

Carlyle and Divinity Hall

Ian Campbell
University of Edinburgh

The question of Carlyle's education for the ministry at the University of Edinburgh—a period for which a certain amount of evidence exists, but which requires scrutiny not least because of his newly published letters written in his late teens and early twenties when he was retreating from his family's unshakable Calvinist faith and hope that he would be a minister of that faith, towards his own difficult and sometimes inscrutable religious position—demands new consideration.

The sacrifices Carlyle's parents made for him and their proud wish to send their eldest son to university for the good of their church were typical of the age and the district. The evidence lies in the *Alphabetical List of students of Divinity in the University of Edinburgh 1813*, the pages of which make fascinating reading.¹ They include Thomas Carlyle (from Hoddam, resident in Annan, sponsored by the Hoddam Church of Scotland minister Mr Yorstoun) and other names familiar from the

¹Oddly enough, David Masson who closely researched this period of Carlyle's

first volume of *The Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle*, including Francis Dickson of Apple-garth (resident in Lochmaben and sponsored by Mr Wright) and James Johnstone of Hutton (also resident in Lochmaben and sponsored by Mr Wright). The records also list a name which was to figure large in this account, Edward Irving, who was first listed in 1809–10 as of Haddington, sponsored by Mr Sibbald, then in 1810–12 at Haddington, sponsored by Dr Lorimer, and in 1812–13 (misspelt as Irvine) in Kirkcaldy, sponsored by Mr Martin who was, of course, to become Irving's father-in-law. This is the period during which he was in Haddington and meeting the youthful Jane Welsh; in Kirkcaldy he was to meet his future wife Isabella Martin. There was also a Thomas Thomson of Hoddam (listed at this time in Annan), sponsored by Mr. Yorstoun, and a steady stream of other candidates from Hoddam over the years. The list tells several interesting things: it confirms that by the time Carlyle and Irving met, the latter was a well-established student of divinity as well as a schoolmaster; it calls up Irving's Haddington years as schoolmaster; it reports, too, that Carlyle was sponsored not by the Burgher Seceder clergy of Ecclefechan (Rev. John Johnstone *senior* and *junior*, both of whom taught Carlyle at various times) but by the Church of Scotland minister who, although he may not have been his parish clergyman, was willing to sponsor him to the University's Divinity Hall with its prestige (and path to preferment) rather than to the Burgher Seceders' own Divinity Hall. This may well reflect on the Carlyle family's standing in the community; the Church of Scotland clergyman would doubtless respect any family's wish to send its sons to the Church. Finally, the list underscores that the early Carlyle letters were frequently not just to casual friends but to fellow-students of divinity, a group recognized as intended for the Church from an early age. The list as a whole provides a vivid window into the religious life of a small parish, presumably not an unrepresentative one. It puts Carlyle into the context of a recognized stream of local talent heading for higher education, even if he was shortly to separate himself from it.

Carlyle had come through Ecclefechan's slender educational opportunities with the good fortune of the Johnstones' help as well as Tom

Donaldson's parish school: he picked up the rudiments of parish schooling which were held to suffice for the low threshold of university education characterizing the Scottish system, which allowed people from modest backgrounds and thinly populated parts of the country access to the University at an early age and gave them at university some of the material which might have been expected in the later years of school in England. Carlyle had Latin and mathematics at a good standard when he entered the University: David Masson, who knew him well, records that "[t]o Greek he never in later life made any pretence; and whatever Greek he did learn from Dunbar—which can have been but small in quantity—must have faded through disuse" (230). Yet the fullest account of these years comes from Carlyle's own recollections in 1866 when he was annotating an early biographical article from *Unsere Zeit* in Leipzig:

My Mother taught me reading, I never remembered when. "Tom Donaldson's School" at Ecclefechan,—a severely correct young man, Tom; from Edinburgh College, one session probably; went afterwards to Manchester &c, & I never saw his face again, tho' I still remember it well, as always merry & kind to me. . . . Hoddam School afterwards; which then stood at the Kirk. "Sandy Beattie" (subsequently a Burgher Minister in Glasgow; I well remember his "examining" us that day) reported me "complete in English," age then about 7; that I must "go into Latin," or else waste my time: Latin accordingly; with what enthusiasm! But the poor Schoolmaster did not himself know Latin; I gradually got altogether swamped and bewildered under him; reverend Mr Johnstone of Ecclefechan, (or *first*, his son, home from College, and already teaching a young Nephew or Cousin, in a careless and intelligent manner) had to take me in hand; and, once pulled afloat again, I made rapid & sure way: a most exact & faithful man Mr Johnstone Senior; my Father & Mother's Minister (Burgher), both of whom he esteemed. The venerablest & most respected Clerical Person I have ever seen. White full bottom Wig; income £75 to £100 a year. (Clubbe 29-30)

