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President's Letter

A momentous year for the Carlyle Society as we sever a long connection with Buccleuch Place, where we met for many years as guests of Extra-Mural (or, as it became, Lifelong Learning) and more recently as guests of the English Department. But as these words are written, the English department itself is moving to new premises in 50 George Square, where the Carlyle Letters office will be located and where the work will go on. 2014 will see volume 42 published, and 43 go to the printer, bringing their long correspondence to an end with the death of Jane in 1866. The project will not be quite finished! So we are glad to have our new premises to continue the work.

New premises too for the Society, thanks to the generosity of the University's Vice Principal Jeff Haywood. We will be meeting now in the University Library in George Square, and we are grateful for the chance to continue our meetings in such excellent surroundings.

The internet has made keeping in touch with our members much easier, along with creating and distributing the Occasional Papers. Our thanks to all members and friends who have helped, and to the indefatigable Andy Laycock of the University's printing services. Another good programme awaits for 2014.

Ian Campbell
President

August, 2014

CARLYLE AND THE UTILITY OF RELIGION

George Currie

The title of this paper may seem odd. Typed, retyped, and typed once more, the conjunction of the nouns *utility* and *religion* with the name of Thomas Carlyle inspired no little reflection. The revulsion Carlyle would have felt for the premise inherent in this essay would no doubt have incurred the wrath of Chelsea's famous Scottish sage.

What is there here that would have produced such a vehement reaction? Carlyle was a passionate opponent of the doctrine – or *doctrines*, for there were many varieties – of utility proposed by the Utilitarians and Philosophic Radicals. Whigs incurred similar wrath for their adoption of the *mentalité* of utility.

Carlyle offered contemporary readers the spiritual domain as a curative for their all too pervasive mechanical understanding of existence. He proffered a sort of religion, though distinctly non-conformist and recognisably unrecognisable in its contours, claims, and extent, as a remedy for the French and Scottish Enlightenment's materialisation of man and society, which he believed was at the root of the problems that characterised the contemporary world. Religion was conceived by Carlyle as the antithesis of the modern *mentalité* of utility and not as something that could be combined with it.

Though, as Lawrence Poston showed Carlyle scholars, in his excellently hermeneutic rendering of *Signs of the Times*, religion could be derived from utility.¹ But, in this instance, it was a materialist faith grown fanatical. It was extremism posing as the voice of rational moderation and resembled only Millenarianism in its fundamentalism.

This is the connotation of religious utility that would have provoked Carlyle's displeasure: that it could be nothing other than a radical materialist faith applied to the problems of society. He stated this nowhere better than in his verdict on

¹ See L. Poston, 'Millites and Millenarians: The Context of Carlyle's "Signs of the Times"', in *Victorian Studies*, Vol.26, No.4 (Summer, 1983), 381-406.

Auguste Comte. The Frenchman was the most notorious Positivist of the day, having effectively founded the school itself in the wake of his Saint-Simonian training. Part genius, part fool, his work was enormously influential, from France to Russia and even Brazil, the flag of which still bears the Positivist motto today. His *Cours de philosophie positive*, in which he proposed the Religion of Humanity, is the best example of enlightened materialism raised to the heights of religious belief that Carlyle deplored.

Having once been likened to Comte, Carlyle recorded his view of the French thinker in his reminiscence of Edward Irving, flatly denying the validity of any comparison of the two men's thought. Comte, he declared, was "the miserabest phantasmal *algebraic ghost* I have yet met with among the ranks of the living!"² Nothing could have been more damning.

But Carlyle did not shy away from citing the benefits that true religious belief could offer his contemporaries. He clearly thought that religion served a purpose other than the preparation of souls for the hereafter. It played a valid and undervalued role in human society distinct from that of the world to come. Such faith must always remain mystical for it to be considered anything other than an approach, more or less, towards the sort of materialism he abhorred. In fact, it must remain so if it is to offer the sorts of benefits that he claimed, for the mystical element of life was an important aspect of human existence.

Carlyle addressed the utility of religion via two distinct and discernable means. He used a number of his early writings to theorise on the importance of religion to man and society. Though these works were written reactively – that is to say, in them, Carlyle was responding to contemporary problems – they were certainly not reactionary. Carlyle did not propose a return to blind faith. He did, however, want to reincorporate religious belief into the understanding of man and society. This was both ontologically and epistemologically necessary in his view.

If Carlyle's first move was to theorise on the importance of religion to man and society, his second was rather more concrete. Carlyle's later works provided readers with a number of historical examples of the utility of religion. Chronologically and geographically these examples were enormously diverse. He found grist for his particular mill in antiquity, the medieval era, the early modern period, even the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

² T. Carlyle, *Reminiscences in Two Volumes*: Volume II, C.E. Norton eds. (London, 1887), 219.

THEORISING RELIGION'S UTILITY

'Church-Clothes', by which Carlyle meant the forms and vestures under which men have at various periods embodied and represented to themselves the principles of religion, were, in his words, 'unspeakably the most important of all the vestures and garnitures of Human Existence.'³

But why was this the case? Why were they of such significance? Carlyle was startlingly clear. Earlier in *Sartor Resartus* he had claimed that 'Society is founded upon Cloth' and 'sails through the infinitude on Cloth, as on Faust's Mantle'. In the absence of 'such Sheet or Mantle,' he went on, society 'would sink to endless depths, or mount to inane limbos, and in either case be no more.'⁴

Church-Clothes were the pre-eminent form of apparel because they were the garb that made society possible. Religion and society operate in a sort of double hermeneutic: society, through association, begets religion, and religion helps to foster society. 'Church-Clothes', Carlyle wrote, 'are first spun and woven by Society; outward Religion originates by Society, Society becomes possible by Religion.'⁵

It was only by the lights of religion that society could be constituted: 'only in looking heavenward, take it in what sense you may, not in looking earthward, does what we call Union, mutual Love, Society, begin to be possible.'⁶ Society originates in religion and can do so only via the common ideas religious belief fosters. The consequences for an irreligious people are dramatic.

I remark, fearlessly enough, that without such Vestures and Sacred Tissues Society has not existed, and will not exist. For as Government is, so to speak, the outward SKIN of the Body Politic, holding the whole together and protecting it; and all your Craft-Guilds, and Associations for Industry, of hand or of head, are the Fleishy Clothes, the muscular and osseous Tissues (lying *under* such SKIN), whereby Society stands and works; - then is Religion the inmost Pericardial

³ T. Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus* (Oxford, 2008), 162.

⁴ Carlyle, *Sartor*, 41.

⁵ *Ibid*, 162.

⁶ *Ibid*.

and Nervous Tissue, which ministers Life and warm Circulation to the whole.⁷

Religion is the animating force that gives life to the body of society. Without it, the ‘Bone and Muscles’ would be ‘inert’; ‘the SKIN would become a shrivelled pelt, or fast-rotting raw-hide; and Society itself a dead carcass’. In such a state men would no longer be ‘Social, but Gregarious’ creatures, ‘which latter state also could not continue, but must gradually issue in universal selfish discord, hatred, savage isolation, and dispersion’. Without religious belief, Society would in essence be ‘abolished.’⁸

Life is the first benefit religion holds out to society. Carlyle emphasises this in the imagery he uses to express the importance of religious belief. Society is an organism with a definable body. It is composed of bones, tissues, muscles, a heart, a nervous system, and is animated by circulation. Like any living organism, society could exist in either a state of health or one of illness. A healthful state required the existence and appropriate balance of each of the parts of the body Carlyle identified. He addressed this notion again in an 1831 essay, *Characteristics*.

The doctrines of ‘corporeal therapeutics’, Carlyle tells us, hold in circles as diverse as ‘moral, intellectual, political’, and even ‘poetical’ fields. What is more, the proper balance of forces – one could almost say ‘humours’, for the metaphor seems peculiarly Greco-Roman – is essential to a healthy disposition in any of these. Carlyle articulates this with characteristic panache.

In the Body, for example, as all doctors are agreed, the first condition of complete health is, that each organ perform its function unconsciously, unheeded; let but any organ announce its separate existence, were it even boastfully, and for pleasure, not for pain, then already has one of those unfortunate ‘false centres of sensibility’ established itself, already is derangement there.⁹

Balance in the various parts of corporeal entities is essential to preventing an undesirable state of disease, decline, and, ultimately, death. Carlyle moves quickly from an assessment of the conditions for optimum functioning in any organism to a general prescription of the purpose of any such body, which is to foster unity.

⁷ Ibid, 163.

⁸ Ibid, 163.

⁹ T. Carlyle, ‘Characteristics’, in *The Works of Thomas Carlyle in Thirty Volumes Volume XXVIII: Critical and Miscellaneous Essays III* (London, 1899), 1.

The perfection of bodily wellbeing is, that the collective bodily activities seem one; and be manifested, moreover, not in themselves, but in the action they accomplish.¹⁰

The problems of the contemporary world resulted from the palpable *imbalance* between the material and immaterial that existed within European societies. Carlyle highlights this in a passage in *Sartor*, which draws attention to the perilous state of religious belief.

Meanwhile, in our era of the World, those same Church Clothes have gone sorrowfully out at elbows: nay, far worse, many of them have become mere hollow Shapes, or Masks, under which no living Figure or Spirit any longer dwells; but only spiders and unclean beetles, in horrid accumulation, drive their trade...¹¹

The degradation of religious belief was a phenomenon the contemporary world had inherited from the eighteenth century. Brian Young has described this aspect of Carlyle's thought best. Carlyle often juxtaposed the devout, heroic seventeenth century and its irreligious, unheroic successor in attempting to divine a route out of the contemporary world's malaise. But, it was the eighteenth century that had 'opened up the tragic momentum that the nineteenth century seemed destined to maintain; it was a period that looked very like a second Fall to Carlyle'.¹²

Carlyle's theoretical argument regarding the importance of religion to the existence of society in *Sartor* prefaces the opinion of his avatar, Teufelsdröckh, on the subject. 'Teufelsdröckh is one of those who consider Society, properly so called, to be as good as extinct'. What remained of society in contemporary Europe – given that Teufelsdröckh is purportedly German, Carlyle's comments are unmistakably aimed at the continent as a whole – were 'Gregarious feelings, and old inherited habitudes'. Only these prevented 'Dispersion, and universal national, civil, domestic and personal war!'¹³

Carlyle was at pains to stress the dependence of the 'Social Idea' on religious belief. Not only were ill-health and social disorder consequences of its absence; it carried something much more malevolent in its train. Social isolation was a very probable outcome. Such isolation, though lamentable in itself, was suggestive of

¹⁰ Carlyle, 'Characteristics', 1.

¹¹ Carlyle, *Sartor*, 164.

¹² B. Young, *The Victorian Eighteenth Century: An Intellectual History* (Oxford, 2007), 23.

¹³ Carlyle, *Sartor*, 176.

a far greater danger: conflict. Man, ‘isolated, regardless of his neighbour, turned against his neighbour, clutches what he can get, and cries ‘Mine!’ and calls it Peace, because, in the cut-purse and cut-throat Scramble, no steel knives, but only a far cunninger sort, can be employed’. It was specious to call such a state of affairs peaceful. When ‘Friendship, Communion, has become an incredible tradition’ peaceful relations could not be expected to remain.¹⁴ Thus, religion was as important to the maintenance of peace in society as to its health and regularity.

