

# “Spiritual Optics?” or Carlyle’s Gospel: A Revised Version

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## I

It would be strange to raise the question of Carlyle’s religion without returning to the direct statement he wrote on it himself and the specific comments on it made by James Anthony Froude.

“What was Carlyle’s religion?” Froude asked and answered, “I am able to explain it, partly from his conversations with myself, but happily . . . there [also] remains among his unpublished papers the fragments of two unpublished essays which he was never able to complete satisfactorily to himself, but which he told me were, and had been, an imperfect expression of his actual thoughts” (2:2).

Froude gave his own version of them in the first chapter of the second volume of his biography of Carlyle.

The second “essay” or fragment is now untraced, but in 1967 Murray Baumgarten published his definitive version of the longer first “essay” in his “Carlyle and ‘Spiritual Optics’” which was decidedly different from Froude’s. This was taken, with precision, from the original manuscript of nine sheets, partly used by Froude, at the Bei-

necke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.<sup>1</sup> But Baumgarten's edition is almost twice the length of that published by Froude who omitted the second half completely. As well as this, an interest in Baumgarten's edition lies in the way that he shows how Froude dramatically chopped, changed, and added to the manuscript in his effort "to make the grand tone more prominent" (503).

Baumgarten's text is an excellent transcription of what he found in the Yale manuscript—not just a record of all Froude's alterations but with Carlyle's own corrections and comments. Yet, for the purpose of seeing just what Carlyle supposed he believed at that time, it is enough to repeat only the first half of his transcription, omitting his detailed account of Froude's alterations. The square brackets in the original manuscript as well as the passages inside them which complain about how hard it was for Carlyle to clarify his thoughts are Carlyle's.

Obviously, another word than "essay" is needed for this kind of composition, which is quite different from what Carlyle usually meant by that term. Perhaps such papers can better be called "drafts," for they are written in the same way as a number of other Carlylean manuscripts meant for future revision.<sup>2</sup> These are often characterized by a running commentary of woeful self-criticism, which one can also discover in other such drafts. But before this Baumgarten was inclined to see them as part of an "essayist's" rhetoric. This is possibly a proper way of reading them and certainly has the advantage of making a connection with the ironic stance of *Sartor Resartus* (1833–34) and other earlier work. Yet it can equally well and much more convincingly be claimed that Carlyle's efforts to put his thoughts into shape are just what they seem at first sight: a self-questioning and despairing comment on his attempts to define his supposedly assertive beliefs.

<sup>1</sup>Grateful acknowledgments are due to Baumgarten for his initial text and analysis. Only a few readings have been silently modified. I am also grateful for the Library's permission to reproduce the manuscript and for help from David Southern at Duke University Press.

<sup>2</sup>The most plentiful of these are to be found in the Norman and Charlotte Strouse Collection of Carlyle's published or unpublished drafts used to prepare his *Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches* (1845) and *Historical Sketches*

Up to this point his writing had usually been less direct. As John Holloway observes, Carlyle had been used to express himself through a series of “marches and counter-marches,” through obscurity or speaking out of a cloud and by using paradox in the hope of having it both ways—with and without insight (52–57). But after often straining the limits of language in this way, he now found himself dissatisfied when he wanted to be transparent. He may well have claimed when he wrote *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1841) that “to get into the truth of anything is ever a mystic act” (50), but by 1852 he had arrived at the life and times of Frederick the Great, when a different way of writing was needed.

It happens, too, that recent Carlyle studies now give a sharper biographical focus, and one finds a fresh situation facing Carlyle, as he confronted the composition of his new “draft” on Tuesday morning, November 9, 1852. For he was turning to it soon after the extremely hostile reception of *Latter-Day Pamphlets* (1850) and *The Life of John Sterling* (1851) when, however defiant, he already felt hurt by such criticism. More precisely, as now shown by his letters, he came to his desk just when he had received what he might have called a broadside, “[i]ll natured to me but well-meaning to the world” (*Collected Letters* 27:351), from an American reviewer.