The parish ministers obviously had more of a part to play than can be gathered from merely reading the letters and the gossip between the young men from the parish who made it to university. Carlyle, for instance, had little chance of picking up Hebrew in Ecclefechan: “nobody in that region, except my reverend old Mr Johnstone, could have read one sentence of it to save his life. I did get to read Latin & French with fluency . . . all the Books I could get were also devoured” (31–32). Mr Yorstoun makes relatively little impression in Carlyle’s letters, though Henry Duncan of Ruthwell does. Still, James Yorstoun, who had a very long career in Hoddam Parish and was the Carlyles’ parish minister when Carlyle spent his quiet year in Hoddam Hill with his mother before marrying and settling in Edinburgh, retained Carlyle’s respect to old age. He was “an intelligent Moderate, and one of Carlyle’s few friends in the district, although there is no record of Carlyle ever having given him ‘a hearing’ in the Hoddom Kirk, . . . who spent his life in this quiet rural parish, and died in 1851 at the venerable age of 79” (Sloan 56). He befriended both Carlyle and Jane,² who copied his sayings in her notebook: Thomas was to remember him as an “excellent chess-player, excellent, simple and ingenious man” (Carlyle, *Alexander* 2:114).

Duncan of Ruthwell was an altogether more substantial minister and representative of the intelligent country clergy: he was responsible for preserving the Ruthwell Cross, founding savings banks, establishing the *Dumfries and Galloway Courier* newspaper, and writing some little-read but interesting fiction. His career, though still awaiting full research, suggests that Carlyle was no blazing exception coming from a wasteland of intellectual sloth. There were able men in the country parishes, and the manse was the obvious place for the educated if impecunious. Sophy Hall, Duncan’s great-granddaughter, notes the life-long gratitude Carlyle felt to Duncan (who was to introduce him to

²Later, in 1855, Jane was to entertain two of Yorstoun’s nieces in London, describing them “as old as the hills and dressed in the clothes that might have been part of a stage-wardrobe in the time of Ben Johnson!—and minds in such a state of trustful innocence that they actually took for gospel every

David Brewster with excellent results for Carlyle's early career) and cites an 1870 letter quoted from James Anthony Froude's biography of Carlyle in which Carlyle remembers,

Your grandfather was the amiablest and kindest of men, to me pretty much a *unique* in those young years, the one cultivated man whom I could feel myself permitted to call *friend* as well. Never can I forget that Ruthwell Manse, and the beautiful souls (your grandmother, your grand-aunts, and others) who then made it bright to me. All vanished now, all vanished! (Froude 1:22).³

All vanished perhaps, but Ruthwell Manse gave Carlyle more than an introduction to polite letters and intellectual stimulus: the sometimes graceless letters and mathematical puzzles Duncan published in his newspaper gave Carlyle a taste for public mathematical showing-off which must have contributed to his willingness to work for John Leslie, to translate the *Elements of Geometry* (1819) from Legendre's French, and to call Carlyle to the attention of Leslie and Alexander Christison both when they recommended him to schoolmastering in Kirkcaldy and the wider field of Fife after his Annan years teaching at his old and little-loved Academy (1814–16). While officially these were years of external registration as a divinity student at Edinburgh, obviously other things were increasingly absorbing Carlyle's attention and the forefront of his mind.

Though that external registration for divinity is something passed over lightly in Carlyle biography, it may offer an insight into his eventual decision to quit the ministry for a life in mathematics, physics,

³In April 1913 in *Nineteenth Century Hall* published a piece on Jane Welsh Carlyle and the "wrong Thomas Carlyle" and on her great-grandfather's early patronage of Carlyle which was to prove decisive in opening the path to early publication as well as introducing him to a world of books he would not otherwise have known. For his part Carlyle confirms his debt: "Last Saturday and Sunday I was at Ruthwell Manse seeing Mr. Mitchell. Mr. Duncan is really an intelligent pleasing man. Indeed the characteristic of every member of the family, seems to be a wish to make all about them happy" (Froude 1:40).

German, literature. The arts course complete, Scottish students of the time had the option to graduate, though relatively few did, and Carlyle certainly is not recorded as having been an MA, and then choose between staying on for further training or taking paid work while training at a distance—what would be regarded today as distance learning but more distinguished by the distance than by the learning.⁴ The assumptions behind this are interesting: the ministry of the Church of Scotland was reserved for those who had completed a University course in arts (without which divinity training was not permitted), and the course in arts was broad-based and extensive:

No particular study of science is in higher estimation than another; all are taught; each has its votaries, and a proper portion of time is allotted to those inferior qualifications, which we every day see assist the greater accomplishments in the acquisition of reputation and fortune. Hence it arises, that the Scotch in general have rather that kind of useful acquaintance with literature, which is so recommended in the *Categories*, as producing in a man friends and esteem, than any great or deep knowledge in one particular or language. (Topham 86)

To put the case more positively, Carlyle as a result of this generalist education could find himself in his late teens qualified not only to tutor in mathematics and physics (which he did) and teach classics (which he also did), while translating high-level mathematical books from French, learning German, and eventually applying with confidence for the position of Astronomer Royal in Edinburgh when it became vacant, but also to be a credible candidate for the ministry.