Carlyle identified other benefits that society offered, none of which would be possible in its absence. In *Characteristics*, he declared that society bred ‘an altogether new set of spiritual activities’ and that these are superadded to those already existing in the individual, which are themselves ‘immeasurably quickened and strengthened.’ After describing society’s broad effects upon the individual, Carlyle contrasted the social with that of the ‘solitary man’. In this condition, in which man is ‘folded in’ and ‘stunted’ so as to appear ‘only half alive’, the individual was ‘but a small portion of himself’.¹⁵

Religion, the agent that fosters society and brings man out of his solitary sphere, improves the man himself. Carlyle developed this analysis even further. ‘The Duties of Man to himself,’ Carlyle wrote, ‘to what is Highest in himself, make but the First Table of the Law’. On top of this was placed ‘a Second’: ‘the Duties of Man to his Neighbour’. It was in the interaction of the latter with the former that the former realised its true importance. ‘Man has joined himself with man’, Carlyle proclaimed, and in so doing, ‘Life, in all its elements, has become intensified, consecrated.’¹⁶

Carlyle raised society itself to the level of the spiritual. Though he may not have said it in so many words, his descriptions of the effect of religion on the individual suggests that he thought its importance lay in bringing people together and combating what we would now refer to as *individualism*, an issue he addresses in *Past and Present*.¹⁷

Crucially, the spiritual union that society inaugurated resulted in the interconnection of minds and the reactive interchange of ideas. This had the further benefit of producing not only new intellectual realities but, even more

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Carlyle, ‘Characteristics’, 10.

¹⁶ Carlyle, ‘Characteristics’, 11.

¹⁷ T. Carlyle, *Past and Present* (London, 1917), 132-133.

significantly for Carlyle, new modes of action. ‘The lightening-spark of Thought’, he avers, ‘reverberated from mind to mind, fed also with fresh fuel in each...acquires incalculable new light as Thought, incalculable new heat as converted into Action.’¹⁸

Communities, in this way, produced all that was valued by philosophers and ordinary men alike. Literature is created, whether ‘in Runes and Hieroglyphs...or in Books written on printed paper’. But if religion, through the spiritual union of society, fosters the development of great arts, it also aids in the maintenance of something infinitely more practical: order.

‘Politics are formed’, in which, according to Carlyle, ‘the weak’ submit ‘to the strong’ or, expressed in better terms, ‘the ignorant’ submit ‘to the wise’.¹⁹ This was true in even the most backward communities because, in Carlyle’s view, ‘man never yields himself wholly to brute Force’ – though, he allowed that man may partially yield to force – ‘but always to moral Greatness’, which was far superior in his mind.²⁰ At bottom, the religious bond seems to enable almost everything that constitutes civilisation. Indeed, as Carlyle presents it, religion is *the* first cause.

It is hardly surprising that Carlyle makes such claims for religion vis-à-vis society given his view of man’s ontological state. In *Signs of the Times*, written in 1829, he outlines the dual nature of human existence. According to Carlyle, man is composed of two distinct and recognisable domains: the *dynamic* and the *mechanic*. ‘To speak a little pedantically, there is a science of *Dynamics* in man’s fortunes and nature, as well as of *Mechanics*.’²¹

The first of these relates to ‘the primary, unmodified forces and energies of man, the mysterious springs of Love, and Fear, and Wonder, of Enthusiasm, Poetry, Religion, all which have a truly vital and *infinite* character’. The mechanical province of human being addresses the opposite tendencies of man; those that relate to ‘the finite, modified developments’ of religion et al ‘when they take the shape of immediate ‘motives,’ as hope of reward, or as fear of punishment.’²²

In former ages, Carlyle proffers, ‘Moralists, Poets or Priests’ had applied to the lights of both in their considerations. These sages had neglected

¹⁸ Carlyle, ‘Characteristics’, 11.

¹⁹ Ibid, 11.

²⁰ Ibid, 12.

²¹ T. Carlyle, ‘Signs of the Times’, in *The Works of Thomas Carlyle in Thirty Volumes Volume XXVIII: Critical and Miscellaneous Essays II* (London, 1899), 68.

²² Carlyle, ‘Signs’, 68-69.

neither province but, Carlyle allows, they had perhaps given preference to the ‘Dynamical’ aspect of man. However, in the present the equivalent wise men – ‘Political Philosophers’ – deal ‘exclusively with the Mechanical province’ in the speculations.²³

This was not only ontologically incorrect, but epistemologically myopic, because ‘these two departments of man’s activity...work into one another... so intricately and inseparably’.²⁴ Without a due appreciation of both, any investigation into man’s nature or any prescription directed at modifying man’s earthly condition would prove fruitless. Exclusive cultivation of either province led to forms of extremism, which are as useless as they are dogmatic.

Undue cultivation of the inward or Dynamical province leads to idle, visionary, impracticable courses, and, especially in rude eras, to Superstition and Fanaticism, with their long train of baleful and well-known evils. Undue cultivation of the outward, again, though less immediately prejudicial, and even for the time productive of many palpable benefits, must, in the long-run, by destroying Moral Force, which is the parent of all other Force, prove not less certainly, and perhaps still more hopelessly, pernicious.²⁵

Carlyle thus argues for a rapprochement between these two domains of man’s being in the contemporary world. Only in reconciling the material and the immaterial, the temporal and the spiritual, can society avoid the pernicious consequences inherent in the exclusive cultivation of one or the other.

If, as Carlyle’s theory suggests, the arts and sciences, social order, and sociability are hindered in centuries in which religion has departed, unbelief also has consequences for the status of the individual.

The mechanical age, which was – as we have seen – an era devoid of true religion, had reduced man to the status of an automaton. Faith in the abilities of men over those of machinery was a characteristic of another age and not the present. ‘No individual now hopes to accomplish the poorest enterprise single-handed and without mechanical aids’, Carlyle maintained. Instead, the individual ‘must make interest with some existing corporation, and till his field with their oxen.’²⁶

²³ Ibid, 69.

²⁴ Ibid, 73.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid, 61.

The value Carlyle's contemporaries found in mechanism extended from 'modes of action' into the realm of 'thought and feeling.' This was a new phenomenon. 'Men', Carlyle lamented, 'are grown mechanical in head and in heart, as well as in hand.' This novel disposition had resulted in the most malign consequence imaginable to Carlyle. 'They have lost faith in individual endeavour, and in natural force, of any kind.'²⁷

This extended into the realm of the metaphysical itself and invaded understanding of the human condition. Carlyle derided those of his contemporaries, like James Mill, who thought that the human mind was nothing other than a construction dependent on circumstance. Such Hartlian psychology, Carlyle believed, was a derivation from John Locke's musings on the constitution of the human mind. The entirety of modern 'Metaphysics', he believed, 'from Locke's time downwards, has been physical; and not a spiritual philosophy, but a material one.'²⁸

Why was this so lamentable? What did Carlyle find so offensive in this doctrine? On one level he simply found the idea distasteful. He parodied the notions of Dr. Cabanis who, in his *Rapports du Physique et du Morale de l'Homme*, had proclaimed that 'as the liver secretes bile, so does the brain secrete thought'. In this scenario, Carlyle chuckled, 'Poetry and Religion' were but 'a product of the smaller intestines'.²⁹

What was at stake, though, was more than simply the tastes and sensibilities of a writer to whom such pronouncements offended his sense of literary decency. It was the very notion of man as he related to his conditions. Associationist psychology was not a true 'philosophy of mind', Carlyle argued, but merely a 'discussion concerning the origin of our consciousness, or ideas, or whatever else they are called'. In essence, this method provided little more than 'a genetic history of what we see *in* the mind.'³⁰

This was lost on his contemporaries and it had resulted in the most pernicious of doctrines. Carlyle must be allowed to speak for himself here, because his words on this issue are among his most powerful.

By arguing on the 'force of circumstances,' we have argued

²⁷ Ibid, 63.

²⁸ Ibid, 64.

²⁹ Ibid, 65.

³⁰ Ibid, 64.

away all force from ourselves; and stand leashed together...like the rowers of some boundless galley...Practically considered, our creed is Fatalism; and, free in hand and foot, we are shackled in heart and soul with far straiter than feudal chains.³¹

Carlyle reinforced this two years later in his essay on *Characteristics*, in which he lamented the blow to free will dealt by modern materialism through allusion to his *bête noire*: the ethics of the Utilitarians.

Goodness, which was a rule to itself, must now appeal to Precept, and seek strength from Sanctions; the Freewill no longer reigns unquestioned and by divine right, but like a mere earthly sovereign, by expediency, by Rewards and Punishments; or rather, let us say, the Freewill, so far as it may be, has abdicated and withdrawn into the dark, and a spectral nightmare of a Necessity usurps its throne; for now that mysterious Self-impulse of the whole man, heaven-inspired, and in all senses partaking of the Infinite, being captiously questioned in a finite dialect...is conceived as non-extant, and only the outward Mechanism of it remains acknowledged...³²

The absence of religion, then, had diminished the power of the individual, firstly, in ordaining the power of mechanism whilst disenfranchising people themselves from its exercise and, secondly, by extending the reach of mechanism so as to encompass the entirety of man, from his thoughts to his feelings and actions. Freewill had perished in the process, as existence itself was contingent on circumstance alone, and not on the creative force of the divine. Fatalism was the true end to which all irreligion tended in Carlyle's view, and the consequences of this were nothing less than disastrous for the individual. The freest and loftiest souls had always been religious. Saint Paul was an eminent example and the Apostles provided others. Epictetus was another and Columbus, Cortes, De Witt, and Shakespeare offered other cases in point.³³

In his concern for the agency of the individual Carlyle was not alone. Ralph Jessop has recently shown that the troubling consequences that the mechanisation of man posed for the individual's moral freedom preoccupied Sir William Hamilton as well. 'Opposing the mechanistic conception of humanity,' Jessop argues, 'Hamilton

³¹ Ibid, 79.

³² Carlyle, 'Characteristics', 9.

³³ Carlyle, 'Signs', 72.

and Carlyle were concerned about the moral implications of theories that undermine the fundamentals of philosophical discourse, and the agency, dignity, and general well-being of humanity.³⁴

DEMONSTRATING RELIGION'S UTILITY

In his most important early works Carlyle had constructed a theory of religion's utility to man. He had demonstrated its importance to the foundation of society, the arts and sciences, social order, peace, politics and free will. Carlyle outlines a theory in which religious belief is central to the ontological state of humanity. If he had used these works to demarcate the territory of his own intellectual predisposition in favour of religion – in contrast to eighteenth century thinkers – his subsequent writings did little to develop this theory. But, they did provide a host of concrete examples that showed how religion had been of use in different eras.

It is not necessary to enter into the debate as to whether Carlyle was primarily a philosopher, an historian, or an artist, which has been skilfully traced by Ralph Jessop.³⁵ What it is important to say, though, is that in this instance – with regard to his view of the utility of religion – Carlyle's work combines all three.