Normally, Carlyle claimed to be completely detached from critics and reviewers, but he was disturbed by receiving a packet of four numbers of the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* on “The Writings of Thomas Carlyle,” which seemed impressively cogent to him.<sup>3</sup> “I stand before that poor Methodist,” he wrote to his friend Joseph Neuberg on November 5, 1852, “as one of the most portentous, black, immeasurable monsters, threatening (unless I be a humbug and a fool, of which he has a wavering timid hope) to eat up the solar system and submerge mankind! . . . All this has given me many thots these two days” (*CL* 27:348–49). He said that he had spent no more than ten

<sup>3</sup>In his articles Thomas McNicoll argued against Carlyle’s deism, his unintelligibility, and the falsity of his worship of force in “the ravings of *Hero-Worship*” (805), denying the conclusion of *Revue des Deux Mondes* that he was “a

minutes on them, “but it has given me various grave reflexions since,” for, in spite of all his efforts it seemed now a “really serious thot” for him to be presented to readers as a “tremendous Nightmare” and perhaps “humbug and fool” (CL 27:351). These were “black days,” he told Lady Harriet Ashburton on November 9 (CL 27:354). He despairingly wrote in his journal on the same day about somehow appealing to the “Supreme Powers” and admitted that he had been guilty of “Cowardice” and that the “votes of men, the respectabilities . . . have been too sacred for me” (CL 27:354–55). He felt he had not written openly; and it was at this exact moment of self-reproach that he took up the pen to examine his beliefs.

The result which follows has been taken, therefore, from Baumgarten’s version, checked with the Beinecke MS, but only slightly altered. Contractions have been silently expanded as by Baumgarten. The title of “Spiritual Optics” was given by Froude. A cover sheet not in Carlyle’s hand says that it is an “Autograph MS on ‘Creeds’”; and a comment by “J.A.S.B.” (J.A.S. Barrett) notes that Froude’s version was taken from only “sheets 1, 2 and 3, in full, but with some minor and some really glaring blunders.” Paragraphs are numbered within < >. As already said, the square brackets and comments inside them are Carlyle’s.

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<1> Thoughts that arise in one ought to be marked some where, if they cannot be got uttered while they are fresh. They die away (as so many have done with me in my time), and are buried,—“like the blossoms of the old roses, like the music of the nightingales that sang then”; alas, like “the great and famous Nations of the Dead.” How much lies buried! Thackeray’s Novel (which is now, 9 November 1852, getting read) tries to open for us again into colour, articulate sound and life, the “Age of Queen Anne”; *ay de mi*, what quite other ages have sunk away into silent annihilation, and now are not,<sup>4</sup>—how all

<sup>4</sup>Carlyle puts a vertical line through what he has written so far, adding a deri-

ages and things have to sink even so! They blossomed out busy, fragrant, opulent, in storm and sunshine for the sons of man; the man and they where now are they? Leafy forests year after year; all the flow-  
erage of their summers now compressed for us into a thin stratum of indiscriminate black *peat*. As we are now so you must shortly be!—  
[enough of that; once said already, the “peat”].<sup>5</sup>

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<2> Why do men shriek so over one another’s creeds? A certain greatness of heart for all manner of conceptions and misconceptions of the Inconceivable is now if ever in season. Reassure thyself my poor assaulted brother. Starting from the east a man’s road seems horribly discordant with thine which is so resolutely forcing itself forward by tunnel and incline, victorious over impediments, from the western quarter. Yet see, you are both struggling more or less honestly towards the centre; all mortals, unless they be diabolic and not human, are. Recollect, with pity, with smiles and tears, however high thou be, the efforts of the meanest man. Intolerance, coiled like a dragon round treasures which were the palladium of mankind; was not so bad; nay rather was indispensable and good. But intolerance coiled and hissing in that horrid manner, now when the treasures are all fled, and there are nothing but empty pots, new and old, pots proposing that they shall be filled, and pots asserting that they were once full, what am I to make of that? Intolerance, with nothing to protect but empty pots and eggs that are fairly hatched addle, is doubly and trebly intolerable. I do not praise the “tolerance” talked of in these times; but I do see the wisdom of a Truce of God being appointed, which you may christen Tolerance and everywhere proclaimed by drum and trumpet, by public cannon from the high places and by private fiddle, cannon-salvo, flute, jew’s harp and penny-trump from the road, till once there be achieved for us something to be intolerant about again [Eheu, ehue!]  
—There are

<sup>5</sup>That is, “said” already in *Historical Sketches and Past and Present* (1843). The first paragraph and some later ones are followed by short rules, marking

a few men who have even at present a certain right, call it rather a certain terrible duty, to be intolerant, and I hope there will be ever more, and that their intolerance will grow ever nobler, diviner, more victorious; but how *few* are there in all the Earth!<sup>6</sup>

