

## CARLYLE AND GERMANY.

BY MEDICO.

THE *New York Times Book Review* reviewed Mr. Marshall Kelly's book, *Carlyle and the War*, on May 7, 1916. I was particularly impressed when I read the words of that title; for Carlyle in relation to this war is a subject on which I have thought a good deal during the present conflict, not, however, with any intention of ever writing anything on it. But with Carlyle's political views in mind, I have often conjectured on his probable attitude in this war, and the extent to which his predictions have been, or will be, verified by the events of these momentous days.

Having never read nor heard before of the book reviewed by the *Times* I can of course have no opinion as to its merits; but there is one statement made by the reviewer in which he is in error. I say this on the basis of a rather careful study of Carlyle's published works and criticisms on them by several writers. The mistaken impression on the point in question is probably due to a lack of full knowledge of Carlyle's life, writings, and teachings. I quote the review literally: "His [Mr. Kelly's] attempts to yoke up Carlyle with the Germany of the world war would be a little more comprehensible, if he did not ignore the fact that the Germany and the German character, which he declares Carlyle knew 'as no other Briton has ever known' was not the Germany of present and recent years. It was the old Germany of philosophy, literature, art, and music. The modern militaristic, industrial and materialized Germany, was beyond the furthest outskirts of his vision."

Carlyle, it is true, did entertain a very high opinion of certain literary men of Germany and their writings. His debt to them he frequently and frankly acknowledges. There can be no doubt but that German literature influenced him deeply; an influence that was never lost throughout his long life. As to the "art and music" of Germany, or of any other country, I can find no evidence for be-

lieving that his liking for Germany was much influenced by them. For "art" as the dilettante views it he repeatedly expressed his contempt, though Carlyle himself was an artist of a high order, having a keen appreciation for works of art, and being highly susceptible to the charms of music.

But it is not on these qualities that his admiration for Germany is based. Except as he wrote in his early life of German writers and German literature his principal literary products dealing with Germany are of a politico-historical nature and are concerned chiefly with that part of the empire where those qualities mentioned by the reviewer are generally conceded to be least conspicuous, i. e., Prussia. His liking and his enthusiasm for Germany, in the last analysis, appears to be founded on two things: (1) The German character as he interpreted it, i. e., silent valor, lack of bombast and braggadocio, industry, justice, inherent honesty, connected with a romantic love for and belief in the destiny of the whole Teutonic kindred, in which were included, of course, all the Teutonic countries—England, Holland, Germany, and the three Scandinavian nations; (2) The excellence of the Prussian government under the management of the House of Brandenburg or Hohenzollern.

A careful study of his *Frederick the Great* will show innumerable specific examples of these beliefs, and further that they form the ground-work of the whole book and, in fact, its *raison d'être*: for Carlyle wrote always with a definite purpose other than "literary." I will not attempt in a communication of this character to make quotations to support my position, but am willing to undertake its proof if desired.

Carlyle lived through the period of the three wars by which German unification was brought about under the leadership of Prussia, and by Prussian methods; yet he never changed his former favorable opinions one iota as far as we have any record, and he lived ten years after the conclusion of the Franco-Prussian war. During Germany's victorious advance through France he wrote that Prussia alone of modern nations seems to have "the art of government." And during the siege of Paris, when English opinion which had earlier in the war been favorable to Germany began to waver out of sympathy for "the under dog" and suspicions on the balance of power, Carlyle wrote a letter to the *London Times* in which he forcibly and logically presented the German side from the historical point of view. This letter is at all times most interesting and instructive reading, and in view of the present war in Europe it is trebly so. It may be found in his miscellaneous works reprinted

from the London *Times* of November 11, 1870.<sup>1</sup> Its influence at the time was great, and it is said to have accomplished the results desired by its author. Incidentally I might add that, the hour and day being considered, its republication at this time is particularly appropriate.