The examples of religion's usefulness Carlyle offered his contemporaries were not necessarily grounded on conventional forms of belief. Secular faiths were valuable in a similar way to sacerdotal. What was important was that these beliefs were genuine and displayed an element of mysticism. Carlyle located such forms of religion in the classical period, the medieval era, even the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Both Greece and Rome offered important instances of religion's utility. Carlyle, in contrast to many of his contemporaries, displayed a favourable attitude towards classical polytheism. In his 1838 *Lectures on the History of Literature* Carlyle acknowledged that 'Polytheism seems at first sight an inextricable mass of confusions and delusions'. But in a typically relativist vein he noted that 'there was,

³⁴ R. Jessop, 'Resisting the Enlightenment's Instrumentalist Legacy: James, Hamilton, and Carlyle on the Mechanisation of the Human Condition' in *History of European Ideas*, Vol.39, No.5 (2013), 634.

³⁵ R. Jessop, *Carlyle and Scottish Thought* (London, 1997), 17-18.

no doubt, some meaning in it for the people.³⁶ It was the result of classical man's attempt to understand 'whence he was, what were his flesh and blood, what he himself was, who was not here a short time ago, who will not be here much longer, but still existing a conscious individual in this immense universe.'³⁷

The Greek's religious beliefs were of singular importance to their civilisation's luminosity. 'We shall find that the Greek religion,' Carlyle claimed, 'did essential service to the Greeks.' It provided vital psychological support to the Greek nation not to mention a means of social cohesion.

The mind of the whole nation by its means obtained a strength and coherence. If I may not be permitted to say that through it all the nation became united to the Divine Power, I may, at any rate, assert that the highest considerations and motives thus became familiar to each person, and were put at the very top of his mind...³⁸

The Greek states' decline was synonymous with the decline of religion and the rise of the speculative spirit. This manifested itself in literature as much as in any other department. 'There is a decline in all kinds of literature when it ceases to be poetical and becomes speculative. Socrates was the emblem of the decline of the Greeks.'³⁹ Though Socrates was himself 'not more sceptical than the rest', and even showed 'a lingering kind of awe and attachment to the old religion of his country', he was the symbol of spiritual decay in ancient Greece.⁴⁰ This had inevitable consequences for Greek literature and plausibly, in Carlyle's view, for the Greek state itself.

After him the nation became more and more sophisticated. The Greek genius lost its originality; it lost its poetry, and gave way to the spirit of speculation.⁴¹

Carlyle concluded that 'there is a strange coherence between the healthy belief and outward destiny of a nation.' The Greeks, he thought, had pursued 'their wars and everything else most prosperously till they became conscious of their condition'. This was equally true of the Romans. Cato the Elder, Carlyle informed his readers, had warned of the ruinous consequences of the Greek fascination with

³⁶ T. Carlyle, *Lectures on the History of Literature* (London, 1892), 11.

³⁷ Carlyle, *Lectures on Literature*, 12.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 34.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 33.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 34.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 35

speculation. But his warning had not been heeded and the Empire's period of decline was coterminous with that of its religious belief.⁴²

Carlyle reinforced this message in his 1843 tract *Past and Present*. Whilst conducting research in East Anglia in 1842 for his then prospective project on Oliver Cromwell, Carlyle stumbled across two unrelated institutions: the ruined abbey of Bury St. Edmunds and the workhouse at St. Ives. Both institutions encapsulated the spirit of their particular age. The former symbolised a settled, harmonious and religious society; the latter, a morally bankrupt modern world united only by the materialist ties of Mammon and the cash-nexus.⁴³

'Let the modern eye look earnestly', Carlyle wrote, on 'St. Edmundsbury Church, shining yet on us, ruddy-bright, through the depths of heaven seven hundred years'.⁴⁴ The modern eye, though, was constantly drawn back to the present. Carlyle had little interest in pursuing antiquarian ends in *Past and Present*; the abbey at Bury St. Edmunds was a didactic tool, useful for exposing the problems posed by an irreligious present and demonstrating the utility of religion.

For the century in which this abbey had prospered had been a truly religious era. 'Religion is not a diseased self-introspection, an agonising inquiry', Carlyle proffered; it 'lies over them [the inhabitants] like an all-embracing heavenly canopy, like an atmosphere and life element'.⁴⁵ But the present was an entirely different age. 'There is no longer any God for us! God's Laws are become the Greatest-Happiness Principle...in our and old Johnson's dialect man has lost the *soul* out of him; and now, after the due period, - begins to find want of it.'⁴⁶

Irreligion bore in its train a variety of consequences, the like of which Carlyle's idealised abbey had never had to consider. The worst of these was social atomisation. 'We call it a Society', Carlyle claimed of the modern world, 'and go about professing openly the totallest separation, isolation.' This was a consequence of atheism. It was the result of the utter annihilation of common bonds and ideas in favour of self-interest and individualism. 'Our life is not a mutual helpfulness; but rather, cloaked under due laws-of-war, named 'fair competition' and so forth, it is a mutual hostility.'⁴⁷ Society, along the lines theorised by Carlyle in *Sartor a*

⁴² T. Carlyle, *Lectures on the History of Literature* (London, 1892), 11.

⁴³ A.D. Culler, *The Victorian Mirror of History* (New York, 1985), 68.

⁴⁴ Carlyle, *Past and Present*, 107-108.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 54.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 123.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 132.

decade earlier, had ended. This was a perversion of the human condition. But, he noted, ‘out of this that we call Atheism come so many...falsities, each falsity with its misery at its heels!’⁴⁸

The image of this lost abbey allowed Carlyle to depict a society in which religion had been at the foundation of earthly life. That this religion was Catholicism mattered remarkably little to the post-Calvinist Scottish sage. It had been a genuine, practical religion that had anchored society in a stable position. It offered a helpful contrast to the fissiparous modern world.

Carlyle had thus demonstrated the social importance of religion in the historical examples of the ancient and medieval worlds, through its ability to foster and preserve society. This was not the extent of his understanding of its utility. Had it been, it would have been decidedly limited. Religion was not merely a static force; it was also dynamic and could play a role in transforming society from one, decrepit state to another in which it was healthy once more.

Protestantism, in Carlyle’s *On Heroes*, plays just such a role. In fact, it is remarkably personified. It is not the Protestants, in his account, that perform the function he attributes to the denomination, but the denomination itself. Though this seems particularly unlike Carlyle, the Protestant doctrine is emphasised in order to highlight its role in the demolition of an outmoded Catholicism and its place at the root of the modern era. It was *the* force that had modified and continued to modify every aspect of society.

Indeed, the rise of Protestantism was in Carlyle’s view the ‘first stroke of honest demolition to an ancient thing grown false and idolatrous; preparatory afar off to a new thing, which shall be true, and authentically divine!’⁴⁹ This process had unfolded in three momentous acts. First, Protestantism had revolted against the spiritual authority of the Popes and asserted the right of private judgement; second, it had, in the form of English Puritanism, rebelled against outworn ‘earthly sovereignties’; finally, Protestantism had culminated in the ferocity of revolutionary France, in which all remaining spiritual and temporal authorities had been abolished.⁵⁰

Protestantism had been a persistent actor on the world stage from the Reformation to Carlyle’s present. But what utility had it performed? It had facilitated

⁴⁸ Ibid, 133.

⁴⁹ T. Carlyle, ‘On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History’, in *The Works of Thomas Carlyle in Thirty Volumes Volume V* (London, 1897), 123.

⁵⁰ Carlyle, ‘On Heroes’, 123.

the change in earthly and metaphysical circumstances, gradually replacing the outworn and false with the modern and genuine. It was *the* progressive force in history and, crucially, it was a religious movement bodying forth its doctrines in order to renew humanity. ‘Protestantism’, Carlyle wrote, ‘is the grand root from which our whole subsequent European History branches out. For the spiritual will always body itself forth in the temporal history of men; the spiritual is the beginning of the temporal.’⁵¹ This was Carlyle’s doctrine on the interaction of religion and society outlined anew and he could not have restated it any more clearly.

Protestantism had helped to renew society and had, in this sense, performed the most useful of functions. It had promoted the transition from an era shorn of all authority to a new one clothed in spiritual and temporal authenticity.

Thus far the religious forces identified by Carlyle had for their focus the otherworldly. However, Carlyle identified two forms of religious belief that were decidedly secular with which he had an ambiguous relationship. These were the social contract of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Jeremy Bentham’s Utilitarianism.

Young has argued that Carlyle ‘constantly lambasted’ Rousseau in the pages of his *French Revolution*⁵², though his disdain for the evangel of the *contrat social* was gradually overtaken by his dislike of Voltaire in the subsequent history of Frederick the Great’s reign.⁵³ F.W. Roe claimed that Carlyle considered Bentham and his thought to be the cornerstone of the ‘machine-made philosophy’ that he so detested, but unfortunately suffused the era.⁵⁴

These interpretations are correct only to a degree. Rousseau’s doctrine of the social contract and Bentham’s Utilitarianism fulfilled a function of religious significance. Carlyle adverted to this at the outset of his discussion of Rousseau’s *Contrat Social*. ‘Man,’ he wrote, ‘lives by faith’ and ‘each generation has its own faith, more or less; and laughs at the faith of its predecessor’.⁵⁵

The disdain one generation shows towards the faith of another is unwise, according to Carlyle, and contemporary scorn with regard to the novel faith Rousseau had offered his fellow Frenchmen was equally unjustified. He accepted its oddity but thought it deserved reflection nonetheless. In fact, he instructed his readers to do just that.

⁵¹ Carlyle, ‘On Heroes’, 123.

⁵² Young, 36.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁵⁴ F.W. Roe, *The Social Philosophy of Carlyle and Ruskin* (Dallas, 1969), 65.

⁵⁵ T. Carlyle, *The French Revolution: A History* (New York, 2002), 277-278

Grant indeed that this faith in the Social Contract belongs to the stranger sorts; that an unborn generation may very wisely, if not laugh, yet stare at it, and piously consider.⁵⁶

It was worthy of such consideration because Frenchmen had genuinely believed that the social contract Rousseau offered was the path to salvation. ‘Freedom by social contract’, Carlyle noted, ‘was verily the Gospel of that Era.’⁵⁷

And all men had believed in it, as in a Heaven’s Glad-tidings men should; and with overflowing heart and uplifted voice clave to it, and stood fronting Time and Eternity on it.’⁵⁸

The belief it had inspired offered these Frenchmen the sorts of benefits that could be derived from religious experience; that is, an escape from materialism and the ability to conceive of polity and society in a new way. Though Rousseau’s doctrine was far inferior to a truly mystical religion, it was better than a belief in the purely material. Carlyle expressed this articulately. Rousseau’s Contract ‘was a better faith than the one it had replaced’, which was a ‘faith merely in the Everlasting Nothing and man’s Digestive Power; lower than *which* no faith can go.’⁵⁹

Rousseau’s *Contrat Social* was the beginning of spiritual recovery. It had enabled the revolutionaries to cross the Rubicon of doubt and emerge with a belief in something other than themselves, in something distinct from self-interest. Carlyle thought that Bentham offered his contemporaries something very similar.

‘Bentham’ he argued, ‘and even the creed of Bentham, seems to me comparatively worthy of praise. It is a determinate *being* what all the world, in a cowardly half-and-half manner, was tending to be.’ It was heroic, in its own fashion, and offered its adherents a creed. John Stuart Mill certainly located his own religious experience in the doctrine of utility. In his *Autobiography*, he declared that on being inducted into the Utilitarian fold he discovered ‘opinions; a creed, a doctrine, a philosophy; in one (and the best) sense of the word, a religion’.⁶⁰

Carlyle was no less explicit about the religious potential of Benthamism and came to recognise its value.