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<3> Be not so much alarmed at the opulences, spiritual or material, of this world. Whether they be of the hand or of the mind, whether consisting of St. Katherine Docks, blooming cornfields and filled treasuries or of sacred philosophies, theologies, bodies of science, recorded heroisms, and accumulated conquests of wisdom and harmonious human utterance, they have all been amassed by little and little. Poor insignificant transitory bipeds little better than thyself have ant-wise accumulated them all. How inconsiderable was the contribution of each. Yet, working with hand or with head, in the strenuous ardour of their heart, they did what was in them; and here, so magnificent, overwhelming and almost divine and immeasurable, is the summed up result. Be modest towards it, loyally reverent towards it; that is well thy part; but begin at last to understand withal what thy own real relation to it is; and that if it in its greatness is divine, so then is thy littleness art thou [not so?]. "*Lass Dich nicht verblüffen*, Don't let thyself be put upon [no], stand up for thyself withal"; that, say the Germans, is the eleventh commandment; and truly, in these times, for an ingenuous soul, there is not perhaps in the whole decalogue a more important one [a flickering shadow of a thought, not brought out here!] And in all kinds of times if the ingenuous soul could but understand that only in proportion to its own divineness can any part or lot in these divine possessions be vouchsafed it, how inexpressibly important would it be! Such is forever the fact though not one in the hundred now knows or surmises it. Of all these divine possessions it is only what *thou* art become equal to that thou canst take away with thee. They are tried by their peers; are by

<sup>6</sup>Carlyle doubtless wrote this, as Chris Vanden Bossche says, as a reply to the recent intolerant and dogmatic attacks on him by various religious reviewers

silent but inflexible laws, strictly set apart for their peers. Except thy own eye have got to see it, except thy own soul have victoriously struggled to clear vision and belief of it, what is the thing seen and the thing believed by another or by never so many others? Alas, it is not thine though thou look on it, brag about it, and bully and fight about it, till thou die striving to persuade thyself and all men how much it is thine. Not it is thine; only a windy echo and tradition of it, bedded in hypocrisy, ending sure enough in tragical futility is thine. What a result for a human soul. In all ages, but in this age named of the printing-press with its multi-form pulpits and platforms, the accumulated *sum* of such results over the general posterity of Adam in countries called civilised is so tragic to contemplate—is in fact the raw material, of every insincerity, of every scandal platitude and ignavia to be seen under the sun. If men were only ignorant and knew that they were so; only void of belief, and sorry for it, instead of filled with sham-belief and proud of it: ah me!

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<4> The primary conception by rude nations, in regard to all great attainments and achievements by man, is that each was a miracle and the gift of the gods. Language was taught man by a Heavenly Power; Minerva gave him the olive, Neptune the Horse, Triptolemus taught him Agriculture &c &c. The effect of *optics* in this strange camera obscura of an existence are most of all singular! The grand centre of the modern revolution of ideas is even this, We begin to have a notion that all this is the effect of optics; and that the intrinsic fact is very different from our old conception of it. Not less “miraculous,” not less divine; but with an altogether (totally) new (or hitherto unconceived) *species* of divineness, a divineness lying much nearer home than formerly. A divineness that does not come from Judea from Olympus, Asgard, Mount Meru;<sup>7</sup> but is in man himself, in the heart of every living man. A grand revolution indeed; which is altering our ideas of Heaven and of Earth

<sup>7</sup>Important in Hindu mythology.

to an amazing extent in every particular whatsoever. From top to bottom our spiritual world, and all that depends on the same, which means nearly everything in the furniture of our life outward as well as inward, is as this idea advances undergoing change of the most essential sort,—is slowly getting “overturned,” as they angrily say; which in the sense of being gradually turned over, and having its vertex set where its base used to be, which means merely turned<sup>8</sup> is indisputably true; and means a “revolution” such as never was before, or at least since letters and recorded history existed among us never was. The great Galileo or numerous small Galileos have appeared in our spiritual world too, and are making known to us that the sun stands still; that as for the sun and stars and eternal immensities they do not move at all, and indeed have something else to do than dance round the like of us and our paltry little doghutch of a dwelling place continually; that it is we and our doghutch that are moving all this while, giving rise to such phenomena; and that if we would ever be wise about our situation we must now attend to that fact!—I would fain (sometimes) write a Book about all that, and try to make it plain to everybody: but, alas, I find again there is next to nothing to be said about it in want at present,—and indeed till lately I had vaguely supposed that everybody understood it, or at least understood me to mean it; which, it would appear, they don’t at all. [a *word* to express that extensive or universal operation of referring the motion *from* yourself to the object you look at, or *vice versâ*? Is there none?—[a considerable quantity of *thoughts* (really) which I can get no tolerable method of expressing, on this subject!—15 November 1852.]