The external student was driven by financial necessity to find work:

⁴William Brown reports that “The College of Edinburgh confers degrees as the universities of England and Scotland do; but no degree under a Doctor is of any estimation; which may be had as soon as the necessary instruction can be acquired to pass the proper examination” (87). In 1866, on being installed as Rector of the University, Carlyle was offered an honorary doctorate, but declined it, partly on the grounds that his brother John already held the M.D. from Edinburgh.

Carlyle's father (who never earned more than £100 in any one year) with a growing family to support in Ecclefechan could ill afford to keep him beyond the basic arts course. Carlyle had used his time in Edinburgh to attend some lectures—fiercely enjoying those by the likes of Leslie who appealed to him but dismissing the others with few words,⁵ though it is worth noticing that his professors thought enough of him to recommend him to both Annan and Kirkcaldy academies. What he certainly did at university was read hugely; as he remembered in 1866 in his Rectorial address, “What I have found the University did for me is that it taught me to read, in various languages, in various sciences, so that I could go into the books which treated of these things, and gradually penetrate into any department I wanted to make myself master of, as I found it suit me” (qtd. in Masson 239). The records of the university library show that during the years when he was supposedly preparing himself for the ministry, his reading was wide, miscellaneous, and not much concerned with divinity: he told Masson of his difficulties in using the library (240–41), but everything known about this period in his life reinforces the impression of a young man desperate to read, to widen an already wide base of knowledge, to explore.⁶ The act of learning German virtually without external teaching is one indication of his mental agility;⁷ another is his voracious reading of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–88) from which he later dated the real decline and fall of his own ambitions for the ministry.⁸ In the *Reminiscences* he was to recall how

⁵Masson notes that Brown had just started teaching in moral philosophy, and several people came just for the brilliant lectures. But to Carlyle they were “mere dazzle and moonshine” (235).

⁶My “Carlyle's Borrowings from the Theological Library of Edinburgh University” chronicles much of Carlyle's reading, while my “Irving, Carlyle and the Stage” charts the impact of imaginative literature on a student who had had little exposure to it.

⁷See Campbell and Rodger L. Tarr's “Carlyle's Early Study of German, 1819–1821.” In Germany Carlyle was to find this self-taught German of limited use conversationally, though he was lucky in his later years to have the friendship of those who, like Joseph Neuberg, were native speakers and glad

Irving's Library was of great use to me: *Gibbon*, *Hume* etc., etc., I think I must have read it almost through;—inconceivable to me now, with what ardour, with what velocity, literally above ten times the speed I can now make with any Book. *Gibbon*, in particular, I recollect to have read at the rate of a volume a day (twelve volumes in all); and I have still a fair recollection of it, though seldom looking into it since. It was of all the Books perhaps the most impressive on me in my then stage of investigation and state of mind. I by no means completely admired *Gibbon*, perhaps not more than I now do; but his winged sarcasms, so quiet, and yet so conclusively transpiercing, and killing dead, were often admirable potent and illuminative to me; nor did I fail to recognise his grand power of investigating, ascertaining, of grouping and narrating,—though the latter had always, then as now, something of a Drury-Lane character; the colours strong but coarse, and set off by lights from the side-scenes.—We had Books from Edinburgh College-Library too (I remember Bailly's *Histoire de l'Astronomie*, ancient and also modern, which considerably disappointed me); on Irving's shelves were the small Didot French Classics in quantity, with my appetite sharp: I must have read (of French and English, for I don't recollect much Classicality, only something of mathematics in intermittent spasms) a great deal during those years. (219)

Masson expands on this very familiar tale from the *Reminiscences*:

In one of the most intimate conversations I ever had with Carlyle

⁸See my "Carlyle and the University of Edinburgh" for further discussion of Carlyle's university career. My "Carlyle and the Secession" and "Carlyle's Religion: The Scottish Sources" study his church background in Ecclefechan. My *Carlyle and Europe: Some Early Influences* (1978) provides information on his intellectual development during this period, as does his own *Reminiscences* (1881) with further information in my "More about myself than him: Carlyle's *Reminiscences*." Finally, the whole question of his Scottish background forms the subject of my "The Scottishness of Carlyle" and "Carlyle: Sage of

he spoke even more distinctly of this his first complete reading of Gibbon in Kirkcaldy. The conversation was in his back-garden in Chelsea, and the occasion was his having been reading Gibbon, or portions of him, again. After mentioning, rather pathetically, as he does in his *Reminiscences*, his wonder at the velocity of his reading in his early days as compared with the slow rate at which he could now get through a book, he spoke of Gibbon himself in some detail, and told me that it was from that first well-remembered reading of Gibbon in twelve days, at the rate of a volume a day, that he dated the extirpation from his mind of the last remnant that had been left in it of the orthodox belief in miracles. This is literally what he said, and it is of consequence. . . . The process of extirpation can hardly have been complete at the moment of the call on Dr. Ritchie,—else the call would not have been made; but there can be no doubt that it was not mere continued languor that stopped Carlyle in his clerical career. There were the beginnings in his mind of the crash of that system of belief on which the Scottish Church rested, and some adherence to which was imperative on any one who would be a clergyman of that Church in any section of it then recognized or possible. (263–64)

The call on Dr. William Ritchie is thus a turning point, and it explains the winding-up of Carlyle's external study of divinity.