I call this gross, steamengine Utilitarianism an approach towards

⁵⁶ Carlyle, *French Revolution*, 278.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ J.S. Mill, *Autobiography* (London, 1989), 68

new Faith. It was a laying-down of cant; a saying to oneself ‘Well then, this world is a dead iron machine, the God of it Gravitation and selfish Hunger; let us see what, by checking and balancing, and good adjustment of tooth and pinion, can be made of it!’⁶¹

Where Protestantism had played a transformational role in history, the creeds offered by Bentham and Rousseau had been transitional. They had enabled their adherents to recognise the benefits held out by faith in something greater than self-interest. Both had a vision of society and attempted to refashion that which they found around them; that is, they tried to clothe society in the garb of a new ideal. This was the spirit of religion. Rousseau and Bentham had thus fulfilled a valuable role in the history of the modern world in demonstrating the eternal value of a religious ideal.

THINKING ABOUT CARLYLE AND RELIGION

The Victorian poet Arthur Hugh Clough remarked to Ralph Waldo Emerson, prior to the latter’s departure for America, that with regard to religion ‘Carlyle has led us all out into the desert, and he has left us there.’⁶² This nicely encapsulates the way in which Carlyle’s disposition towards religion has been examined up to present. Investigation has tended to inquire after his doctrinal preferences, or lack of them, *or* the impact that his writings had on a generation prone to religious doubt.

Though interesting, such study does not exhaust the riches of Carlyle’s thought on matters of religion. Certainly, he did change the nature of many of his contemporaries’ religious views. Without doubt, his own religious opinions remain a matter of ambiguity worthy of further investigation. But the views he Carlyle expressed on religion as it interacted with society are of fundamental importance to his thought as a whole, particularly his political and social thought.

Religion was essential to a healthy society and ensured continuity within the social body. It was significant to the maintenance of notions of human agency and individual power. Without religion, these things became difficult to sustain. The benefits of a belief in human free will and individuality do not require delineation here. They are canonical concepts in the history of modern liberalism, which seem to be beyond justification. Carlyle did not approach them from a liberal perspective;

⁶¹ Carlyle, *On Heroes*, 172.

⁶² Cited in S. Heffer, *High Minds: The Victorians and the Birth of Modern Britain* (London, 2013), 157.

his understanding of them was in this sense not political but human. His concern for these features of life were thus entirely humanist and deserves to be underlined at a time when Carlyle's humanism is all but forgotten in modern scholarship.

Alongside its protection of the individual from the claims of necessity and those of powerlessness, religion was the basic material out of which society and the goods of society were constructed. It performed the important social function of connecting people with one another through the common stock of ideas that it provided to each. Could Atheists form a part of society? Was a society of Atheists possible? These are important questions, but for another paper. At most, it is possible to say here that a religious community would always be able to form a social body and thus experience the benefits it had to offer.

Religion was as much a constructive, transformative force as it was one of preservation. Religious movements had played a role throughout history in advancing European society. From the Reformation to Carlyle's present, religious movements had played a role in either renewing faith or clearing the ground for its rebirth, which enabled new incarnations of society to emerge resplendent.

Finally, Carlyle's doctrine of the utility of religion places him in the company of a thinker with whom he is not often compared, Alexis de Tocqueville, who made similar claims for the importance of religion to politics and society in his most famous work *De la démocratie en Amérique*.⁶³ It is to thinkers like Tocqueville, with their depth, range and tolerance, that Carlyle is most comparable.

⁶³ See A. de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America Historical-Critical Edition of De la démocratie en Amérique*, E. Nolla eds. (Indianapolis, 2010), 467-488.

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“Didactic Meaning”: Carlyle, Louis Napoleon, and the Bismarckian Legacy of Frederick the Great

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Carlyle’s response to the phenomenon of Louis Napoleon overlapped with that of Karl Marx, whose famous description of “the hero Crapulinski” in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852) deserves to be quoted here at length: “Hegel observes somewhere that all great events and characters of world history occur twice so to speak. He forgot to add: the first time as high tragedy, the second time as low farce. Caussidière after Danton, Louis Blanc after Robespierre, the montagne of 1848–51 after the montagne of 1793–95, and then the London constable, with a dozen of the best debt-ridden lieutenants, after the little corporal, with his round table of military marshals! The eighteenth Brumaire of the fool after the eighteenth Brumaire of the genius!” Though he drew very different conclusions about the significance of Louis Napoleon, Carlyle, like Marx, acknowledged the “cartoon quality” of Louis Napoleon’s appearance on the stage of history. In their only encounter at a dinner hosted by the Stanleys in 1873, Carlyle recalled that “I sat next him and tried to convert me to his notions; but such ideas as he possessed had no real force or capacity for flame in them. His mind was a kind of extinct sulphur pit, and gave out a kind of smell o’ rotten sulphur . . . A tragi-comedian, or comic-tragedian.”

Yet the impact that this “tragi-comedian” exercised on Carlyle’s historical imagination operated on much deeper levels than these comments suggest. As Froude rightly noted, Carlyle regarded the Emperor “a symbol and creature of his time, which divided with him the crime of the coup d’état. He had his day, and paid his debt at the end of it to the retributory powers.” In Carlyle’s mind, Louis Napoleon’s farce was but one act in a much larger drama, the contours of which Carlyle himself defined in his letter to the *Times* on 11 November 1870 in the immediate aftermath of the Franco-Prussian war: “That noble, patient, deep, pious,

and solid Germany should at length be welded into a Nation, and become Queen of the Continent, instead of vapouring, vainglorious, gesticulating, quarrelsome, restless and over-sensitive France seems to me the hopefulest fact that has occurred in my time.” In this scheme, Louis Napoleon plays a vital role in provoking the wrath of the God of history, and in unwittingly restoring justice and order in the shape of Bismarck’s Germany.

For Carlyle, the Franco-Prussian war was the final act of a world-historical cycle that he himself had recreated in *The French Revolution* and in the *History of Frederick the Great*. It was Frederick who had introduced a new version of “kingship” during his reign, thereby exposing the fallacy of traditional monarchy and preparing for its annihilation in the French Revolution. Napoleon Bonaparte had boldly and bravely attempted to revive Frederick’s model, but his rule ended in the “fanfaronade” of his own cult of power. Louis Bonaparte’s reign was doomed to failure because he could not distinguish the reality of his Uncle’s greatness from the illusions that eventually warped his judgment and destroyed him. Carlyle linked the Bonapartes’ downfall to the fatal inability of the French nation to be “reverent of Human worth.” In *Frederick the Great* he warned, “Nations who have lost this quality, or who never had it, what Frederick can they hope to be possible among them?” Where “liberty” and “equality” were worshipped, there was no possibility of a Frederick emerging to govern. Louis Napoleon was a perfect embodiment of French moral and political vacuity: “Such nations cannot have a King to command them; can only have this or the other swindling Copper Captain; constitutional Gilt Mountebank, or other the like unsalutary entity by way of Kings.”

Yet Carlyle the prophet was never quite the same creature as Carlyle the historian, which partly explains why the composition of *Frederick the Great* caused him such anguish. Much earlier in his career in his essay “On History” (1830), Carlyle had memorably warned his rivals against subordinating the barely legible “Prophetic Manuscript” of the past to rigid formulas: “Better were it that mere earthly Historians should lower such pretensions, more suitable for Omniscience than for human science; and aiming only at some picture of the things acted . . . leave the inscrutable purport of them an acknowledged secret.” “All-knowledge” was reserved for gods, not mortals. In Carlyle’s view, the prophetic content of any history hinged on the basic humility of historians. This did not mean that they should disengage from the controversies of the past, anymore than they should distance themselves from those of the present. On the contrary, their goal should

always to immerse themselves in both realms simultaneously, without trying to impose false continuums or progressions. The critic Walter Benjamin inadvertently captured Carlyle's method in an account of his own procedures in his *Arcades* project (1928-45): "It isn't that the past casts its light on the present or the present casts its light on the past: rather, an image is that in which the Then . . . and the Now . . . come into a constellation like a flash of lightning." (Smith 49). For the younger Carlyle, objectivity sprung from the impassioned endeavor to re-create the past as a living phenomenon, so that the "Then" and the "Now" converged "like a flash of lightning." For the author of *Frederick the Great*, this view of the past was too open-ended, yet he was never quite able to abandon it, determined as he was to play prophet.

At the root of Carlyle's problem in his Prussian epic was the *unepical* character of Frederick the Great. From the outset Carlyle was determined to hold "Fritz" in antithesis to Louis Napoleon, the "scandalous Copper Captain." But the king that Carlyle's sources disclosed was never the paragon that his champion sought. In the "Proem" to his epic, Carlyle conceded that Frederick fell far short of the standards expected by readers of Homer, Shakespeare, or Milton: "To the last, a questionable hero; with much in him which one could have wished not there, and much wanting which one could have wished" (*Frederick, Works* 12:14). Throughout the book—a qualified epic, at best—Carlyle confronted the refractory evidence of "Dryasdust," which served to shrink Frederick's heroic stature. His friend and disciple, the physicist John Tyndall observed that writing *Frederick the Great* "drew heavily upon [Carlyle's] health and patience. His labours were intensified by his conscientiousness. . . . The facts of history were as sacred in his eyes as the 'constants' of gravitation in the eyes of Newton; hence the severity of his work. The 'Life of Frederick' . . . worried him; it was not a labour into which he could throw his whole soul. He was continually pulled up by sayings and doings on the part of his hero which took all enthusiasm out of him. 'Frederick was the greatest administrator this world has seen, but I could never really love the man.'"

Part of the reason he could never love him were the personal qualities and political judgments that too often placed Frederick in the category of Napoleon III: his cynicism, his unbelief, and his amorality. Ironically, Louis Napoleon was intrinsic to the paradox of Carlyle's Frederick: it was Frederick's French "Copper" attributes that had to be purged from the biography in order for a more pious, noble, and humble King to emerge who was at one with the sober Prussian nation that revered "true worth." Always with one eye cast on the present, Carlyle wanted

to represent Frederick as a king who suited the self-image of Bismarck's Germany: "Prussia has defended itself against overwhelming odds,—brave Prussia; but the real soul of its merit was that of having merited such a King to command it. . . . No wonder Prussia still has a loyalty to its great Frederick, to its Hohenzollern Sovereigns generally." Carlyle the prophet needed Frederick to become the anti-Louis Bonaparte, but Carlyle the historian was repeatedly checked in his efforts to effect this transformation by the restraining hand of "Dryasdust," the moldy and hidebound archivist and researcher.

At the outset of the book he likened "Dryasdust" to a freed slave, "gone masterless . . . and totally unfit for self-guidance," and promised that in his hands, History would rise to its ordained position as "the inspired gift of God employing itself to illuminate the ways of God." Yet as the work progressed, Frederick became more and not less enigmatic, and Carlyle's increasingly strident efforts to reclaim him as forerunner of the Iron Chancellor frequently dissolved in contradiction. The first challenge to which Carlyle was obliged to respond was the issue of Frederick's Francophile proclivities. These were the Crown Prince's "feminine" pursuits (and Carlyle was uneasily aware of their identification with his alleged homosexuality): his love of rococo art and music, his flute-playing, his French reading, and his French clothes. The young Frederick was a dandy in the mould of Louis Bonaparte, loose in his manner and contemptuous of the parochial and stultifying Prussian crudity and literalism that surrounded him. Carlyle conceives of this phase of Frederick's life as operatic, and recasts it in scenes worthy of Offenbach.