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<5> A notable tendency of the human being in case of mutual motions on the part of himself and another object, to misinterpret the said motion, and impute it to the wrong party. Riding in his wheeled vehicle, how the hedges seem to be in full gallop on each side of him; how the woods and houses and all objects but the fixed blue of

heaven seems to be madly careering at the top of their speed, stormfully walzing round transient centres, the whole Earth gone into menadic enthusiasm, he himself locked all the while into dead quiescence. And again, if he is really sitting still in his railway carriage—stagnant state. Sitting still in his railway carriage at some Station when an opposite train is getting underway, his eye informs him at once that *he* is at length setting out and leaving his poor friends in a stagnant state. How often does he commit this error; it is only in exceptional cases, when helps are expressly provided, that one avoids it, and judges aright of the matter. This is the law of the poor creature's eyesight, and often a considerable sorrow to him. How often does he commit—[above]—stagnant state! It is very notable of the outward eye; and would be insupportable, did not the experience of each man incessantly correct it for him in the common businesses and locomotions of this world. In the uncommon locomotions again, it is not so capable of correction: during how many ages and aeons, for example, did not the sun and the moon and stars go all swashing round in their tremendously rapid revolution every 24 hours round this little indolent Earth of ours, and were evidently *seen* to do it by all creatures,—till at length the Galileo appeared, and the Newtons in the rear of him! The "experience" necessary to correct that erroneous impression of the eyesight was not so easy of attainment. No, it lay far apart from the common businesses, and was of a kind that quite escaped the duller eye. It was attained nevertheless; gradually got together in the requisite quantity; promulgated too, in spite of impediments Holy Offices and such like, and is now the general property of the world and only the horses and oxen cannot profit by it. These are notable facts of the outward eyesight, and the history of its progress in surveying this material world.

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<6> But now will the favourable reader permit me to suggest to him a fact which though it has been present for some time to the consciousness of here and there a meditative individual, has not perhaps

struck the favourable reader hitherto: That with the inward eyesight and the spiritual universe there is always, and has always been, the same game going on. Precisely a similar game, to infer motion of your own when it is the object seen that moves, and rest of your own with menadic storming of all the gods and demons while it is yourself with the devilish and divine impulses you have that are going at express-train speed! I say the Galilei of this, many small Galileos of this have appeared some time ago,—having at length likewise “collected” (with what infinitely greater labour, sorrow and endurance than your material Galileo needed!) “the experience necessary” for correcting such illusions of the *inner* eyesight in its turn! A crowning discovery, as I sometimes call it; the essence and summary of all the sad struggles and wrestlings of these last three centuries. No man that reflects need be admonished what a pregnant discovery this is; how it is the discovery of discoveries; and will, as men more and more become aware of it, remodel the whole world for us, in most blessed and surprising manner. Such continents of sordid delirium (for it really is growing now very sordid) will vanish like a foul Walpurgis night at the first streaks of dawn. Do but consider it. The delirious dancing of the universe is stilled; but the universe itself, what scepticism did not suspect, is still all there. God, Heaven, Hell, no more than the material woods and houses, are none of them annihilated for us; nothing that was divine, sublime, demonic, beautiful, or terrible is in the least abolished for us (as the poor Pre-Galileo fancied it might be would have had it) only their mad dancing has ceased, and they are all reduced to dignified composure, any madness that was in it being recognized as our own henceforth. What continents of foul error, world-devouring armies of illusions, and of foul realities that have their too true habitation and too sad function among such, will disappear, at last wholly, from our field of vision; and leave a serener veritable world for us. Scavengerism, which under Chadwick makes such progress on the material streets and beneath them, will alarmingly but beneficently reign in the spiritual fields and thoroughfares, and deluges of spiritual water (which is light, which is clear pious vision and conviction) will have washed our inner world clean too, with truly celestial results for us. O my friend I advise

thee awake to that fact, now discovered of the inner eyesight as it was long since of the outer, that not the sun and the stars are so rapidly dashing round, nor the woods and distant steeples and country-mansions are deliriously dancing and waltzing around accidental centres; that it is thyself and thy little doghole of a planet or dwelling place that are doing it merely.