Different universities in Scotland had different regulations, but at the time the system Carlyle knew in Edinburgh was quite normal: a student would work somewhere far from the university city, usually as a schoolteacher or tutor, and occasionally come to the city to pay fees or to make some token demonstration of his continuing study.

The life of a divinity student attending full-time was not a particularly pleasant one, and Carlyle would not have been keen to undergo its discipline. In Aberdeen, for instance, Duncan Mearns of Tarvit had gained the divinity chair in 1815: a cold and distant man, he ran a formidable timetable for those who were regular students, about one hundred before the disruption. Mearns met his divinity students on Friday, Saturday, and Monday: Saturday was devoted to discourses; on other days one discourse was heard, and then the regular lecture fol-

lowed, occupying forty-five minutes. His lectures talked of doctrinal matters, Christian evidences, and some history of religion and Christianity. There were no examinations on the lectures. The students were required to attend three regular and one partial, two regular and three partial, or one regular and five partial sessions. The Hebrew class, not compulsory, was taken only by a handful, while Church history became available only from 1833 on and had to be taken by all students (Henderson 383–89).

It is not difficult to see how someone like Carlyle—whose ambition for the ministry was not strong and seemed not to be growing stronger—would have found discipline on this scale unpalatable. James Martin records that in Aberdeen every student had also to attend worship Sunday morning at 9:00 when Mearns would give lectures on practical religion; attendance was taken (231). Again, Carlyle would not have found such a discipline to his taste: though he was careful in his letters home to give the impression that he still attended worship regularly, it is fairly plain that such occasions were the exception rather than the rule.

In the early nineteenth century Glasgow had “a longer session in its Divinity Hall and probably a larger number of students than any other Scottish University” (Coutts 337), though the problem lay with the pluralities of appointment which the professors enjoyed. But had Carlyle been there, rather than in Edinburgh, in the second decade of the nineteenth century he would have had even less occasion to enjoy divinity:

Findlay, the venerable professor of Divinity, had evolved a course of prelections of portentous range and elaborate execution, embodying great stores of learning, but less interesting and useful to his students than if it had been prepared with judicious selection and condensation. (354)

Robert Findlay died in 1814, aged 93. Writes James Coutts, “It is tolerably evident that for some years in the early part of the 19th century the faculty of Divinity must have been influenced by the age and infir-

mity of its professors” (337). Plainly, the study of divinity in Glasgow was not flourishing at the time: in 1819–20, 233 students were enrolled in divinity and only eighty in Hebrew and seventy-four in church history. Numbers shrank still further: by 1831 they were down to 105 and by 1836 to seventy-two (325). Coutts instructively compares the position between the Scottish divinity schools in 1830: in Glasgow the academic year lasted six months, in Aberdeen three, and in St. Andrews and Edinburgh four. Till quite recently, he records, it had been enough to be on the books of a professor for six years and then proceed to trial for license by Presbytery without further formality. Only recently had one compulsory year at Divinity Hall been instituted in Glasgow: a compulsory year of Hebrew was under consideration but not yet in place (373).⁹

The picture of Carlyle drifting on the edge of the Divinity School in Edinburgh is thus not at all out of step with his contemporaries in the rest of Scotland. Divinity schools were not enjoying a high reputation: Carlyle missed by more than a decade a number of important and potentially stirring teachers (Thomas Chalmers, for one) and important reforms (such as those which overtook the Divinity School in Glasgow and the institution of the B.D. degree). Graeme Auld, writing of Alexander Brunton’s career in Edinburgh Divinity Hall, notes that

For most of his career, there were at Edinburgh still only the three Professorships of Theology as established during the seventeenth century—Divinity (1620), Hebrew and Oriental Languages (1642), and Ecclesiastical History (1694). Brunton was joined in this small Faculty of three by Thomas Chalmers (Divinity) in 1825, and by David Welsh (Ecclesiastical History) in 1831. It fell to them jointly to implement in 1835–37 the reform of the B. D., to make the degree “an instrument for awakening and strengthening in their pupils a desire for professional study . . . a Degree based

⁹On the other hand, *A Catalogue of the Books, in the private Collection, belonging to the Students of Divinity in the University of Glasgow* (1790) indicates a lively

upon such examination as may make it credible alike to the receiver and to the University which confirms it. (53-54)

Alexander Grant gives a largely sympathetic account of the institution, but even he admits that despite general dullness “many earnest and some distinguished men held Chairs in the Faculty of Divinity down to 1858. But anyone can see that the system of education for the clergy in Scotland during last century was loose, and the standard was low” (1:337). Looking at the individuals Carlyle might have heard, Grant adds that Brunton (in the chair from 1813 to 1847) had many duties which “did not press very heavily upon [him]” (2:284, 291-92); the arrival of Chalmers (1828-43) “towers immeasurably over all his predecessors in the Chair”; Ritchie (who held his chair from 1809-28) made no great impact (2:283-84), while Hugh Meiklejohn (who held the chair in church history from 1799-1831) was chiefly famous in his lectures for “an extraordinary monotony of delivery” (2:309). He was to be succeeded by David Welsh (1831-43) “who with Chalmers added greatly to the theological faculty” (2:310). None of this, however, did Carlyle any good.