Carlyle was aware of Louis Napoleon's reputation as a philanderer—in a letter to Jane in 1851 he reported a conversation that he had with their mutual friend Plattnauer "about Louis Napoleon's female friend [Elizabeth Ann Howard], some years ago a walker on the streets of Brighton, now resolute to be 'Empress of the French.'" In *Frederick the Great* Carlyle represents the Crown Prince's dalliance with French frivolity and immorality in terms of farce. In one such example, Carlyle seized on an anecdote that he found in the courtier Nicolai's memoirs: "Fritz and Quantz sat doing music, an unlawful thing; in this pleasant, but also unlawful costume; when Lieutenant Katte, who was on the watch in the outer room, rushes in, distraction in his aspect: Majesty just here! Quick, double quick! Katte snatches the music-books and flutes, snatches Quantz; hurries with him and them into some wall-press, or clout for firewood, and stands quaking there. Our poor Prince has flung aside his brocade, got on his military coatie; and would fain seem busy with important or indifferent routine matters. But alas, he cannot undo the French hair-

dressing; cannot change the graceful French bag into the strict Prussian queue in a moment. The French bag betrays him, kindles the paternal vigilance,—alas, the paternal wrath, into a tornado pitch. For his vigilant suspecting Majesty searches about; finds the brocade article behind a screen; crams it, with loud indignation, into the fire; finds all the illicit French books;—and there was mere sulphurous whirlwind in those serene spaces for about an hour!” The scene foreshadows the cruel fate of Katz, beheaded in a square in front of his horrified companion, who is forced to watch from his jail cell. The execution of Katz—a kind of symbolic act of castration—serves to purge the Crown Prince of his “unlawful” inclinations, and to re-clothe him permanently in the Prussian uniform that he once called “a shroud”.

Unlike Louis Napoleon, who was probably not a Bonaparte by birth—in the 19th century rumors circulated about his parentage, including one that suggested that he was the incestuous offspring of Hortense de Beauharnais and Napoleon I—Frederick’s father is what Carlyle refers to as a “stern reality.” It is Friedrich Wilhelm to teaches his son to renounce his pleasure-seeking habits and his French foppery, and to heed his duties as a leader and a governor. The psychological transformation that he undergoes leads him to the kind of ruthless calculation that the earlier opponent of torture, capital punishment, and Machiavelli was disposed to condemn. Observing the King’s behavior on the eve of his invasion of Silesia in 1740, Carlyle observes: “Not the Peaceable magnanimities but the warlike, are the thing appointed [him] this winter, and mainly henceforth. Those ‘golden or soft radiances,’ which we saw in him, admirable to Voltaire and to Friedrich, and to an esurient philanthropic world—it is not those, it is the steel-bright or stellar kind,’ that are to become predominant in Frederick’s existence: grim hailstones, thunders and tornado for an existence to him, instead of the opulent generalities and halcyon weather, anticipated by himself and others.” Frederick’s passions are now redirected towards the destruction of that decadent culture that corrupted his morals and weakened his judgment.

Whereas Frederick learned to scorn the operatic illusions of French culture and civilization, Louis Napoleon embraced these and exploited them in his seizure of power in 1848. Carlyle later told William Allingham that “I used to meet him often in the street, mostly about Sloane Square, driving a cab, with a little tiger behind; his face had a melancholy look that was rather affecting at first, but I soon recognised that it was the sadness of an Opera Singer who cannot get an engagement. When I heard of him afterwards as Emperor, I said to myself, ‘Gad, sir, you’ve got an opera engagement such as no one could possibly have expected!’”

Louis Napoleon's ascent to power was "one of the grandest achievements these latter ages have seen," Carlyle believed, because his success testified to the political degeneracy of France. In *Frederick the Great* Carlyle insisted that the rise of the "Copper Captain" be considered in the context of Frederick's career because they were historically interlocked. Their respective reputations in 1858, when Carlyle began writing his Prussian history, were symptomatic of the degraded political environment of the times.

In a section to his introduction revealingly called "Frederick then, and Frederick now," Carlyle contrasted the low estimation of Frederick in the present—to British Historians, he was a robber and a villain for not supporting George II in the Austrian succession war of 1740-48—with the noble reality of his accomplishments. Frederick was "defaced under strange mud-incrustations" for the same reason that Napoleon III was being celebrated—because dishonesty disguised as altruism was preferable to straightforwardness and truth. In an era of "Drawcansir rodomontade" and "grandiose Dick Turpinism," Frederick's merits could not be appreciated. But by disclosing his conversion from French frippery to Prussian solidity, Carlyle was reaffirming Frederick's relevance to the present. He and his country were everything that the Third Empire was not, and Carlyle was determined to show how this comparison might benefit the present: "How this man [Frederick], officially a King withal, comported himself in the Eighteenth Century and managed *not* to be a Liar and a Charlatan as his Century was, deserves to be seen a little by men and kings and may silently have didactic meaning in it."

In *Frederick the Great* Carlyle was reconstructing history as a montage, juxtaposing the 18th century world of true king with that of a contemporary imposter. In his "Proem" he asked, "What part of that exploded Past, the ruins and dust of which still darken the air, will continually gravitate back to us; be reshaped, transformed, readapted, that so, in new figures, under new conditions, it may enrich and nourish us again?" The answer was "[o]nly what of the Past was True will come back to us, that is the *asbestos* which survives fire; and comes out purified." Yet the truth was far more flammable than Carlyle pretended, as he discovered when he attempted to justify Frederick's invasion of Silesia in 1740. For Carlyle, this was meant to be the critical moment when the young king, having shed his French dandyism, emerged as a purified leader. Unfortunately for Carlyle, his primary source, Frederick's own *Histoire de mon temps* (1788) tended to undercut his narrative of Protestant self-renunciation and transfiguration.

Carlyle's enjoined his readers to "Hear Frederick himself" in the pages

of his memoir, always seeking to disclose the inward psychological regions of the past. But Frederick's confessions brought him closer to Louis Napoleon than Carlyle might have wished. In justifying his decision to invade Silesia, Frederick gave priority to personal ambition: "[The invasion of Silesia] was a means of acquiring reputation; of increasing the power of the State; and of terminating what concerned the long-litigated question of the Berg-Jülich Succession." Faithful to his own conception of history, Carlyle compromises the impression that he wished to convey. Ironically, had he focused on legality of the King's claim to Silesia, he might have rested his case on firm ground. He does assert that in invading Silesia, Frederick was seizing "the property he has long had there," but curiously, he makes little of this plausible claim. As Peter Clark has written recently of the legal dimension to the invasion, "there was nothing exceptional in the context of contemporary power politics about an attack of this kind on another's territory—one need point only to the long history of French aggression in Belgium and the western German lands, or the seizure of the island of Gibraltar by an Anglo-Dutch raiding force in 1702 during the War of the Spanish Succession, or, closer to home, to the bold partition plans of Saxony and Bavaria."

Carlyle eschewed this argument in favor of Frederick's forthright admission of his actual motives—popularity and fame—and avoided trying to use the episode to demonstrate the confluence of might and right. Having denied the charges against Frederick of "adroit Machiavellianism," Carlyle is left with a King whose motives fall short of the usual standards of Carlylean hero-worship. If Frederick is neither sincere nor pious, he is at least transparent. Somewhat exasperated, Carlyle taunted his opponents—"Desire to make himself a name; how shocking!" exclaim several Historians; 'Candour of confession that he may have had some such desire; how honest!' is what they do not exclaim." Yet Carlyle was unable here to erase the impression that Frederick's own words created, and which Carlyle's own justification reinforced: "If you have rights and can assert them into facts, do it; that is worth doing." In what ways did Frederick differ from his "Copper" counterpart Louis Napoleon in proclaiming the preeminence of his will? The contrast that Carlyle continued to develop in the biography was weakened by the reminders Frederick's of affinities with the man who, as Marx said, transformed the slogans of "Liberty, Equality, [and] Fraternity" into "infantry, cavalry, [and] artillery."

A second front in his Prussian history allowed Carlyle the chance to extol Prussian piety in favor of French foppery in his account of Frederick's relations with Voltaire, who was eventually exiled from Berlin by the King and obliged to

retreat to France in a state of humiliation and disgrace. But again, the case here was not as clearcut as Carlyle might have wished it to be. Frederick's adulation of Voltaire continued, long after Carlyle has announced the King's Prussian apotheosis. Conversely, Voltaire remained a wary admirer of the King, respectful of his genius yet clear-sighted about his limitations as a man and a ruler. Carlyle might have used the friendship to attack the "effervescence" of the Third Empire, but recondite evidence in the letters of both Voltaire and Frederick upset this strategy. Perhaps recalling Bismarck's quip about the Second Empire that "From a distance it is stunning but when you get up close there is nothing there at all," Carlyle tried to shape the Voltaire-Frederick friendship as a gradual process of unmasking on the King's part.

But once more, the evidence was stubbornly resistant to "didactic meaning." Carlyle conceded that Frederick—too much in the manner of the Emperor Napoleon—treated artists as baubles in his court and vehicles of personal vanity. Frederick also maintains something of his boyish hero-worship of Voltaire, even during the latter's fifth and final visit to Berlin: "He is loyally glad over his Voltaire; eager in all ways to content him, make him happy, and keep him at Berlin, as the Talking Bird, the Singing Tree, and the Golden Water, of intelligent mankind; the glory of one's Court, and the envy of the world." Frederick admits that Voltaire will "'teach us the secret of the Muses, too; French Muses, and help us in our bits of Literature!'" Conversely, Voltaire "has, and continued always to have, not unmixed with fear, a real admiration for Friedrich, that terrible practical Doer, with the cutting brilliancies of mind and character, and the irrefragable common sense; nay, he even has a kind of love to him." Carlyle depicted Voltaire's expulsion from Berlin as a humiliation, yet the episode did nothing to diminish Frederick's admiration of French culture in general, and Voltaire in particular. In the biography Frederick's "conversion" to iron Prussian realities was never complete, and his attachment to the Voltaire eventually baffles and exhausts Carlyle.

In military and strategic terms, Carlyle had an easier time highlighting the differences between "Frederick then" and Louis Napoleon "now." The effeminate, inept, and dithering Napoleon III lies always in the shadows of Carlyle's rugged portrait of Frederick the soldier-statesman serving to remind readers of the interweaving instruction of past and present. Carlyle's hope that the world would draw the appropriate conclusions was fulfilled in ways that his kaleidoscopic conception of history mysteriously accommodated. In 1910–11, prior to the Great War, the *Encyclopedia Britannica* echoed his conviction that the true significance

of the Seven Years' War lay not in the defeat of the French by the British in India or Canada, or the victories of Clive, Amherst, and Wolfe. On the contrary, it was "the steadfast resistance of Prussia, almost single-handed as she was—the resistance which laid the solid, if then unseen, foundations of modern Germany" that deserved the most serious notice. The Encyclopedia was much less kind to France and to its "Copper" Emperor. Its fate at Sedan was an appropriate punishment for the feckless conduct of its leader and his people: "Since 1866 [Napoleon III] had been pursuing an elusive appearance of glory. Since 1866 France was calling for 'revenge'. He felt that he could only rally the people to him by procuring them the satisfaction of their national pride. Hence the mishaps and imprudences of which Bismarck made such an insulting use . . . hence the final folly which led this government into the war with Prussia (July 1870)." Carlyle's plot had been vindicated, but within three years of this article, new and unforeseen elements of the "exploded Past" would erupt and scatter to dust his narrative of Prussian triumphalism.