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<7> It was God, I suppose, that made the Jewish People, and gave them their hook-noses, obstinate characters, and all the other gifts, faculties, tendencies and equipments they were launched upon the world with. No doubt about that in any quarter; these were the general outfit of the Jews, given them by God and none else whatever. And now if in the sedulous use of said equipments, faculties and general outfit, in such opportunities as then were, the Jew People did in the course of long ages work out for themselves a set of convictions about this universe which were undeniable to them, and of practices grounded thereon which were felt to be salutary and imperative upon them, were not the Jew People bound at their peril (temporal and eternal) to cherish such convictions and observe said practices with whatever strictest punctuality was possible, and to be supremely thankful that they had achieved such a possession? I fancy they would do all this with a punctuality—a devoutness and sacred rigour in exact proportion to the quantity of obstinate human method, piety, persistence or in strict Jewhood and manhood and general worth and wisdom that was in them. For which be they honoured as Jews and as men.—And if now they pleased to call all this by the Highest Names in their vocabulary and silently think and reverently speak of it as promulgated by their Great Jehovah and Creator for them, where was the harm for the time being? Was it not intrinsically true that their and our unnameable Creator *had* revealed it to them, having given them the outfit of faculties, character and situation for discerning owning and believing the same? Pool souls, they fancied their railway-carriage (going really at a great rate, I think, and with a terrible noise through the Country) was perfectly mo-

tionless and that all the landscape was dancing and walzing round them. They at least saw the landscape; discerned what landscape there was. Their error was the common one; so incidental to all passengers and movers through this world,—except those overloaded, busy, eating individuals that make their transit sleeping. Yes, fall well asleep, you will not think the landscape waltzes; you will see no landscape but in this dim vastness the turbid whirlpools of your own indigestions and nightmare dreams. You will be troubled with no misconceptions of a Godhood, Providence, Judgment Day, Eternal soul of Right or other sublimity in this world: looking into your own digestive apparatus when sleep has [*word illegible*] it into the immense,—one snores quietly and is free from all that.

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At this point Froude broke off his version of the first “essay” in his biography, mendaciously declaring,

So far Carlyle had written, and then threw it aside as unsatisfactory, and not adequately expressing his meaning, and therefore not to be proceeded with. But . . . when I told him that I had found and read it, he said that it contained his real conviction that lay at the bottom of all his thoughts about man and man’s doings in this world. A sense lay on him that this particular truth was one which he was specially called on to insist on, yet he could never get it completely accomplished. (2:15)

So, however parenthetically unsatisfactory, Carlyle did not reject this as an attempt to give his “real conviction.”

The second half that Froude silently put aside can be read in *Victorian Studies*, though some of it is less a statement of Carlyle’s conviction than rambling thoughts of other matters including the development of language.<sup>9</sup> It also considers optical illusions that arise in looking at distant objects, where “[o]nce again the law of the outward eye corre-

sponds exactly to that of the inward” (paragraph 10), ending: “[ay de mi, this is now forty years old this thoughtkin; and my writing here is very sad stuff indeed!]” The whole draft concludes: “[Alas, not a word of this is coming rightly from my heart; nor is it tending (naturally) toward any good, or even perceptible goal whatever; I know not what to do with it. Persist for a day or two. Illuden chartés, if you are not able to *work* on them. Ah me! (16 Nov. ’52).]”

## II

It is a conclusion pursued equally vehemently in the second fragment, from which it can hardly be separated, and of which Froude’s version can also be corrected (15–18).<sup>10</sup>

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Singular what difficulty I have in getting my poor message delivered to the world in this epoch: things I imperatively need to say.

