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Two Letters from Thomas Carlyle to Beverley Tucker

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featured on the jacket of the Strouse edition of *Past and Present* (2006), but the cropping has removed both the brace and the evidence of the shaking hand. The photograph without cropping is included in the *CLO*: TC to FMB, 10 May 1859 (*CL* 35: 90).



TC to Ford Madox Brown, 15 April 1865. MS: unknown. Pbd: William Michael Rossetti, *The Rossetti Papers: 1862–1870* (New York: Scribners, 1903) 97. The headnote explains: “A characteristic little note, referring to Brown’s Exhibition. Many readers will recollect that Carlyle sat to Brown for a leading figure in the large picture named *Work*.” In the text, “No. 191” refers to Piccadilly Galleries, 191 Piccadilly.

Chelsea. 15 *April*, 1865.

Dear Sir—

Might I ask you to put my *Wife’s* name, instead of mine, on the inclosed which you have been so kind as to send me. I have already been twice (and she as well) to No. 191; and feel very likely to return: but the female mind seems to be still more adventurous in this affair, and wishes to be independent of me.—

Yours very sincerely,

T. Carlyle



Two Letters from Thomas Carlyle to Beverley Tucker

THE FOLLOWING PAIR OF LETTERS FROM THOMAS CARLYLE TO Beverley Tucker were transcribed for the *Collected Letters* from the texts in the “Editor’s Easy Chair,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* (71 [1885]: 799–800). The letters were also printed in the *New York Times*: “Carlyle on American Slavery. Unpublished Letters Written to a Virginian Before the War. From Harper’s Magazine for October” (20 September 1885). The transcriptions below, which correct a number of minor typographical

errors, are from Carlyle's holograph letters in the Special Collections Research Center, the College of William and Mary (the Tucker-Coleman papers) and are printed with permission.

The recipient of the letters was a professor of law at the College of William and Mary, the son of a distinguished jurist, St. George Tucker (1752–1827), also a professor of law at William and Mary (St. George Tucker, before reconciling himself with slavery, had proposed its slow demise in his *A Dissertation on Slavery* [1796]).

Beverly Tucker (1784–1851) was a son of privilege at ease in Zion, and a novelist and a writer who had long anticipated the breakup of the Union that would allow the South to retain what he and his colleagues regarded as anything but a peculiar institution. Indeed, at William and Mary, he was one of a number of eminent and influential apologists for slavery, perhaps the most distinguished of whom was the College's president from 1836 to 1846, Thomas Roderick Dew. In my essay "A First Look at the Worst: Slavery and Race Relations at the College of William and Mary" (*William and Mary Bill of Rights Journal* 16.4 [2008]: 1141–68) I set Tucker in the milieu of his William and Mary colleagues and offer accounts of the idyllic life he and his "servants" shared (see in particular 1148–52).

Some measure of Tucker's belief in the benefits of slavery can be gleaned from his unsigned essay in the *Southern Literary Messenger* (June and August 1844), "An Essay on the Moral and Political Effect of the Relation between the Caucasian Master and the African Slave." Slavery, Tucker argues at length, has led to "the physical, intellectual and moral improvement of the inferior race" (332). He sees this "progress" in decidedly Carlylean terms:

[A]n accurate observer may see that, from time to time, the great body of slaves have become more attached, more content with their condition, less licentious and more honest; and that, meanwhile, their comforts have been increased, and that the master has become more kind, more indulgent, milder in his methods of government and more confiding. The voice of command is giving place to that of courteous request; the language of objugation is exchanged for that of grave reproof, and it becomes daily more manifest that, whatever griefs may fall to the lot of either party, both are happy

in each other, and happy in a relation, with the duties of which use has made familiar. (337)

The envelopes that accompany both of these letters in the collections at William and Mary are worthy of description. The accompanying envelope of the first letter is addressed to "N. Beverley Tucker Esq, Professor / Williamsburg University / Virginia U.S." One postmark is indistinct but appears to be "Paid / AM Oct 27 / [illegible]." Another is "L / Oc 28 / C." A third is perhaps "Boston / [illegible] / Nov 17 / US." The envelope is endorsed along the left edge of the front, presumably by Tucker, "Thos Carlyle / Oct. 25th, 1840." The verso includes the wax seal and another postmark, again indistinct, perhaps "Pimlico."