The picture Masson paints of Carlyle’s climactic visit to divinity professor Ritchie to put his name down for a third year of divinity is simply the end of a long period of disillusionment and fading ambition through the required curriculum of four winter sessions as external student of Divinity Hall, or six partial sessions (279). His professors would have been Ritchie (divinity), Meiklejohn (church history) and Brunton (Hebrew).¹⁰ He stuck it out through his first trial discourse (Christmas 1814) in Divinity Hall on *Before I was afflicted I went astray* (Psalms 119:67) and his second (Christmas 1815) on *Num Detur Religio Naturalis?*, but that seems to have been the limit of his meeting the formal conditions of study. It is hard to tell how much he attended lectures or other students’ discourses, though his letters give some indication.

Student gossip there, inevitably, is about the professors:

¹⁰Masson records that he too was taught by Brunton, and the experience did

It is long since I was at Edinr and when I was there nothing of importance was a doing. I heard Alison preach. His elocution is clear—his style elegant—his ideas distinct rather than profound—Some person contrasting him and Chalmers, observed that the Prebendary of Sarum is like a glass of spruce beer—pure, refreshing and unsubstantial—the Minister of the Tron Kirk, like a draught of Johnnie Dowie’s ale—muddy, thick & spirit—stirring—Ivory the celebrated Analyst has quitted his situation at the College of (I forget its name)—Wallace has succeeded him—and has left his own place to his brother—They were saying that Ivory had it in his mind to come to Edinr & become a Teacher of Mathematics—Leslie has published an Arithmetic—similar I suppose to that treatise contained in the supplement of the Encyclopaedia—He is to have a third class this winter—Playfair I believe is returned—and is to teach the class himself—. (CL 1:113-14)¹¹

He heard Archibald Alison preach; he also kept up with Chalmers, one of the age’s most newsworthy writers:

Dr Chalmers, it would seem, is fearful lest these speculations lead us away from Christianity and has written a volume of discourses to prove that the insignificance of our planet in the universe is no argument against the truth of our religion. Orthodox men declare, of course, that he has completely discomfited his opponents—I read it sometime ago—It abounds in that fiery thoroughgoing stile of writing for which the Author is so remarkable: nevertheless his best argument seems to be, that as it is in the scriptures, we have no business to think about it [at] all—an argument which was well enough known to be a panacea in cases of that nature—before his volume saw the light. (CL 1:103)

A longer extract tells of the boredom and cynicism among the stu-

¹¹Later, Carlyle added, “Except Leslie in Mathematics no Professor did me al-

dent body of Divinity Hall, and clearly Carlyle's heart is not in his study there:

I was in Edinr two weeks ago: but there was nothing worthy of Notice taking place. I heard Leslie give a lecture on heat:—it displayed great ingenuity, but his experiments did not succeed.—His geometry is to be out in a few days.—I intended to have enrolled in the Divinity-Hall; but their Doctor was too busily engaged otherwise to attend to me. He had been quarrelling with his students about the management of the library; and the committee, which had been appointed to draw up regulations for the management of it, had that very day submitted them to the Doctor & his students assembled in the Hall. They gave much dissatisfaction to the Doctor, and immediately (as I was told—for I was not there) there was great confusion, and several speeches vituperative and objurgatory passed among them; till at last the mutineers to the number of fifty, adjourned to a neighbouring school-room, *con strepito* [noisily]—and valiantly drew up twelve resolutions proclaiming their grievances, & their determination to apply to the presbytery for advice. The Senatus Academicus has since taken up the case; and, as the committee appointed to decide on it consists of Meiklejohn, Ritchie & Brunton, it is easy to see how the affair will end.—Your picture of this hall and the dudgeon it seems to have excited in you gave me great amusement. I have not been within its walls for many months—& I know not whether I shall ever return, but all accounts agree in representing it as one of the most melancholy and unprofitable corporations, that has appeared in these parts for a great while. If we are to judge of the kind of Professors we should get from the Edinr Kirk, by the sample we already pos[s]ess, it is devou[t]ly to be wished that their visits may be short and far between. It may safely be asserted that tho' the Doctors Ritchie junior and senior, with Dr Meiklejohn, Dr Brunton & Dr Brown were to continue in their chairs, dosing in their present fashion for a century, all the knowledge which they could discover, would be an imperceptible quality—if indeed it[s] sign were