1. That all history is a Bible—a thing stated by me in words more than once, and adopted in a sentimental way; but nobody can I bring fairly into it, nobody persuade to take it up practically as a *fact*. Part of the “grand Unintelligible”, that we are now learning spiritually too—that the earth *turns*, not the sun and heavenly spheres. One day the spiritual astronomers will find that *this* is the infinitely greater miracle. The universe is not an orrery, theological or other, but a universe; and instead of paltry theologic brass spindles for axis, &c., has laws of gravitation, laws of attraction and repulsion; is not a Ptolemaic but a Newtonian universe. As Humboldt’s “Cosmos” to a fable of children, so will the new world be in comparison with what the old one was, &c.

<sup>10</sup>The main draft was sold at Sotheby’s June 14, 1932, item 191, for his nephew Alexander Carlyle’s executors, misleadingly catalogued under “Chartism,” but there is no record of the sale of the second fragment. Alexander Carlyle had owned it at the time he made some thorough corrections in his copy of Froude’s biography (now MS 751–54, National Library of Scotland), of which most are minor, but they put right such misreadings as “with” for “without”

(And flowing out of this). That the work of genius is not *fiction* but fact. How dead are all people to that truth, recognising it in word merely, not in deed at all! Histories of Europe, our own History! eheu! If we had any veracity of soul and could get the old Hebrew spectacles off our nose, should we run to Judæa or Houndsditch to look at the doings of the Supreme? Who conquered anarchy and chained it everywhere under their feet? Not the *Jews* with their morbid imaginations and foolish sheepskin Targums; the Norse with their steel swords guided by fresh valiant hearts and clear veracious understanding, it was *they* and not the *Jews*! The supreme splendour will be seen *there*, I should imagine, not in Palestine or Houndsditch any more. Men of genius sought to interpret history. Interpreting the Greeks and Romans for a thousand years, let us now try our own a little. (How clear this has been to myself for a long while!) Not one soul, I believe, has yet taken it into him. Universities founded by monk ages are not fit at all for this age. "Learn to read Greek, to read Latin"! You cannot be *saved* (religiously speaking too) without those languages. What of reason there was in that! Beautiful loyalty to the ancients. Dante and Virgil, *il duca mio*: beautiful truly so far as it goes. But the superfoetation is now grown perilous, deadly, horrible, if you could see it!

Old Piety was wont to say that God's judgments tracked the footsteps of the criminal; that all violation of the Eternal Laws, done in the deepest recesses or on the conspicuous high places of the world, was absolutely certain of its punishment. You could do no evil, you could do no good, but a god would repay it to you. It was as certain as that when you shot an arrow from the earth, gravitation would bring it back to the earth. The all-embracing law of right and wrong was as inflexible, as sure and exact, as that of gravitation. Furies with their serpent hair and infernal maddening torches followed Orestes who had murdered his mother. In the still deeper soul of modern Christendom there hung the tremendous image of a Doomsday, *Dies, iræ, dies illa*—when the All-just, without mercy now, with only terrific accuracy now, would judge the quick and the dead, and to each soul measure out the reward of his deeds done in the body—eternal Heaven to the good, to the bad eternal Hell. The Moslem too, and generally the Oriental peoples, who are of a

more religious nature, have conceived it so,—and taken it, not as a conceit, but as a terrible fact, and have studiously founded, or studiously tried to found, their practical existence upon the same.

My friend, it well behoves us to reflect how *true* essentially all this still is; that it continues, and will continue, fundamentally a fact in all essential particulars—its certainty, I say its infallible certainty, its absolute justness, and all the other particulars, the eternity itself included.<sup>11</sup> He that has with his eyes and soul looked into nature from any point—and not merely into distracted theological, metaphysical, philosophical, modern or other cobweb representations of Nature at second hand—will find this true, that only the vesture of it is changed for us; that the essence of it cannot change at all. Banish all miracles from it. Do not name the name of God; it is still true.

It is in religion with us, as in astronomy: we know now that the earth moves. But it has not annihilated the stars for us; it has infinitely exalted and expanded the stars and universe for us. Once it seemed evident the sun did daily rise in the east; the big sun—a sun god—did travel for us, driving his chariot over the crystal floor all days: at any rate the sun *went*. Now we find it is only the earth that goes. So too all mythologies, religious conceptions, &c., we begin to discover, are the necessary products of man's godmade mind.