Yet despite Carlyle's collusion in the creation of the myth of the "Iron Kingdom," his biography presented a far more enigmatic view of Frederick the Great than he assumed. Never quite as Prussian as Carlyle wished, and never quite as free of French "adhesions" as he hoped, Carlyle's Frederick could never satisfactorily fulfill his appointed role as the anti-Louis Bonaparte. Likewise, historical truth was not nearly as impenetrable to alternative interpretations as Carlyle pretended. Writing in 1943 while serving as a technical sergeant in psychological warfare, the American historian Albert Guérard commented: "The most dangerous feature of this popular account is that it cannot be dismissed as altogether wrong. Frivolousness in high places and chauvinistic hysteria cannot be denied. . . . But from a true indictment it is possible to draw fallacious consequences, and two of these have been clouding historical thought for nearly three-quarters of a century. The first fallacy is that because the defeated was wrong the victor must inevitably be held blameless. This implies a barbaric faith in the arbitrarment of the sword. *World history is God's judgment* is only a more sacrilegious version of *Might is Right*. . . . If the France of 1870 was vainglorious and over-sensitive, we need not admit that Bismarckian Germany was noble, deep, and pious."

Seen from the early twenty-first century, Guérard's remarks look more prescient than Carlyle's ruminations about the durability of "didactic meaning." But the confusion in Carlyle's practice of history itself constitutes a precious quality that survives his own often brutal desires to subordinate "the Prophetic Manuscript" to the dictates of his authoritarianism. The respective reputations of Napoleon III and

Bismarck shed considerable light on what Carlyle himself called “the inscrutable purport” of historical judgment. The riddle of Louis Bonaparte easily rivals that of Frederick the Great. His philosophy was as opaque as his personality. Roger Williams, in a study aptly titled “Gaslight and Shadow” (1957), remarked that the “crux of the difficulty was the creed of Bonapartism itself: the attempt to heal the wounds of the eighteenth century and the Revolution by pleasing everybody.” It was never merely a charade, J. M. Thompson argued, because the “common people lives by faith, not facts; its religions are based on myths. Louis’ instinct was right when he founded his appeal to France upon a legendary, not a historical Napoleon.”

And the result? Carlyle lauded Frederick the Great’s Prussia as a paternalistic society that was a humane alternative to the chaotic *laissez-faire* “No-Governments” of England and France. But as James McMillan has contended, the “Second Empire’s commitment to economic expansion and to the alleviation of some of the miseries engendered by industrialisation allow it to be seen as an essentially ‘modern’ regime. In this light, Napoleon III appears as a technocratic visionary, a ‘Saint-Simon on horseback.’” And Carlyle’s allusions to the “Questionable” Frederick the Great themselves have resonated in more recent studies of Prussia by Christopher Clark and of Bismarck by Jonathan Steinberg, both of whom have raised uncomfortable questions about the Iron Chancellor and his connection to the Nazi nightmare that descended upon Germany in the 1930s. Clark rightly emphasizes the extent to which the Nazis distorted the legacy of Frederick the Great: The Frederick the Great of National Socialist propaganda was a heavily truncated version of the original—the monarch’s insistence on French as the medium of civilized discourse, his disdain for German culture and his ambiguous sexuality were simply airbrushed away.” These were precisely the same features that Carlyle himself had tried—and failed—to airbrush from Frederick’s history, and for which Bismarck had honored him.

Steinberg is no less scrupulous in drawing comparisons, but he does not exonerate Bismarck from blame for the horrors that followed him—and by implication, he does not exonerate Carlyle either. Early in his career Bismarck recognized the political value of Carlyle’s *Frederick the Great*. As chancellor of the Reich in 1874, he arranged to have the Prussian order of merit, an award instituted by Frederick the Great, bestowed on Carlyle. It was not merely, as Froude contended, that Bismarck was thanking Carlyle for his avid support of Prussia in its war against France. The Chancellor was not in the habit of courting literary figures. As Steinberg witheringly remarked, “[Bismarck] had no interest in the arts, never went

to a museum, only read lyric poetry from his youth or escapist literature. He paid no attention to scientists or historians unless he could enlist them.” Carlyle’s narrative potently reinforced an image of Prussia that Bismarck ruthlessly manipulated for his own political ends. *The History of Frederick the Great* lent credibility to the Chancellor’s claim that he always acted in allegiance to the aims and ideals of the Prussian “genius-king.” Steinberg’s summary of Bismarck’s spurious inheritance indirectly explains Carlyle’s usefulness to him and to his successor: “He transmitted an authoritarian, Prussian, semi-absolute monarchy with its cult of force and reverence for the absolute ruler to the twentieth century. Hitler fished it out of the chaos of the Great Depression of 1929-33. He took Bismarck’s office, Chancellor, on 30 January 1933. Once again a ‘genius’ ruled Germany.”

These more recent reverberations of Carlyle’s testify to the enduring importance and originality of his historical sense. By insisting on the historian’s simultaneous engagement in both past and present, he awakens his readers to the precariousness and perhaps the delusion of detachment and objectivity. His fierce determination to extract living truths from the dead bones of experience fires his ambition to achieve omniscience, which in turn is perpetually thwarted by “Dryasdust” and his new mounds of evidence. The prophet and the historian are engaged in a relentless struggle, yet in the end it is the historian who prevails because Carlyle never loses his faith in the ineffable reality of facts. Carlyle’s cannot recast Frederick the Great to fit the mould of Bismarck anymore than he can remodel Louis Napoleon in the shape of his Uncle. For the admirers of Carlyle the historian, here is welcome proof of the “the *asbestos* which survives fire; and comes out purified.”

On Edinburgh Lectures

Professor Stephen G Hillier, BSc, MSc, PhD, DSc, FRCPath, FRCOG
Vice Principal International, The University of Edinburgh

Carlyle Society 30 November 2013

Colleagues, members of the Carlyle Society, Ladies and Gentlemen. I am honoured to have this opportunity to address you. I am not a member of your Society and far from being an expert on Thomas Carlyle. However, I have been a member of staff at this University since 1985, and I am a friend and colleague of your President, Professor Ian Campbell. These, I trust you will agree, are adequate Carlylian credentials.

Ian and I first met when we were paired up in an academic procession for a graduation ceremony in the McEwan Hall. It was a while ago now but I vividly remember the exchange. I was delighted to find myself alongside the Professor of Scottish and Victorian Literature, and he was bemused to be with the Professor of Reproductive Endocrinology (otherwise known as hormone science). On the face of it, we had little in common. But there was something – or rather someone – who connected us. That someone was JM Barrie.

Finding myself in the company of someone who teaches and has written on Barrie, I owned up to being intrigued by Barrie's connection with this University and having become a keen collector of his works. At that point we became destined to collaborate, somehow or other.

Fast-forward to earlier this year. Ian and I met at another University event, and got together for a catch up. It turned out that there was a strong Carlyle slant to my interest in Barrie, which provides the theme of my lecture today *On Edinburgh Lectures*.

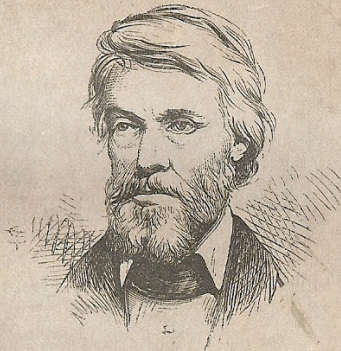
In 1866 as Rector of the University of Edinburgh Carlyle had delivered an inaugural lecture, which subsequently inspired Barrie's inaugural lecture in 1930, at his installation as Chancellor of the University. Then in 1994, I drew on JM Barrie to introduce my inaugural professorial lecture 'On Male Hormones and Female Testicles'. The three lectures are linked. Quite how, I shall now reveal.

PRICE ONE SHILLING.

ON THE
CHOICE OF BOOKS.

An Address.

BY
THOMAS CARLYLE.



REPRINTED FROM "THE TIMES," WITH A MEMOIR AND
TWO PORTRAITS.

LONDON:
JOHN CAMDEN HOTTEN, PICCADILLY.

Cover of the pamphlet containing the text of Thomas Carlyle's Rectorial address 'On the Choice of Books', delivered in the Music Hall on 2 April 1866.

So, to begin at the beginning with the Rector's lecture.

The Rectorship is an ancient office dating back to 1620. Originally, it was always held by the Lord Provost of the City, commensurate with the University's status as the 'Tounis College'. This also explains why the Rector always used to be known as the Lord Rector. Since 1858, it is an elected post with a three-year term of office, which currently held by Mr Peter McColl. As summarized here, the primary role of the Rector is to chair the University Court. The Rector also chairs meetings of the General Council in absence of the Chancellor. The role has evolved substantially over the centuries. It used to be an important ceremonial post, but more recently Rectors have come to occupy a position similar to an ombudsperson. They work closely with students and the Edinburgh University Student's Association, as well as with Court and General Council.

Certainly it is a highly prestigious and influential post -- as indicated by some of those who have held office, including Prime Ministers Gordon Brown, Winston Churchill, David Lloyd George, Stanley Baldwin and William Baldwin, the discoverer of penicillin Sir Alexander Fleming, actor James Roberston Justice, journalist Muriel Gray, the singer Donnie Munro and the footballer John Colquhoun amongst others.

And our hero, Thomas Carlyle.

Carlyle was an early, illustrious addition to this list, given his eminence as the literary giant of the era as shown by the summary CV on this next slide. By 1866 his life's work in publication was all but complete with the appearance of *Frederick the Great*, though he continued to write – above all his marvelous correspondence now being edited here and in Duke University – almost till his death. His reputation on both sides of the Atlantic, as well as in continental Europe, was immense. He was hailed by many sectors of society for different reasons, and many found in him a powerful advocate for religious values and a steady society at time of change and threatening revolution

Carlyle was elected to the Rectorship by the students and staff by a large margin in 1865. It was a 2 to 1 landslide victory over the incumbent Rector William Gladstone, who instead went on to become Prime Minister for the first of four times in 1868. As was the custom then, Carlyle delivered an inaugural address upon his installation as Rector, on 2 April 1866, titled *On the Choice of Books*.

Elsewhere in these papers you will find much more about the atmosphere that prevailed at the Music Hall that afternoon, and the impact that the lecture left.

ADDRESS DELIVERED ON INSTALLATION AS
CHANCELLOR OF EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY
OCTOBER 25, 1930

THE
ENTRANCING LIFE

BY
J. M. BARRIE

HODDER AND STOUGHTON
LIMITED LONDON

Frontispiece of the booklet containing JM Barrie's lecture, 'The Entrancing Life', delivered upon his installation as Chancellor of the University in the McEwan Hall on 25 October 1930.

However, the talk itself seems not to have been uniformly well received, as these notes here indicate.