There do exist, however, other definite proofs that "the modern militaristic, industrial, and materialized Germany" was not "beyond the furthest outskirts of his vision," and further that it was well within the bounds of his sympathies. During the last half of his life, from about 1840 on, his writings were largely of a political nature, and he has repeatedly and picturesquely expressed his views on government. As Gilbert Chesterton says, "he was the first of the socialists," though his was far from the socialism of the modern exponents. Carlyle's idea, as I understand it, demands first a genuine government, strong, and if possible well-traditioned, stable, permanent and continuous; not such as is to be had by "election," for with modern democracy, so called, he had no sympathy whatever. The "governing powers" should first of all be fully alive to their tremendous responsibilities. Next they should be serious, talented and qualified leaders, the "able man" of Carlyle, and they should drill, guide, help, instruct and teach the nation they are called upon to rule, with an eye single to their high commission and nature's inexorable laws. The principle of *laissez-faire*, of extreme individualism in national life, was to him abhorrent. Government must be paternal and concern itself directly and in an infinite variety of ways with promoting the well-being of its people. Great penalties will follow neglect of this. Poverty in a country is an abomination and must be eliminated by active governmental interference. The poorhouses of England filled with able-bodied workers doomed to death-in-life afforded his text for *Past and Present*, a book in which many of his views on government are set forth. His observations on sanitation in factories, in the houses of the poor, on the consumption of smoke at the factories—all sound strangely modern and show him to have been far in advance of the opinion in his day, in these matters at least. An aristocracy that governs is a noble, a divine thing. A dilettante aristocracy that hunts foxes and passes "corn laws" is a diabolical anomaly and carries far-reaching penalties with it. What is an aristocracy etymologically but the "best," and duke, *dux*, a leader, or director? There is no doubt but that Carlyle believed thoroughly in government by the aristocracy, not necessarily always by the hereditary nobility; and

<sup>1</sup> Carlyle's letter to the *Times* will be found on another page of this issue.

further that only in rare instances do the aristocracies measure up to their responsibilities. In Germany, and in Prussia especially, he saw his ideas applied to a greater degree than elsewhere; hence his predilection for the Prussian government, a partiality that was apparently becoming more firmly rooted from year to year up to the time of his death in 1881.

But after all it is the modern Germany that has carried out Carlyle's principles of government and has applied them so thoroughly and so widely that one might be tempted to believe that he had furnished the model on which Germany was to build up a modern state as an example of what can be done by a living government. Yet so far as I know, Carlyle, while highly appreciated in Germany, is in no sense the father of its governmental undertakings. But to say that Carlyle would have been, on the whole, displeased with the Germany of 1881 to 1914, is equivalent to saying that that stern and earnest man did not believe what he preached so vehemently for more than fifty years.

I would not, however, convey the impression that I believe that Carlyle held the Prussia and the Germany of his day to be ideal, any more than I think there is reason to believe that he, if living, would call the Germany of 1871 to 1914 perfect. I simply hold that of the leading governments, that of Prussia, and later that of Germany, seem to be the least defective and to conform most nearly in theory and practice to the underlying principles of government.

As to industrialism in a state in contrast to "art, music and philosophy" he has left us in no doubt. All his visions of the well-governed state show it teeming with industry of every honorable sort, protected, supported, and regulated by an all-powerful government. In the early sixties he speaks of "a Prussia all shooting into manufactures, into commerces, opulences," and approvingly. As to those who pursue "art" as an end he has left us his opinion in language such as only he could command. Thomas Carlyle, "the last of the Puritans," said in no uncertain voice that man is here only to do his duty, and "art and litterateurs figure very little in all that." He has spoken over and over again kindly and even lovingly of the Prussian soldiers. Except Cromwell's Ironsides no others apparently ever so appealed to him, and he had followed the Prussian through all his wars up to and including the Franco-Prussian. He approved of the large Prussian army in particular, and of preparedness in general. In a large measure, possibly too large a measure, Carlyle seems to have taken the size and state of its army as an index of

the virility, health and prosperity of a nation. His liking for the military, which increased as he grew older, is of more than passing interest, but cannot be inquired into nor analyzed here.

This question of Carlyle and the present war is one of more than superficial interest. For no other author's writings, doctrines and life-teachings are more at stake than are his. A public discussion of his teachings in their relation to the war and conjectures as to his probable attitude toward the several belligerents, would excite a lively interest among a considerable circle of readers.

As this point in the *Times* review of Mr. Kelly's book which I have taken up, is one that I conceive to be not of opinion, but of fact, and one that is essential to any intelligent discussion of Carlyle and the war, I thought it only just that the *Times* should give it the same publicity as they gave to the original statement to which I have taken exception. With these two view-points before it the public could at least decide for itself or, what is still better, investigate for itself. Nevertheless, the *Times* did not see fit to publish my statement, which accordingly appears here for the first time.