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The attack on the Old Testament is clear: the “morbid” Jewish imagination and foolish “Targums” are part of Carlyle's increasing resentment in the 1850s of the “beggarly twaddle” of contemporary Christianity (Wilson 372). At different times he had recently shaken such friends as Emerson, Tennyson, and W. E. Forster by his “utmost impatience of Christendom & Jewdom . . . plainly biding his time & meditating how to undermine & explode the whole world of nonsense which torments him” (CL 22:140, xiii).<sup>12</sup> The rest is equally plain. Mankind has found that the Earth goes round the Sun and is

<sup>11</sup>Alexander Carlyle corrects Froude in this sentence, but his pencillings are

similarly coming to see that knowledge of God comes from no external revelation but from within. It comes close to Samuel Butler's quip that "[a]n honest God's the noblest work of Man" (Bartholomew 26) and to Ludwig Feuerbach and many others, including his own earlier comments. It is both "totally" new, a complete revolution, and yet, especially if perceptions are God-given, "it is still true," and little or nothing has altered.

There are further steps in the argument, spiralling in different directions. All depends on personal conviction—even if now weakening. And perhaps one should leave it there. Carlyle's problem lay in coming to doubt some of his own wobbling convictions as he slowed down his prose.

### III

This leaves much unsaid, but the two documents on "Spiritual Optics" were a rejected draft for reasons Carlyle makes clear, and readers hardly flatter him by supposing that his sharp misgivings really show any special rhetorical purpose. Thus, one can perhaps acknowledge that it expressed at least his attempt to articulate a few of his scattered thoughts about religious belief. However much Froude needs questioning and revising, this is what Carlyle imperfectly set down; and within such limits he was to remain for the remainder of his life, as can be seen in the numerous extracts from his journal given in the last chapters of Froude's biography.<sup>13</sup> For at the end of 1870, for example, Carlyle was privately to return to the problem:

*December 28*,—I wish I had the strength to elucidate and write down intelligibly . . . what my outline of belief about God essentially is. It might be useful to a poor protoplasm generation, all

<sup>12</sup>Even in 1847 he had written of that other "Book in me; 'Exodus from Houndsditch' . . . a peeling off of fetid *Jewhood* [the Old Testament] in every sense from myself and my poor bewildered brethren" (CL 22:48–49).

<sup>13</sup>Alexander Carlyle's copy shows that he verified and accepted passages given from the journal as almost correct, confirmed by a typed copy of the journal made by Alexander and checked by J.A.S. Barrett. Such quotations, there-

seemingly determined to try Atheism for a while. They will have to return from that, I can tell them, or go down altogether into the abyss. (Qtd. in Froude 4:304-05)

In fact, his response to the development of new theories or discoveries in science remained divided, though sharply expressed as he strenuously denied that it could reveal anything about the Un-nameable and Unknowable—except His existence. In 1869 a despairing passage is preceded by a hopeful one, when, even though he sees that his experience of God’s creation (“the Infinite made palpable and visible to me”) will soon be over (“and I knew so little of it, real as was my effort and desire to know”), he feels slightly cheered at the thought that “Omnipotence” might eventually let some “go farther” (4:385). Yet this is soon followed by another denunciation of the “consciously increasing Atheism, sprouting out everywhere in these days. . . . Logic never will decide the matter, or will decide it—seem to decide it.” He continues to aver his inability to write about it: “I wish all this could be developed, universally set forth, and put on its true basis. Alas! I myself can do nothing, but perhaps others will” (4:386-87). At the same time he could still express his views on other matters, even though with diminished force.

In 1868, too, he had noted of Science that it had much advanced “geologies” and “notions of the early history of man,” and it had even “got rid of MOSES . . . no very sublime achievement, though that is pretty much all that science in this age has done, or is doing” (4:384). Earlier in that year, he had dutifully attended his good friend John Tyndall’s lecture on Michael Faraday, though he was not “fully sympathetic.” For why should he “care about such discoveries?” Such was his feeling about most of Science’s triumphant “miracles, . . . and I sadly keep it secret, a sorrowful private possession of my own” (4:366).

The paradox affecting him was that, if he tried to give direct expression to what he believed, it seemed self-contradictory: that though God’s revelation should be evident in His works and man’s history, one seems to have no hope of learning anything of importance in spite of investigations. In fact, this was no longer just his “private” conviction. His views changed; he offers a moving target; and if schol-

ars are to continue to discuss Carlyle's beliefs, they need to seek what they were (or what he says they were) at particular times of his life.

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