The Times correspondent was particularly underwhelmed (“*The discourse of the new Lord Rector squared well with the occasion. There was no novelty in it...*”), while in his memoir of the event, John Camden Hotten reflects, “*He spoke like a patriarch about to leave the world to the young lads who had chosen him and were just entering the world*”. He did however have some stirring aphorisms for ‘the young lads’, not least “*...great is the value of wisdom. It cannot be exaggerated...*” The significance of this will shortly become evident.

Before we leave that historic day (when Carlyle would also have received an honorary LL.D., had he accepted the offer, it but with his brother John already an M.D. of Edinburgh, he chose to refuse) I’d just like to reflect on how much the University had changed since Carlyle had been a student at Edinburgh.

He enrolled in the MA course in 1809, leaving four years later in 1813 (he never graduated). Over this period the University seems to have been a veritable building site. The foundation stone of Old College had been laid in 1789 but work had ceased by 1793 and, with the death of Robert Adam, and the exigencies of the Napoleonic War and its aftermath were not recommenced until 1815 when Carlyle was already gone, or at best visiting Edinburgh as an occasional student of Divinity – a part-time enrolment he was soon to abandon as his personal religious faith was in ferment, and he realised he could not see his way to fulfil his parents’ ambition that their eldest son should enter the ministry.

Adam’s original plan for the Old College was for a handsome and quite complex structure, but with delay and financial cutback, and the influence of another architect, it was not to be completed until 1827, even then in a considerably abbreviated form. The dome was not added until 1887 – six years after Carlyle’s passing. So that is what Old College would have looked like by the time he returned to give his inaugural rectorial address in 1866. Although, recall, his actual lecture was given at the Music Hall in George street.

I thought it of interest to point out the affection that Carlyle seems to have felt for the University – despite his trials and tribulations here as a student – by the time of his death. As indicated here, in the last lines of his will, he bequeathed property worth about £300 a year to the University, to found ten bursaries for the benefit of the poorer students that “the small bequest might run forever, a thread of pure water from the Scottish rocks, trickling into its little basin by the thirsty wayside for those whom it veritably belongs to.”

THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

**CHAIR OF REPRODUCTIVE
ENDOCRINOLOGY**

PROFESSOR S G HILLIER

BSc, MSc, PhD, DSc, MRCPATH

**will deliver his
INAUGURAL LECTURE**

**“ON MALE
HORMONES AND
FEMALE
TESTICLES”**

**in the Anatomy Lecture Theatre,
University Medical School, Teviot Place**

**on
Tuesday, 29th November 1994 at 5.15pm**

**THE PRINCIPAL OF THE
UNIVERSITY WILL PRESIDE**

THE LECTURE IS OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Poster advertising the author's inaugural lecture as Professor of Reproductive Endocrinology, given in the Anatomy Lecture Theatre of the old medical school on 29 November 1994.

Let us now turn our attention to J.M.Barrie, the Chancellor of Edinburgh University one generation later, and the focus of my interest. The present University Chancellor is the wonderful HRH The Princess Royal who was elected to office by the General Council in 2011, following her father, The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh.

These, briefly, are the main features of the role: The Chancellor is Chair of the General Council. The Chancellor is elected by the University's General Council, and remains Chancellor for life. And she confers all our degrees or delegates this task to the Vice-Chancellor. In the 150 years of the existence of the post, the highest in the University, it has been held by only eight individuals. Notable among them, Sir James Matthew Barrie.

Barrie became Chancellor in 1930 when his world-renowned acclaim as an essayist and play write had long ago peaked. Honours came thick and fast towards the end of his life and in the same year that he took up the Chancellorship of Edinburgh University he was voted Rector at St Andrews. An obvious conflict of interest, I should have thought. Perhaps not. Either way, he had retained his wonderful way with words. The proof lies in *The Entrancing Life*, his inaugural address as the Chancellor here, delivered in the McEwan Hall on 25 October 1930.

Like Carlyle's, over half a century earlier, Barrie's message in *The Entrancing Life* is to take life's difficulties head on, to emerge as a better person. The climax is at page 20. There he describes what he calls the entrancing life, which, as he puts it, "*...sums up most of what I have been trying to say to-day for your guidance.*" He continues: "*...Carlyle held that genius was an infinite capacity for taking pains. I don't know about genius, but the entrancing life, I think, must be an infinite love of taking pains. You try it.*"

Here then is the link to Carlyle's lecture: it's all about mastering the demon within, and going the extra mile to do good. Again on page 20: "*...The 'Great War' has not ended. Don't think that you have had the luck to miss it. It is for each of you the war that goes on within ourselves for self-mastery.* Sterling stuff.

And what of Barrie's Edinburgh? When he enrolled in 1878, Old College was complete, bar the dome, and the Playfair Library had been completed. Even then we were a global university. "*The average number of students is above 3,000 yearly, and by far the greater proportion of them attend the Faculty of Medicine. The British colonies and India avail themselves very extensively of the University of Edinburgh. In 1880, there were 3,172 matriculated students, of whom 1,634*

were medical alone; of these 677 were from Scotland, 558 from England, 28 from Ireland, and the rest from abroad.”

During Barrie’s time here, the medical school – i.e. the building where I addressed the society – was also completed. *“In October 1881, nearly the whole of the great anatomical collection refereed to here, including the skeletons of the infamous Burke and one of his victims known as ‘Daft Jamie’, was removed from the old to the new University buildings at Lauriston.”*

An engraving depicts the medical school then, with one glaring error – Sir Robert Rowland Anderson’s Venetian tower. It was never built here. However, it did eventually go up at St George’s church in Shandwick Place. You can also see the McEwan Hall, here, opened in 1897. This is where Barrie gave his installation address in 1930.

But before I move on, can I just again emphasise the impact of Carlyle on Barrie’s thinking. Not only does Barrie refer to Carlyle in his Chancellor’s installation lecture, there is every reason to suppose that he would have actually have met him when he was a student at Annan Academy, prior to entering Edinburgh. Thus, according to J.A. Hammerton: *“... at Dumfries the youthful Barrie had the good fortune to see in the flesh Thomas Carlyle, who often came to the town in those days on visits to his sister, Mrs Aitken, and his friend Thomas Aird, the editor and poet.”* Furthermore: *“...With the Carlyle fever in him – at one time he asserted that Carlyle was the only author who influenced him – he left Dumfries and went to Edinburgh University, where he almost immediately came under the influence of Professor Masson.”*

And it was with reference to Masson, that Barrie would reflect elsewhere, “The glory of a professor is to give elastic minds their proper bent”. This is the aphorism that inspired the introduction to my professorial inaugural lecture – albeit on a totally unrelated subject – delivered in the Anatomy Lecture Theatre of the old medical school on 29 November 1994,

I have been discussing different lectures on different themes given in different places: all with a Carlyle connection. The McEwan Hall holds the key.

I was awarded my Edinburgh D.Sc. degree in that hall in 1992. Without earning that degree, I doubt if I would have been elevated to the professoriate. I have subsequently sat in those hard wooden seats on the platform during countless graduation ceremonials many times since, as a ‘processing professor’ (moving closer and closer to the front row, the older you get...).

Many is the time my gaze has wandered up into the McEwan's dome – most recently, yesterday – to contemplate the names of twelve Edinburgh luminaries inscribed up there, on high, Carlyle included. Barrie presumably saw them too, and drew on them ('An Edinburgh Dozen'?) to inspire his inaugural lecture.

Barrie could not have missed the inspirational verse from Proverbs (4:7) that lines the frieze beneath the role of honour. It reads, "*Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom, and with all thy getting, get understanding. Exalt her and she shall bring thee to honour.*"

These words seem to capture the essence of Carlyle's *Choice of Books* and must have influenced Barrie's *Entrancing Life*. To my mind, they epitomise the *Edinburgh way*, which is what makes Edinburgh the global university it is today.

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Carlyle and Edinburgh: the last Chapter

Ian Campbell

In the Senate House Library in London (Manuscript AL 466/1) there is a letter from David Masson to William De Morgan, written from the Garrick Club and dated 13 June 1867.

My dear De Morgan

The translation you spoke of was wholly done by Carlyle, who also remembers that he gave in the book some simplification of the *5th* Book which he thought at the time might be valuable. He has not seen a copy of the Book for very many years. Brewster gave him £50 for the job – not much for the work, but acceptable to him at the time. This, of course, is for your own information only. There *is* a book of Leslie's (earlier than the above one) in which reference is made to the solution of some problem by his "ingenious young friend Mr Carlyle". The solution was some neater or shorter way of doing something normally done in a larger way. Some ill-natured friend afterwards pointed out to Leslie that the identical solution given by C. had been published by some Dutchman 200 years before. C. had never heard of the Dutchman & his solution, & Leslie stuck to his compliment.

ever yours truly
David Masson

This story takes us back very early in Carlyle's literary life, before he had chosen his main field of activity, and (as the *Carlyle Letters* of the period make clear) was still depending for a large part of his income on his undoubted talents in mathematics. The letter covers two of his early publications, a translation commissioned by David Brewster of the *Elements of Geometry* by Adrien Marie

Legendre and a mention in Professor John Leslie's *Elements of Geometry and Plane Trigonometry* (1817), which does indeed contain an acknowledgement of a suggestion (p.340) from "Mr Thomas Carlyle, an ingenious young mathematician, formerly my pupil".¹ Leslie, as Professor of Mathematics at Edinburgh, had strongly attracted Carlyle's student enthusiasm, and the early letters contain copious evidence that Carlyle was interested in the subject long after leaving University. Translating Legendre's *Eléments de géométrie* was, plainly, hackwork to bring in money, akin to the articles Carlyle produced for Brewster's *Edinburgh Encyclopaedia*, though Tarr's bibliography notes that the Legendre translation was in fact indebted to Carlyle's younger brother John, who was then being supported financially through his University years by Thomas. It was Thomas who appended the original essay on proportion which forms part of the title page, though his name appears nowhere on the finished volume.²

Another tantalising clue from this period, just after Carlyle completed most of his undergraduate study and while he was still attending classes (and obviously keeping up with his reading) was the unhappy first attempt at publication in the *Edinburgh Review*, in the form of an unsolicited review of a technical treatise on the three-body problem published in the *Bibliothèque Universelle*.³ This underlines the omnivorous nature of Carlyle's student years, reading in foreign languages (he was about to spend a great deal of time acquiring some German)⁴ and the width of his reading, including overseas periodicals in scientific and mathematical subjects. The manuscript was hand-delivered by Carlyle and sank without trace: the blow to Carlyle's early hopes did nothing to prevent Carlyle and Jeffrey becoming the firmest of friends in the 1820s. A long chapter of the *Reminiscences* attests to the warmth and enduring nature of the friendship.

Masson's letter throws light on a period of Carlyle's life we know relatively little about, a period of intense reading, considerable personal upset and

¹ R.L.Tarr, *Thomas Carlyle A Descriptive Bibliography* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989), 403. For John Carlyle and the Legendre translation see *The Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle (Duke-Edinburgh edition)* (Durham, NC, 1970), 1:396, 2:98-100, 2:216 and 2:348.

² Tarr, *Bibliography* p.3

³ For details see "Carlyle, Pictet and Jeffrey Again", *The Bibliothek* 7,1 (1974), 1-15.