The accompanying envelope of the second letter is addressed "Honble Beverley Tucker / Williamsburg / Virginia, U.S." There are three postmarks: "Nov 16 / Paid /24," "21 / cents," and "PAID [?] CU [?] / 31 OC 31 / 1850." The front of the envelope has been endorsed along the left edge, presumably by Tucker, "Thos. Carlyle. / Oct. 31st, 1850." The verso has the wax seal but no writing or postmarks.

William Sumner Jenkins quotes this second letter extensively in *Pro-Slavery Thought in the Old South* (U of North Carolina P: Chapel Hill, NC, 1935; rpt. Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1960), see 307. Tucker had sent a copy to James Henry Hammond, a South Carolina politician. Jenkins notes too of another letter from Tucker to Hammond, 29 May 1849, in which Tucker relates that he "was so impressed with the likeness between Carlyle's ideas and his own that he sent him a copy of his *Lectures*" (305), an allusion to the first of the two letters presented here.

Terry L. Meyers
College of William and Mary



Chelsea, London, 25 Octr 1846—

Sir,

The New-York Booksellers have duly forwarded to me, a few days ago, your volume of *Lectures*;¹ for which I beg to return

you many thanks. The candid, ardent and manful spirit which shines everywhere thro' these Discourses renders the Gift welcome in itself, and as a token of your kind feelings towards me still more so.

I have always said of America, in looking at its books, *Meliora latent* [better things lie hidden]: the best meaning of America has not yet come to *words* (or even to thought),—it is but still struggling to come! And surely, if it be true, as one sometimes prophesies, that huge changes lie not far ahead in your Republic as elsewhere, whosoever has in his heart a clear word longing for utterance, ought to do his best to utter it.

With many thanks and good wishes,

Yours very sincerely,

T. Carlyle

To Professor Tucker,
&c &c



Chelsea, London, 31 Octr, 1850—

Dear Sir,

Your letter and Pamphlets have duly reached me; for which accept my acknowledgments.² The style both of what you write and of what you have spoken invites a considerate perusal; and such accordingly you have had from me. If it were in my power to forward, in the way you mention, what I find to be right and essentially just in your endeavours, surely I should not neglect it. But that, I must add, is little likely, in the present state of our affairs, as of yours! Our “New Downing Street”, as the present omens indicate, is still at a great distance.³

Meanwhile, dark as we are in regard to all details, I think you rather exaggerate to yourself our ignorance as to your essential position in that big controversy. I find it a settled conviction among rational Englishmen, which they frequently express in a careless way, that the Southern States must ultimately feel driven to separate themselves from the Northern: in which result there is not felt here to be anything treasonous or otherwise horrible; our grand short-coming is, that we regard the matter as one in which *we* have no concern, or a

much smaller one than the fact might indicate if we would look at it;—that, in short, the *rational* class, on this as on some other subjects, is at present a dumb and luke-warm one; and that, Exeter Hall having all the talk to itself, a windy foolish and otherwise inconsiderable *minority* (for such I really take it to be, even by account of heads, if you insisted on having any degree of sense in them) usurps the name and figure of England in treating of this matter. Perhaps now at last the dumb sense of the Country does begin to stir, and growl a kind of inarticulate contradiction to the Platforms; but I foresee, it will be a long time, such is the complicated depth of this Emancipation Question, and such the general numb bewilderment of men's minds, before the wise result be insisted on with emphasis, and get the majority in its favour.

For you and other men of sense and manfulness of spirit, who stand in the very coil of Negro complications, and feel practically that you must retain command of your servants, or else quit your place and task in the world, I find it altogether natural that you should in silence resolve to front all extremities rather than yield to an extrinsic clamour of that nature, however big-voiced and pretentious it become: in which quarrel, too, what can I say, except "God stand by the *right*", which I clearly perceive you in part are!