not negative. We ought to be somewhat sorry for the divinity-Hall; but our grief need not stop here. If we follow its members into the world, and observe their destination, we shall find it very pitiful. With the exception of the few whom superior talents or better stars exempted from the common fortune, every Scotch Licenciate must adopt one of two alternatives. If he is made of pliant stuff, he selects some one having authority before whom he bows with unabating alacrity for (say) half-a-score of years, and thereby obtains a Kirk: whereupon he betakes him to collect his stipend, and (unless he thinks of persecuting the Schoolmaster) generally in a few months, falls into a state of torpor, from which he rises no more. If on the other hand, the soul of the Licenciate is stubborn & delights not to honour the Esquires of the district,—heartless & hopeless he must drag out his life—without aim or object—vexed at every step to see surplices alighting on the backs of many who surpass him in nothing—but their *love for gravy*. This is the result of patronage, and this is one of the stages thro' which every established church must pass, in its road to dissolution. No Government ever fostered a Church—unless for its value as a state-engine, and none was ever ignorant of the insecurity of this engine, till it is placed upon the rock of patronage. But it ends not here. Tho all “constituted authorities” are ready to admit, that, Truth is great and will prevail—none have ventured to let their “true religion” descend unsupported into the arena, and try its hand at mauling the heresies which oppose it. On the contrary every “true religion” is propped & bolstered, & the hands of its rivals tied up; till by nursing and fattening it has become a bloated monster that human nature can no longer look upon—and men rise up & knock its brains out. Then there is great joy for a season; and forthwith a successor is elected, which undergoes the same treatment—and in process of time, meets with a similar fate. Such is the destiny of Churches by law established. Let every one of us be as contented with it as possible—and gird up his loins to attain unto a share of the plate while the game is good—. (CL 1:97-99)

Plainly, his sermons do not take a high priority in his reading, as he noted to Thomas Murray:

My sermon is pretty much in the same stile as yours *was* at th[e] date of your last letter—with this difference—I don't know quite so wel[l] in what part of the Bible it is. My sentiments on the Clerical profession are like yours mostly of the unfavourable kind. Where would be the harm, should we both stop? The best concerted schemes o' mice an' men—gang aft a'glee! I intended to have said something of the bigoted scepticism of Hume,—but as I am convinced you see thro' his specious sophisms and detect his blind *prejudice* in *favour* of . . . infidelity, I shall defer it.—at any rate I have not room—and therefore *must* wait. (CL 1:30)

Much more exciting is his general reading:

Have you ever seen Hoole's *Tas[so?]* I have among many others read, it, *Leonidas*, *The Epigoniad*, *Oberon*, *Savage[']s Poems &c.* *Miss Porter's Scottish Chiefs* and *Waverl[e]y* have been the principal of my Novels—. With regard to *Waverl[e]y* I cannot help remarking t[hat] it is the best novel that has been published these thirty years. (CL 1:29)

Not only was his ambition for the ministry shaky; his wish to earn a living told him that it was not a good strategy:

I leave Annan on Friday—Direct your next letter to me at Ecclefechan. Tell me, in what state of forwardness is your discourse? I too have an Exegesis to write—but when—is another circumstance. To be serious, Tom, I am growing daily and hourly more lukewarm about this preaching business.—The trade (for it is become a trade) is completely overstocked. And independently of this how would it suit one's humour—after spending the flower of one's life in the service of some pitiful country 'squire—to be obliged after all to flatter and wheedle his piques and prejudices in order to ob-

tain—a country parsonage; whence after spinning out a few years of dreary existence, to “drop into the grave unpitied & unknown”? —In this neighbourhood there are several students of divinity who, unless turned out to grass have no prospect of obtaining a livelihood at all. This looks badly. (CL 1:60)

He continued in this vein a bit later:

When I quitted Edinr in 1814—I felt as if I had been leaving the fountain head of knowledge and good humour; and when I returned, its society seemed uninteresting, and the pursuits very stale and unprofitable! I am vexed that I vallicate [vacillate] in this unphilosophical manner[.] But it is thus, I suppose with wiser persons than I our views of the world are perpetually changing as we sail down the stream; and that man is the wisest, who is best satisfied with his present prospect.— (CL 1:88)

And even later in Kirkcaldy he said,

The other day, there arrived from Edinr, a large shoal of preachers—Dixon, Nichol, Bullock, &c—they preached all along this coast of ours—I heard Dixon—on death;—somewhat in King Cambyzes’ vein—He is a witcracker by profession—otherwise a good fellow enough—Between ourselves, our own Minister here is the veriest drug that ever hapless audience yawned under. He has ingine too—but as much laziness along with it as might suffice for a Presbytery. I protest if he becomes no better, I shall be compelled to abandon him, in a great measure. (CL 1:117)

Obviously, this did not get back to Mr. Martin, for on leaving Kirkcaldy, Carlyle observed,

I know not whether I mentioned that Mr Martin the minister of Kirk[c]aldy, of his own accord, gave me, at my departure a most consolatory certificate—full of encomiums upon talents, morals &c which gratified me not a little. He was always kind to me. The

favourable opinions of such a man is worth the adverse votes of many ignorant persons. (CL 1:154-55)

All of this paints a picture of a man rapidly running out of ambition for the ministry and failing to find any very adequate substitute. It also explains the circumstances of his visit to Ritchie which Masson highlighted: his annual visit to register as an external student, pay fees, and keep his flickering candidacy for the ministry alive. The *Reminiscences* of Kirkcaldy catches it vividly:

We lived habitually, by their means, in a kind of Edinburgh element, not in the still barer Kirkcaldy one; and that was all. Irving now and then perhaps called on some City Clergyman; but seemed to have little esteem of them, by his reports to me afterwards. I myself, by this time, was indifferent on that head. On one of those visits my last feeble tatter of connexion with Divinity Hall affairs or Clerical outlooks was allowed to snap itself, and fall definitely to the ground (Old "Dr. Ritchie not at home," when I called to enter myself;—"Good," answered I; "let the omen be fulfilled!") (226)

Possibly even more terminally for Carlyle himself was not the severing of the relation with Divinity Hall but the actual confession to his closest friend at the time, Irving, not by letter but by frank face-to-face discussion while walking on the Muirkirk road:

It was here, just as the sun was sinking, [Irving] actually drew from me by degrees, in the softest manner, the confession that I did not think as he of Christian Religion, and that it was vain for me to expect I ever could or should. This, if this were so, he had pre-engaged to take *well* of me,—like an elder brother, if I would be frank with him;—and right loyally he did so, and to the end of his life we needed no concealments on that head; which was really a step gained. The sun was about setting, when we turned away, each on his own path. (260-61)

This is very different from the verbal tricks he played in his letters,

above all to his mother: “My dear Mother, we *shall* yet agree in all things. But absolute sameness of opinion, upon any point, is not, as I have often said, to be looked for in this low erring world” (CL 1:214). To reassure her that he was still reading scripture, that he and Jane would take pews at a City church when they married in 1826, might have soothed her fears: to Irving, years earlier, he had found it possible to blurt out the truth about the door that had closed in his life.

Indeed, this may be a good moment to consider the relations between parents and son in Carlyle’s struggle to leave Divinity Hall and its influences. His parents had made financial sacrifices for his divinity training, and their behavior towards their eldest son when he rejected their choice was—as he admitted upon looking back—both honorable and generous. He later wrote of his theological career that

In me it never was in any favour; tho’ my Parents silently much wished it, as I knew well. Finding I had objections, my Father, with a magnanimity which I admired and admire, left me frankly to my own guidance in that matter, as did my Mother (probably still more lovingly, tho’ not so silently); and the “theological course” (which *could* be prosecuted, or kept open, by appearing annually, putting down your name, with some trifling fee, in the Register, and then going your ways) was, after perhaps 2 years of this languid form, allowed to close itself for good. I remember yet being on the street in Argyll Square, Edinburgh (probably in 1817, & come over from Kirkcaldy), with some intent, the languidest possible, still to put down my name & fee: the Official person, when I rang, was not at home;—and my instant feeling was, “Very good, then, *very* good; let this be *finis* in the matter,”—and it neatly was. (Clubbe 35)

From this time onward, whatever he may have said to his mother in his consoling letters, he was an acknowledged apostate from the Burgher Seceder (later United Secession Church) practices of his family. While he never lost a respect for them and a theoretical admiration—as he obviously did for both the 1611 Bible and for many of the religious practices of past ages—he saw no reason to involve himself in

his parents' faith. While he could sit in Hoddam Hill and feel some tug of memory—"The sound of the Kirk-bell, once or twice on Sunday mornings (from Hoddam Kirk, about a mile off on the plain below me), was strangely touching,—like the departing voice of eighteen hundred years" (*Reminiscences* 321-22)—neither he—nor after their marriage Jane—felt obliged to join in. After riding over from Craigenputtoch to Scotsbrig,

it was ten p.m. of a most still and fine night when I arrived at my Father's door; heard him making worship; and stood meditative, gratefully, lovingly, till he had ended; thinking to myself, how good and innocently beautiful and manful on the earth, is all this:—and it was the last time I was ever to hear it. I must have been there twice or oftener in my Father's time; but the sound of his pious *Coleshill* (that was always his tune), pious Psalm and Prayer, I never heard again. With a noble politeness, very noble when I consider, they kept all that in a fine kind of remoteness from us, knowing (and somehow *forgiving* us completely) that we did not think of it quite as they. (82)

By the time he left Kirkcaldy in 1818 his career path was in effect set away from the "innocently beautiful" to the new realities of mathematics, philosophy, and German. Irving was heading off to a brilliant, if ephemeral, success in Glasgow (as Chalmers's assistant) and then in London, many of their contemporaries from university settling to pulpit or schoolmastering. Happily, Irving was to keep up their close friendship for many years and even more practically assist Carlyle with offers of help and work, introductions, and invitations to London. The two men enjoyed listening to Chalmers and engaging with the chief minds they could find or listen to in Scotland. But Carlyle's interests, as his letters make more and more clear, lay in books, in translation, in grappling with larger questions through metaphysics, Goethe, and Schiller, and in putting enough money together to keep going while he nurtured the ambition to write the "book of his own" which eventually became *Sartor Resartus* (1833- 34). Divinity

Hall by then seemed a long way past, Irving a fading memory, as marriage and an Edinburgh life made the affairs of the Caledonian Chapel a distant irrelevance, and friendship with Francis Jeffrey a more immediate intellectual stimulus and possibility for publication and advancement. The loss of Irving's friendship and eventually of Irving himself, movingly recorded in *Reminiscences*, must have seemed to sever a bond to those days, as did the loss of Chalmers later. Carlyle looked back on Irving and himself as the last generation of Christians who had come from the austere but untainted churches of the Burgher Seceders: "it began to alter just about that period, on the death of those old hoary Heads [of his youth]; and has gone on with increasing velocity ever since. Irving and I were probably among the last products it delivered" (*Reminiscences* 208–09).