⁴ For details see [with R.L.Tarr] "Carlyle's Early Study of German, 1819-1821", *Illinois Quarterly* 34 (December, 1971), 19-27

uncertainty, and financial restraint. We do not know the nature of De Morgan's original query to Masson, but it led to a reply from the old Carlyle himself, which is in the University of London along with Masson's letter.

Chelsea, 19 June, 1867

Dear Sir,

I did undoubtedly translate the *Legendre's Geometry*, to which Dr Brewster gave his name, except (as I suppose, but don't recollect) some supervision of the first few *Proofs*, and then, finding it would go of itself, gladly let it go. The poor Book is still an innocently pleast reminiscence to me, as of a quiet little Island in the waste seas I was then sailing – tho' I have never seen it since, and indeed do not remember ever to have seen it as a volume at all.

On the *Galbraithite Legend* I can throw no light. I did, sometimes, hear the name of Galbraith in those years, as of a diligent enough Mathematical "Private-Teacher"; but not as of a *writer*, or in any other capacity; nor did I ever see him, or hear more of him in the long years that have followed. So that the Cambridge *myth* of him becomes darker than before! – He was rustic *Scots* by birth, *may* have frequented Brewster, but I think, if so, it must have been in a subsequent time.⁵

The truth is, if Cambridge took the trouble to form any guess abt such a matter, the guess was pretty likely to be *wrong*. I had never any Mathematical acquaintanceship in Edinr (except with Leslie my excellt first Professor); a year or two before this Translation, I had already abandoned Mathematics as a chief study, and thenceforth it fell into silence and abeyance altogether; in the *Legendre* times, I had got into quite another sort of spiritual inquiries, problems and inscrutabilities; -- and was leading a most secluded solitary silent life, intent

⁵ Possibly, but not very likely, a reference to Joseph Galbraith, the son of Richard Galbraith, of Scottish stock, and Rebecca Allen. Richard was a Dublin merchant and respected member of the Presbyterian church St Mary's Abbey. He died before Joseph's graduation, having lost most of his wealth. Galbraith entered Trinity College as a pensioner on 3 November 1834, graduating with a BA in 1839, and was made a Junior Fellow in 1844. He was a talented mathematician. However, the dates of this Galbraith make it unlikely he would have been in Carlyle's circle at the time of the Legendre translation. The references in this letter have not been traced.

at least “to consume my own smoke” (of *whh* I had an abundant quantity), and *cd* not well be suspected as the translating party.

It gives me pleasure to have this opportunity of expressing my respects; thank poor Galbrith at least for that!

I remain/Dear Sir/Yrs Sincerely/T. Carlyle

The year is 1867, and Carlyle is slowly returning to his circle of acquaintance after the shock of Jane’s death in 1866, his overwintering in Mentone with Lady Ashburton, and the months of solitary composition which gave us the *Reminiscences*. His links with Edinburgh were still strong, for he had only recently been in Scotland for his installation as Lord Rector in April 1866, receiving a hero’s welcome, and very much in contact with the senior members of the University – Principal Brewster and Professor David Masson included. A.J.Symington, who was present at the address, noted the platform party which included “the Principal of the University, Sir David Brewster, who in other days, as editor, had got the young student to contribute articles to the “Edinburgh Encyclopaedia.” There, too, sat Dr. Guthrie; Sir George Harvey, P.R.S.A.; Tyndall; Huxley; Erskine, of Linlathen; Lord Provost Chambers; Dr. Rae, the Arctic explorer; and many other men of world-wide renown”.⁶

A vivid record survives from one Rev. David Macrae, in the audience on the occasion, who went home and wrote his impressions of the event, seen from the auditorium and not the platform,⁷ pushing into

. . . the Music Hall, in the midst of an immense crowd, and occupying the smallest amount of space consistent with the possession of unbroken ribs and the operation of the vital organs. Half-past one: -- *In* the Hall now, far forward, looking back over the people’s heads at the torrent of black-coated humanity still boiling in through every avenue, and rolling along the back of the crowd into all the unoccupied nooks and corners. Dr John Brown, friend of Thackeray, and writer of books, is seen elbowing his way forward in the stream of people that

⁶ A.J.Symington, *Some Personal Reminiscences of Carlyle* (London, 1866), 65.

⁷ *America Revisited and Men I have Met* by Rev. David Macrae (Glasgow, John Smith, 1908), 191-4.

still presses down the middle passage. Dr Caird, the great preacher, with his long straight black hair and dark earnest eyes, is visible for a moment clambering over the backs of the seats, with the unaffected eagerness of a school-boy running up to see a fight. . . . People still pouring and struggling in, looking wildly towards the front, over the heads of the multitude . . . seats crammed: passages choked . . . Not merely a man born in Scotland, but a true Scottish man, burning with the *perfervidum ingenium*, the resolution, the grim religious humour, and withal, the deep and homely instincts of his race . . . Carlyle, for more than quarter of a century, had almost hid himself from the gaze of man . . .

At five minutes past two there is a sudden stir and buzz of excitement behind, towards which all faces instantly turn, most of the people swarming upon the seats to get a better view. A glittering object borne aloft, and slowly threading its way down the middle passage, indicates that the bedellus, with the mace on his shoulder, is heading the procession to the platform. . . . The appearance, next, of a spare old man, slightly bent with age, and wearing on his shoulders the spangled robe of the Lord Rector, is the signal for a tremendous outburst of applause, repeated again and again like peals of thunder. Thomas Carlyle at last! . . .

He had not been speaking two minutes before it became evident that his voice would not fill the hall. It was painful at first to see the efforts which the old hero made to rouse his voice to what it had done quarter of a century ago. But after a few unsuccessful attempts, he settled down into his ordinary tone, and addressed those who could hear . . . No attitudinising, no rhetorical tricks, no attempt at fine speaking. . . . Many of the people, too far back to hear distinctly, were ebbing away, having satisfied their curiosity. . . . It was a wonderful speech – such as no man but Thomas Carlyle would or could have delivered – full of the same wisdom that pervades his books . . .

The look of the old man as he recited this [Goethe's hymn from *Wilhelm Meister*], and the deep sonorous tones in which, with startling suddenness, he began, as if, for a moment, the voice of other years had come back, made as profound an impression as I have ever seen produced on any public audience. It was a fitting close. It is not likely that Carlyle's voice will be heard again.

The address, as printed and reprinted, was a great success, even if many in the hall could not hear it. Carlyle had tried and failed to script it in advance (and so had to write it up for the official published version), and Symington saw something of the struggles he had before the triumph in Edinburgh.

I saw him at Chelsea, both before and after his memorable visit to Scotland. He was extremely anxious, if he carried out his reluctant intention of appearing before the students, to say something which would really be serviceable to them. A sense of duty urged him, although he shrank from public appearance, and said he felt as if he were going to be hanged. So he dictated an address to his amanuensis; but, on looking at it, was altogether dissatisfied with the result, remarking that, if he could not do better than that, he must abandon the business.

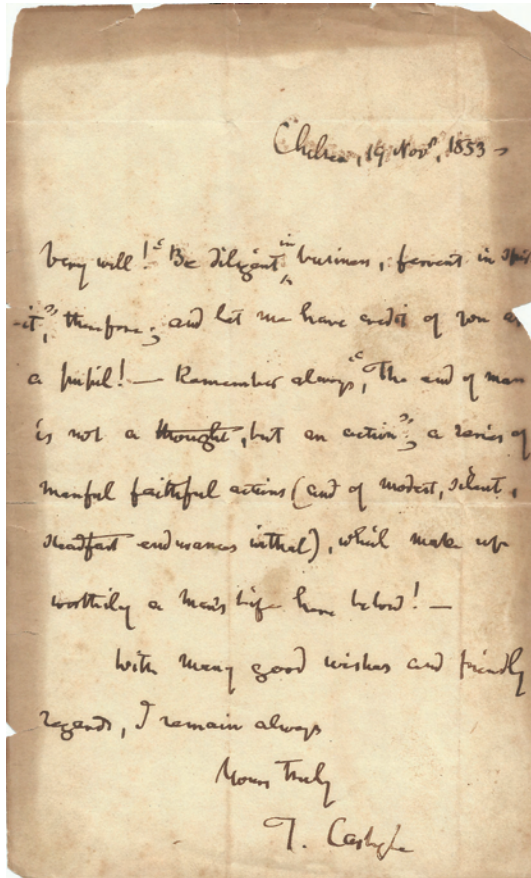
Instead, Carlyle decided on “a few simple words to the young men, coming directly from his heart, and such as would naturally occur to him at the time”.⁸

Edinburgh had been a pivotal part of Carlyle’s early experience and the formation of his intellectual life, and the Rectorial Address paid tribute to that, while bringing him back to the city where he had first encountered Legendre, and mathematical problems, and where he made the leap from these years to the struggle with the Germans, and the move to an original writing career which earned him the accolade of the Lord Rectorship. A personal friendship with Masson was to continue, and to be the reason for later visits to Edinburgh, but the Rectorship really wrote an end to his public life in Edinburgh. Masson’s conclusion to the long (and invaluable) “Carlyle’s Edinburgh Life” chapter in *Edinburgh Sketches and Memories* looks back at the Rectorial as really the end of an era.

Of that visit, perhaps the crowning glory of his old age, and reconnecting him so conspicuously with Edinburgh at the last, but saddened for him so fatally by the death of his wife in his absence, I have not a few intimate recollections; as also of those later, almost furtive, visits now and then in his declining autumns, to his eightieth year and beyond, when his real purpose was pilgrimage to his wife’s grave in Haddington Church, and he would saunter, or almost shuffle, through the streets as a bowed-down alien, disconsolate at heart, and evading recognition.

⁸ Symington, 62-3.

Better to remember him on the platform of the Music Hall in George Street at the peak of his fame.⁹



Chelsea, 19th Nov^r, 1853 →

Very well! Be diligentⁱⁿ business; fervent in ^{it}; therefore; and let me have credit of you as a pupil! — Remember always, "the end of man is not a thought, but an action"; a series of manful faithful actions (end of modest, silent, steadfast endurance intellectual), which make up worthily a man's life here below! —

With many good wishes and friendly regards, I remain always

Yours Truly
T. Carlyle

An autograph, one of many Carlyle wrote during his years of fame, to encourage admirers.

⁹ David Msson, *Edinburgh Sketches and Memories* (London and Edinburgh, 1892), 358. The Carlyle material covers pp. 226-358.

With thanks to the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh University Library and Dundee Central Library.

SYLLABUS 2014-15

CARLYLE SOCIETY: PROGRAMME FOR 2014-15

2014

October 11	Aileen Christianson	<i>Jane Welsh Carlyle's Death and its Aftermath</i>
November 1	Sharon Brown	<i>'Do read this book': Jane Welsh Carlyle and 'les sujets français'.</i>
December 6	Liz Sutherland	<i>AGM: Christmas Party: and 'Letters of the kitchen table'</i>

2015

January 24	Michael Smith	<i>The Dark Side of Paisley</i>
February 21	Murray Pittock	<i>Recollecting heroes: memorialization in the age of Carlyle</i>
March 14	David Sorensen	<i>Carlyle and Bismarck</i>

Meetings will be held on Saturdays at 1415 in room 1.07 of the University Library, George Square: tea and coffee will be afterwards in the library café on the ground floor. Please make yourselves known to the security staff at the entrance when you arrive for each meeting.

New members are welcome. Enquiries should be made to the President at
Ian.Campbell@ed.ac.uk