But, alas, the question is deep as the foundations of Society; and will not be settled this long while! For the cry about Emancipation, so well pleased with itself on Humanity Platforms, is but the keynote of that huge anarchic roar, now rising from all nations, for good reasons too,—which tends to abolish all mastership and obedience whatsoever in this world, and to render *Society* impossible among the Sons of Adam! And I doubt we have hardly got to the crisis of that yet,—at least among speakers in England I find myself in a painful minority of one in regard to it;—and *after* the crisis, when the minority shall have even become considerable, I feel too well what a task will lie ahead of them! It is truly time that each brave man consulted solemnly his own most religious oracles on the subject; and stood piously prepared to do whatever God's-mandate he felt to be laid on *him* in regard to it.

Give me leave, in my dim light, but in my real sympathy with your affairs, to hint another thought I have. It is, that this

clamour from your “Exeter-Hall” and ours, which few persons can regard with less reverence than I, was nevertheless a thing *necessary*. My notion is, that the relation of the White man to the Black is *not* at present a just one according to the Law of the Eternal; and tho’ “Abolition” is by no means the way to remedy it, and would be a “remedy” equivalent to killing it (as I believe); yet, beyond all question, remedied it must be; and peace upon it is not possible till a remedy be found, and begin to be visibly applied. “A servant hired *for life*, instead of by the day or month”:⁴ I have often wondered that wise and just men in your region (of whom I believe there are many) had not come upon a great many methods, or at least some methods better than those yet in use, of justly enunciating this relation, and relieving such asperities of it as become intolerable. Have you, for example, a Law by which a Negro, on producing a certain sum of money possible for the thrift and foresight of a superior Negro, can *demand* his Freedom?— I could conceive many other Laws, and Practices not quite in use at present; but am at the bottom of my paper, and must end. I shall say only, the Negro Question will be left in peace, when God Almighty’s Law about it *is* (with tolerable approximation) actually found out and practised; and never till then. Might this also be a word to the wise!— — With many regards and true wishes, Yours sincerely, T. Carlyle



Notes

1. *A Series of Lectures on the Science of Government Intended to Prepare the Student for the Study of the Constitution of the United States* (Philadelphia, PA: Carey and Hart, 1845).

2. Tucker appears to have sent Carlyle at least his speech to the Southern Convention in 1850, later reprinted as *Prescience: Speech Delivered by Hon. Beverly [sic] Tucker, of Virginia, in the Southern Convention, held at Nashville, Tenn., April 13th, 1850* (Richmond, VA: West and Johnson, 1862). An undated printing is listed in WorldCat as available only on microfilm, *Southern Convention*, a 16 pp. pamphlet (Richmond, VA: Colin, Baptist, and Nowlan, [1850?]).

3. See “The New Downing Street,” Number 4 in Carlyle’s *Latter-Day Pamphlets* (1850).

4. Carlyle picks up his own phrasing from his "Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question," *Fraser's Magazine* (February 1849).



"I must write": Vernon Lushington, the Brownings, John Ruskin, and Thomas Carlyle

IN NOVEMBER 1860 VERNON LUSHINGTON (1832–1912) WROTE to Elizabeth Barrett Browning in Florence and reported his recent visit to the Carlyles in Chelsea.¹ Lushington had met the Brownings earlier in the year, on a trip to Italy in the company of William Michael Rossetti (1829–1919).² The holograph of Lushington's letter to Barrett Browning is located in and published here with the kind permission of the Browning Collection, Ella Strong Denison Library, Scripps College, Claremont, California. The letter was published in an incomplete form by George S. Hellman in *Harper's Monthly* ("Some Unpublished Papers of R. and E. B. Browning." 132 [March 1916]: 534–38).

David Taylor
Roehampton University



4 Paper Buildings, Temple
9 Nov. 1860

Dear Mrs Browning:— This is a strange handwriting to you. But I have to forward for your husband's kind consideration the enclosed letter, & I have to say how I gave his message to Mr. Carlyle; and besides this I have such kind thoughts towards you and yours, & such pleasant recollections of our visit, that I *must* write, & I know you will take it kindly.

Last Saturday night I made my way to Chelsea, to the little house in Cheyne Row, where the Great Man lives so quietly. I found him & Mrs. Carlyle at tea & with them Mr. Ruskin. Ruskin had come for an evening's chat too, for he reverences