One of them was to blaze up briefly from the pulpit. The other, refusing the pulpit, was to become a moral force of incalculable value to several generations. What discourses he delivered in Divinity Hall and what his dozing professors thought of him remain unknown. But those years did give him the opportunity to read, to form strong opinions, to listen—he attributed much of his "style" to Irving along with the influence of his mother's spoken speech—and to experience with Irving the more active and experimental parts of the church of his time through visiting and listening to Chalmers. Had Ritchie been in for that fateful visit, it might have postponed the break with Divinity Hall, but only briefly. Already, Carlyle could see that his future lay elsewhere.

WORKS CITED

Alphabetical List of students of Divinity in the University of Edinburgh. Special Collections. University of Edinburgh Library, Edinburgh.

- Auld, Graeme. "Hebrew and Old Testament." *Description to Diversity: Edinburgh Divinity 1846–1996*. Ed. David F. Wright, and Gary D. Badcock. Edinburgh: Clark, 1996. 53–71.
- Campbell, Ian. *Carlyle and Europe: Some Early Influences*. Edinburgh: Carlyle Society, 1978.
- . "Carlyle and the Secession." *Scottish Christianity in the Modern World: Essays in Honour of the Revd. Professor A. C. Cheyne*. Ed. S. J. Brown and George Newlands. Edinburgh: Clark, 2001, 17–36.
- . "Carlyle and the University of Edinburgh." *Four Centuries: Edinburgh University Life 1583–1983*. Ed. G. Donaldson. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1983. 53–70.
- . "Carlyle's Borrowings from the Theological Library of Edinburgh University." *Bibliothek* 5 (1969): 165–68.
- . "Carlyle's Religion: The Scottish Sources." *Carlyle and his Contemporaries: Essays in Honor of Charles Richard Sanders*. Ed. John Clubbe. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1970. 3–20
- . "Carlyle: Sage of Chelsea or Sage of Ecclefechan?" *Thomas Carlyle 1981*. Ed. H. W. Drescher. Frankfurt: Lang, 1983. 385–403.
- . "Irving, Carlyle and the Stage." *Studies in Scottish Literature* 8 (January 1971): 166–73.
- . "More about myself than him: Carlyle's Reminiscences." *Carlyle Studies* 18 (1998): 175–83.
- . "The Scottishness of Carlyle." *Carlyle Studies* 17 (1997): 73–82.
- , and Rodger L. Tarr "Carlyle's Early Study of German, 1819–1821." *Illinois Quarterly* 34 (December 1971): 19–27.
- Carlyle, Alexander, ed. *New Letters and Memorials of Jane Welsh Carlyle*. 2 vols. London, John Lane, 1903.
- Carlyle Thomas. *Frederick the Great. 1858–65. Works*. 30 vols. Ed. H. D. Traill. London: Chapman and Hall, 1896–99. Vols. 12–19.
- . *Reminiscences*. 1881. Ed. K. J. Fielding and Ian Campbell. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997.
- . *Sartor Resartus*. 1833–34. Ed. Rodger L. Tarr and Mark Engel. Berkeley: U of California P, 2000.
- A Catalogue of the Books, in the private Collection, belonging to the Students of Divinity in the University of Glasgow*. Glasgow: David Niven, 1790.

- Clubbe, John, ed. *Two Reminiscences of Thomas Carlyle*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1974.
- Coutts, James. *A History of the University of Glasgow*. Glasgow: Maclehose, 1909.
- Froude, James Anthony. *Thomas Carlyle: a History of the First Forty Years of His Life*. 2 vols. London: Longmans, Green, 1882.
- Gibbon, Edward. *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. 6 vols. London: Strahan and Cadell, 1776–88.
- Grant, Alexander. *The Story of the University of Edinburgh*. 2 vols. London: Longmans, Green, 1884.
- Hall, Sophy. [untitled offprint]. *Nineteenth Century* 73 (April 1913): n.p.
- Henderson, G. D. *Aberdeen divines, being a history of the chair of divinity in King's College, Aberdeen*. MS 3411. Special Collections. Aberdeen University Library.
- Legendre, A. M. *Elements of Geometry*. 1819. Trans. David Brewster and Thomas Carlyle. Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1824.
- Martin, James. *Eminent Divines in Aberdeen and the North: their World and Influence*. Aberdeen: "Free Press" Office, 1888.
- Masson, David. *Edinburgh Sketches and Memories*. London: A&C Black, 1892.
- Sloan, J. M. *The Carlyle Country*. London, Chapman and Hall, 1904.
- Topham, Edward. *Edinburgh Life 100 Years Ago*. Edinburgh: William Brown, 1886.