a genealogy of quacks according to Carlyle, was restored. For his efforts, Cromwell's dismembered corpse was unearthed and hung in chains. Carlyle did not believe that the Lord Protector sought merely to secure his own place in history, but rather to do its work obediently:

Did he not, in spite of all, accomplish much for us? We walk smoothly over his great rough heroic life; step-over his body sunk in the ditch there. We need not spurn it, as we step on it!—Let the Hero rest. It was not to men's judgment that he appealed; nor have men judged him very well.⁷³

Almost two centuries later, Thomas Carlyle lamented over the absence of a modern hero-king, while indicating the various signals of a hastily approaching revolution. Certainly, he was disappointed in this too, as he appeared to be about many aspects of his life and times. Much could still be said in criticism of his philosophy. According to Peter Geyl, Carlyle unwittingly supplied ammunition to the totalitarian monsters of the twentieth century with his assault upon the positive values of Western society.⁷⁴ Considering the history of thought in the nineteenth-century, Carlyle was not alone to blame.

Carlyle states that there was indeed truth and beauty to be found in Carlyle's works, particularly in his language and his emphasis on the spiritual side of life. However, throughout his career, Carlyle's work increasingly degenerated into a more "vehement glorification of power, racial pride, cult of instinct, and revilement of reason."⁷⁵ These are the strains which for many bear the most significance. Geyl also states that Carlyle's work was notable for the way in which he conveyed the inner details of history and made it come alive as did few others.⁷⁶ He used graceful expression to speak on behalf of those old heroes who really, despite his insistence to the contrary, could not do so themselves.

Also significant is the fundamental contradiction that ran throughout his view of the Hero. Carlyle spoke at length about the inevitability of all the historical process, and that revolution invariably shatters all of the dark times. It was as if to say that there is progress in history, and that ultimately it must be positive. But, as already shown, sometimes dark ages were rendered obsolete by even darker ones; revolutions did not always work on behalf of the Godly. Furthermore, if the triumphant appearance of the hero was a foregone conclusion, why then did Carlyle continually place the onus upon lesser men to prepare a place for him? Why must society, as

⁷²Carlyle, *Oliver Cromwell*, vol. 2, 95-98.

⁷³Carlyle, *Heroes*, 287.

⁷⁴Geyl, *Debates with Historians*, 52-54.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 64.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 68.

he suggested, be geared toward enabling the great man to rule, if it was chaos and falsehood which invites him?⁷⁷ In the end, Carlyle gave no assurances that anyone could ever identify the heroic, and make the crucial distinction between a leader's divine right, and rule by brute force. Frankly, without the safety nets of rational, universal principles, power simply becomes arbitrary and absolute.

Geyl also mentions Carlyle's significance as a prophet, or in any case, "an abettor of upheaval."⁷⁸ Carlyle apparently foresaw the crisis of capitalism and democracy, as it later had to contend with the irrational forces of nationalism and the like. Sadly, he was a "poor prophet,"⁷⁹ who sought comfort in the Godliness of the past, if only to escape from the despicable present.

Mark Schmelzer, a graduate student in history, composed his paper on Thomas Carlyle for a graduate seminar on revolutions. He has been on the Historia staff since its inception in 1991. This issue represents his final year working on the journal.

⁷⁷Carlyle, *Heroes*, lects. I, II, and VI, *passim*.

⁷⁸Geyl, *Debates with Historians*, 53.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*



Charles Darwin and *The Origin of Species*: Resistance, Acceptance, and Recent Challenges

BY JEFF WALDHOFF

The publication of Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859) would stand as one of the most significant events of the modern era if it had only affected traditional views of biology. It asserted not just the ideas of evolution, but described in detail how that evolution happened. Darwin pioneered new areas in ecology by showing the intimate relationships among individuals, groups, different organisms, and their climates. However, Darwin's work transcended his specific field of expertise to become a force in social thought and philosophy not just for the elite intellectual, but also for the common person. In this respect, Darwin stands above all great minds of the past 160 years. Even Einstein's ingenious insights into the nature of light, energy, and matter, which explained nuclear fission and revolutionized human history, did not have as immediate impact on the common person as did Darwin's work.

Although Darwin's arguments were powerful and well documented, it has only been in the past fifty years or so that the majority of scientists have accepted them as valid. Darwin not only revolutionized interpretations of biology, but invented a new philosophy of science, which so profoundly challenged scientific thought in nineteenth-century Europe that it took a long time to win converts. This paper will focus solely on the effect of Darwin's work on the natural sciences, which one will see was tremendous. And it will also show how viewpoints on Darwinian theory have changed, why, and what new discoveries have been added to Darwin's theories.

Darwin described the process of natural selection in *The Origin of Species*:

...if variations useful to any organic being's welfare, assuredly individuals thus characterised [sic] will have the best chance of being preserved in the struggle for life; and from the strong principle of inheritance, they will tend to produce offspring similarly characterised. This principle of preservation, I have called, for the sake of brevity, Natural Selection. It leads to the improvement of each creature...¹

These variations arise out of the genetic variability that is inherent in each organism. Although natural selection was important to his evolutionary theory, it is not the only part. He also went on to explain the importance of sexual selection, whereby the males of a species struggle with each other for

¹Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, with a foreword by J.W. Burrow, editor. (London: Penguin Books, 1983) 169-170.