

# THE SATURDAY READER.

VOL. I.—No. 16.

FOR WEEK ENDING DECEMBER 23, 1865.

FIVE CENTS.

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By MRS. C. L. BALFOUR.

## CARLYLE.

"A CAT can look at a king;" and even we, living in a free country, may be permitted to raise our feeble protest against one who is evidently bent on effecting what we regard as a baneful revolution in English literature. It is impossible not to admire Mr. Carlyle, his varied knowledge, his occasional eloquence, his powers of invective and sarcasm, but above all, we, for our part, chiefly were wont to admire him for his fierce detestation of everything in the shape of a "sham," or what he considers to be such. But from being the denouncer of shams, he has become the first of modern shams himself, a literary Cagliostro, who might have been a great man, and who has degenerated into a charlatan. He was always eccentric in the manner and style of his writings, but in his life of Frederick of Prussia, he has attained a height of absurdity beyond which it is impossible for mortal man to wing his flight. It is Carlylism run mad. He seems to have discovered Ariosto's Curiosity Shop in the moon, and to have appropriated all the crazy ideas there to his own proper use. We are aware that we may be accused of impertinence in thus speaking of an author so eminent as Mr. Carlyle. We cannot help that. We speak what we believe to be the truth; and if we are mistaken, it is our misfortune that we are so. We utter nought in malice—and if we did, it matters little to Mr. Carlyle—for we have derived much pleasure from the perusal of his earlier productions,—his article on Burns in the Edinburgh Review, his French Revolution, his Sartor Resartus and his Hero Worship. These contain much sound thought in sound English; often brilliant, indeed, both in sentiment and language. The greater our loss and that of the world that he has fallen into evil ways, in that respect, and that he is now labouring to pervert the tongue of Shakespeare and Milton into a sort of gibberish which is not the speech of gods or men, nor of "tother beggars," so far as we know. He has not "been at a feast of languages, and gathered up the scraps," for no language ever had such scraps. It is an olla of the dialects of Touchstone, Sarah Gamp, and a Virginia negro whose pronunciation has been reformed. We do not mean to assert that the whole of the Life of Frederick is written in this gibberish, but much of it is, and mars the beauty of a work which otherwise would confer honour on himself and the literature of his country. We shall, however, give a few specimens, from vol. 5, of Mr. Carlyle's mode of writing history. He thus speaks of the Duke of Cumberland's difficulties prior to the Convention of Closter-Seven: "It is well-known how Royal Highness fard

when he did, and what a campaign Royal Highness made of it this year 1767! How the Weser did prove wadeable, as Schmettau had said to no purpose, wadeable, bridgeable, and Royal Highness had to wriggle back, ever back, no stand to be made, or far worse than none; back ever back, till he got into the sea, for that matter, and to the end of more than one thing. Poor man, friends say he has an incurable Hanover Ministry, a Program that is inexecutable. As yet he has not lost head, any head he ever had; but he is wonderful, he; and his England is." An account of some doings of the Germanic Diet is headed, "Keich's Thunder, slight Summary of it," with Question, Whitherward, if any whither? He then goes on to say: "The thunderous fulminations of the Reich's-Diet, an injured Saxony complaining, an insulted Kaiser, after vain *Detortatoriums*, reporting and denouncing 'Horror' such as these; what say you, O Reich?—have been going on since September last." And again: "Kur-Mainz, chairman of the Diet (we remember how he was got, and a battle of Dittengen fought in consequence, long since); Kur-Mainz is admitted to have the most decided Austrian leanings; Britannic George, Austria being now on the opposite side, finds him an unhandy Kur-Mainz, and what profit it was to introduce false weights into Reich's balance that time. Not for long generations before had the poor old semi-imaginary Reich's-Diet risen into such paroxysms, nor did it ever again after. Never again, in its terrestrial history, was there such agonistic parliamentary struggle, and terrific noise of parliamentary palaver witnessed in the poor Reich's-Diet." Alluding to the elder Pitt's retirement from office in 1857, he discourses after this fashion:—the "St. Vitus" is Mr. Carlyle's nickname for the policy of the English government.—"After six months' trial, the St. Vitus finds that it cannot do with him, and will prefer going on again. The last act his Royal Highness of Cumberland did in England, was to displace Pitt. "Down you, I am the man" said Royal Highness, and went to the Wesser countries on these terms." Some of the titles of the chapters or sections are curious; for example: "Serene Highness of Wurtemberg at Fulda (November 30th., 1759) is just about 'firing Victoria,' and giving a ball to Beauty and Fashion, in honour of a certain Event,—but is unpleasantly interrupted." Again: "What is Perpetual President Maupertuis doing all this while? Is he still in Berlin, or where in the Universe is he? Alas, poor Maupertuis!" Then Mr. Carlyle has nicknames for everybody and everything. The King of France has half a dozen or more, the French Government is "the Pompadour", the French army "the Dauphiness", the King of England "Britannic George", the Duke of Cumberland "Royal Highness"; the English policy "St. Vitus", and so on. And by these childish appellations they are almost invariably introduced to the reader. Almost every contemporary writer is "Dryasdust," or "Smell-fungus," and he has revived the double superlative of the Elizabethan age, "most fiercest" and "most honestest," or similar coxcomberies. The old familiar names of men and places are also changed into German, of which, they being German, we ought not to complain, though the world will scarcely give His Majesty of Prussia the title of the King of Prusen, even to please Mr. Carlyle.

