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Thomas Carlyle's Lost Translation of Saint-Simon's *Nouveau christianisme*: An Epistolary Account ¹

Michael R. Hill

THE FIRST-KNOWN (and now lost) translation of Saint-Simon's *Nouveau christianisme* was prepared by the well-known Scotch-born prose writer, Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881). Carlyle was considerably interested in the Saint-Simonian movement (Cofer 1931; Murphy 1936; Shine 1941) and undertook to translate Saint-Simon's last work during the latter half of 1830. The following excerpts from Carlyle's correspondence reveal that he was unable to find a willing publisher for his translation, and the manuscript subsequently disappeared, presumably in France.² This unfortunate chain of events accounts in part for the circumstance that *Nouveau christianisme* was not better-known among English-speaking sociologists and lay readers. Although James E. Smith produced and published an English translation in 1834,³ Smith's name carried little of Carlyle's impressive and occasionally controversial weight, especially in the United States where Carlyle became particularly well-known as the author of *Sartor Resartus* (1833-1834) and *The French Revolution, A History* (1837).

Through Carlyle's correspondence (Sanders and Fielding 1976), it is possible to reconstruct his effort to translate and then publish an English-language version of *Nouveau christianisme*. The general narrative is available elsewhere (e.g., d'Eichthal 1903; Coffey 1931; Murphy 1936; Pankhurst n.d.; and Shine 1936, 1941), but here the story unfolds directly in Carlyle's own words. He first read Saint-Simon's short book when it was sent to him in July 1830 by Gustave d'Eichthal.⁴ On 9 August 1830, Carlyle wrote from Scotland to d'Eichthal, thanking him for sending a packet of Saint-Simon's works, and commented specifically on *Nouveau christianisme*. Carlyle observed:

. . . in these writings of Saint-Simon himself, even in the *Nouveau christianisme*, I find indeed an ardent, all-hoping temper, a keen, far-glancing, yet often, as seems to me, hasty and flighty, vision; surely

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² Shine (1936 and 1941) intimated that the manuscript translation likely resides in France somewhere within the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, but this tantalizing hypothesis remains unsubstantiated.

³ Selected excerpts from Smith's translation are provided elsewhere in this issue of **SOCIOLOGICAL ORIGINS**, pp. 73-89, above.

⁴ Gustave d'Eichthal to Thomas Carlyle, July 1830, reproduced in Eugène d'Eichthal (1903: 292-293) and Shine (1941: 52-53). Eugène d'Eichthal's father, Gustave d'Eichthal (1804-1886), was an ardent, supportive participant in the Saint-Simonian movement in France who served briefly as a Saint-Simonian "missionary" to England.

nothing of a Divine Character; no Inspiration, save what every man of genius, who has once seen Truth, and with his whole heart embraced it, may be equally said to feel; none, indeed, but what several of his Disciples manifest in a still more unquestionable form. Doubt not, therefore, but the Book wherein you are to unfold your Religious principles, will be specially welcome here: the whole history and actual constitution of your Society, its aspects internal and external, its numbers, its political and economical relations, its whole manner of being and acting, are questions of unusual interest for me.⁵

Some four months later, on 19 December 1830, Carlyle reported to his younger brother, John A. Carlyle:

I have translated Saint-Simon's *Nouveau christianisme*, a heterodox Pamphlet (about 40 Review pages), which I mean soon to send *you*. I have prefixed a very short introduction; and you may try whether any pamphlet-printing Bookseller (some Socinian, or Anti-Church, or quite indifferent character) will give you the matter of five pounds for the copyright thereof, or will give nothing whatever, which also will be a decision. It contains several strange ideas, not without a large spice of truth; is ill-written, but easily read, and deserves a reading. Tell me whether you think it will be worth risking 6 shillings on, and in the affirmative, *off!*⁶

A month later, Carlyle was still calculating how to put his translation into print. He wrote again to his brother, John, on 21 January 1831:

Can you tell me anything about who the Conductors of the *Examiner* are? The head one is a fine figurative fellow, devoid of belief, yet not incapable (if under 45) of receiving such. They spoke lately of the St Simonians (whom I love and pity and dissent from): I had positive thought of sending up my Ms. Translation to *him* (the 'Conductor'), and requesting him to find a Publisher for it. I clearly think it might do good, especially in these days. I expected no profit. Tell me what you think. I suppose you know no Bookseller (I meant it as a Pamphlet, which it is in the original, not an 'Article'). Had I any money, I would have a look at London soon, and see what I could see.⁷

⁵ Sanders and Fielding (1976: Vol. 5, p. 137).

⁶ Sanders and Fielding (1976: Vol. 5, p. 203).

⁷ Sanders and Fielding (1976: Vol. 5, pp. 216-217).

Carlyle continued to be impressed by the Saint-Simonian movement, and noted in a letter dated 11 July 1831 to John Bowring, editor of the *Westminster Review*:

Our wondrous Saint-Simonian Friends are making great way; converts in every direction. Their *Sermons*, it must be admitted, are monotonous enough; already almost as wearisome as our Parish Church ones. Nevertheless, so unfurnished is the general Heart and Head, at this epoch, I should not be much surprised if the New Religion (as it is pleased to name itself) gained very universal acceptance among the Young; who again, in their turn, become the Old.⁸

To Gustave d'Eichthal, Carlyle wrote from London on 3 October 1831 now thanking him for sending copies of the *Globe*, a Saint-Simonian newspaper. Carlyle lamented that publication of his translation of *Nouveau christianisme* had stalled, that the manuscript was temporarily out of his hands, and offered the work gratis to d'Eichthal if he would have it at some future point in time:

I am regularly favoured with the Numbers of the *Globe*; and derive from them not a little information on various matters that interest me much and are imperfectly or not at all understood here. Partly by way of testifying my thankfulness for this kindness, I had resolved on sending you an English version of the *Nouveau christianisme*, which I executed many months ago in Scotland; but the Manuscript which is in Dr Bowring's hands cannot be procured at this moment, and must wait another opportunity. If on any occasion it could be of service to you, it is heartily at your disposal.⁹

By early 1832, Carlyle had still not secured a publisher. He wrote to Gustave d'Eichthal on 15 February:

The editor of the *Magazine* having decided not to publish this translation, I place it, according to my promise, at your entire disposition. I fully authorize you to print or to burn it, or to do what you wish with it, upon the single condition that *my name be not mentioned*.

The "translator's note" is undoubtedly useless now; however I send it to you as well, in it I openly express my impression of the possible influence of Saint-Simon and his work upon our English public, and this in terms rather less favourable than the opinion I

⁸ Sanders and Fielding (1976: Vol. 5, pp. 300-301).

⁹ Sanders and Fielding (1976: Vol. 6, p. 3).

formed of this last work (an opinion to which I was naturally forced). My duty, in regard to this subject is, I believe now accomplished.¹⁰

Effectively closing the books on his translation project, Carlyle's manuscript remained unpublished and is now presumed lost. Some two years later, J.E. Smith's translation was published in London, but Smith's edition languished in virtual obscurity and is found today only in a small number of research libraries. *Nouveau christianisme* was thence translated into Dutch (1835), German (1911) and Italian (1946) before becoming widely available in a new English translation in F.M.H. Markham's (1952) compilation of Saint-Simon's selected writings. All that remains today of Carlyle's efforts is what may be a re-worked version of the "very short introduction" (or "translator's note") that appeared in 1832 as an anonymous "letter" in *Fraser's Magazine*.¹¹

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¹⁰ Sanders and Fielding (1976: Vol. 6, p. 118).

¹¹ The full text of the "letter" is provided elsewhere in this issue of **SOCIOLOGICAL ORIGINS**, pp. 96-100, below. For arguments attributing the contribution to Carlyle, see Thrall (1934) and Shine (1936).