MR. CARLYLE.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES.

Sir,—Would you permit me, with all deference to the opinions of others, to correct what I believe to be a current error regarding the late Mr. Carlyle? It is said that, in respect to science, he was not only incurious, but hostile. This does not tally with my experience. During the lifetime of his wife and afterwards I frequently saw him, and as long as his powers continued unimpaired, I do not remember a single visit in which he failed to make inquiries, both regarding my own work and the general work of science. In physical subjects I never encountered a mind of stronger grasp and deeper penetration than his. During my expositions, when these were clear, he was always in advance of me, anticipating and enunciating what I was about to say. He not unfrequently called to see me in Albemarle-street, and on such occasions I usually described to him what I was doing there. Four or five years ago, when I was engaged on the "chimera" of spontaneous generation, I took him into my warm room and explained to him the part played by the floating matter of the air in the phenomena of putrefaction and infection. He was profoundly interested and as docile as a child.

This, however, was not always his attitude. He sometimes laid down the law in matters where special study had rendered my knowledge more accurate than his, and had, in consequence, to bear with my dissent. Allow me to cite an illustration. In 1866 I accompanied him to Mentone, and, by the desire of his generous hostess, stayed with him there for two or three days. One evening, while returning from a drive, the glow of sunset on sea and mountain suggested a question regarding light. He stated his view with decision, while I unflinchingly demurred. He became dogmatic ("arrogant" is a word which could only be applied to Carlyle by those who never felt his influence) and invoked his old teachers, Playfair and Leslie, in support of his view. I was stubborn and replied that, though these were names meriting all honour, they were not authorities regarding the matter in hand. In short, I flatly and firmly opposed him; and it was not the first time. He lapsed into silence and we drove home. I went with him to his room. As he drew off his coat he looked at me mildly and earnestly, and, pointing to an armchair, said, in his rich, Scotch accent, "I did not want to contradict you; sit down there and tell me all about it." I sat down and, beginning with the alphabet of the question, carried it as far as my knowledge reached. For more than an hour he listened to me, not only with unruffled patience, but with genuine interest. His questions were always pertinent and his remarks often profound. I do not know what Carlyle's aptitudes in the natural history sciences might have been, but in regard to physics the contrast between him and Goethe was striking in the highest degree.

His opinions had, for the most part, taken their final set before the theory of man's descent was enunciated, or, rather, brought within the domain of true causes by Mr. Darwin. For a time he abhorred the theory, as tending to weaken that ethical element in man which, in Carlyle's estimation, as in that of others, transcends all science in importance. But a softening, if not a material change, of his views was to be noticed later on. To my own knowledge, he approved cordially of certain writings in which Mr. Darwin's views were vigorously advocated, while a personal interview with the great naturalist caused him to say afterwards that Charles Darwin was the most charming of men.

Carlyle was sternly real; but he was a gentleman—full of dignity and delicacy of thought and feeling. No finer courtesy could be shown by man than was shown by him to the ladies who visited him in his modest home at Chelsea. I see him now, standing bareheaded in his sober dressing-gown on the pavement below his door steps, with the sun shining on his gray hairs, saying the last kind and courteous words to a lady whom his three and eighty years did not prevent him from conducting down stairs.

Knowing the depth of Carlyle's tenderness, I should almost feel it to be bathos to cite the cases known to me which illustrate it. I call to mind his behaviour towards some blind singers in the streets of Marseilles and the interest he took in the history of a little boy whom, during my momentary separation from him, he had found lying in the shadow of a tree and over whose limbs paralysis was slowly creeping. There was a kind of radiance in the sorrow depicted in the old man's face as he listened to the tale, and, probably, looked to woes beyond it. The selfsame radiance I saw for the last time as he lay upon his sofa and for some mintues rested his head upon my shoulder a few weeks before his death. I do not expect to see the like of it again. "Give your life royally" was his exhortation to the reformer eight and thirty years ago. In such fashion Carlyle gave his own life to his country and to mankind. England may forget this for the moment, but she will remember it by and bye.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

Athenæum Club, May 3. JOHN TYNDALL.