But our great objection to him is, the strange liberties he takes with the English language. Have all our great writers been wrong, and is Mr. Carlyle right? We have had all sorts of heresies in style from euphuism to that of the spasmodic school; but this is the worst yet. Shakespeare and Milton, and Jeremy Taylor and

Addison, and Swift and Macaulay can no longer be regarded as the standards of our language. Our grand version of the Bible itself must be repudiated. Are we prepared to make the sacrifice, and adopt the Carlyle dialect? We repeat it, if he is right, they are wrong.

Mr. Carlyle cannot even claim the merit of originality in his adoption of the eccentric style of writing. He is travelling over a beaten path. Rabelais, Burton in his Anatomy of Melancholy, and Sterno have trodden it before him. He reminds us of Burton especially, although the author of the Anatomy would hardly have thought the assertion a compliment. Nor is his mode of treating his subject a new discovery. It has long been admitted that the accounts of court intrigues and battles do not so much constitute history as does the relation of the ordinary affairs of a people. But while it is well that the Historic Muse should be dismounted from her stilts; being down, we see no necessity to set her to play antics or grin through a horse-collar.

We shall, in our next number, speak of the moral tendency of the Life of Frederick.

## REVIEWS.

Books for review should be forwarded, as soon as published, to the Editor, SATURDAY READER.

LIFE AND LETTERS OF FREDERICK W. ROBERTSON, M.A., Incumbent of Trinity Chapel, Brighton. Edited by Stopford A. Brooke, M.A. In two vols. Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1865.

We have received from Mr. Worthington the Life and Letters of the Rev. Frederick W. Robertson. These volumes bear the imprint of Messrs. Ticknor and Fields of Boston, to whose intelligence and enterprise the reading public of the American Continent are already indebted for five successive volumes of Mr. Robertson's discourses. The present volumes give an insight into the wonderful life, and tenderness and strength of beauty and holiness which was shown forth in the early called and widely mourned Incumbent of Trinity Chapel, Brighton. We know that competent judges have affirmed of Mr. Robertson's discourses that they are, considered as sermons, the best in the English language. There are many more profound essays passing under the general name of sermons, and many more finished literary compositions passing under this name, but regarded simply as sermons—words spoken to a mixed congregation they rank out of, and far above the common order. They are terse and tender, full yet fragmentary, pregnant with suggestion, stimulating to the best faculties, presenting throughout the highest Christian ethics applied to the current questions of the times, and pervaded everywhere by the large and sweet charity of the Gospel. The life and services of Frederick Robertson were a benediction to the age and place, when and where he lived. His writings, republished over and over again in England, on the continent of Europe and in America, spread the blessing of his pure thought and devoted Christian life far and wide. The Church of England has her hosts of noble minded and notable men; but take him all in all, no man on her long roll of honoured names occupies a nobler place than he holds. Of course he encountered opposition, and had enemies. What notable and heroic man has not to face and brave opposition from some quarter? But no man won a wider circle of grateful and devoted friends than he. The monuments raised to his memory testify this. In his own college