

A SHARP TONGUE AND A HUNGRY HEART

JANE WELSH CARLYLE (1801-1866)



In certain respects, the life of Jane Welsh Carlyle is even more limited than that of John Keats: she has no career, publishes nothing, and never travels outside of Great Britain. Yet her correspondence, which centres first on her courtship by Thomas Carlyle and later on their much discussed marriage, presents a cross section of Victorian society while criticising it from the standpoint of values that Jane shares with Thomas. This cross section extends from the aristocracy to the destitute. Jane takes, on the other hand, only a slender interest in nature – enjoying it she classifies as “very hard work” – and little more in politics. Where she excels is in depicting characters, narrating anecdotes, deploying her wit, and recording dialogue. Her letters, especially those to Thomas, are peppered with coterie speech in quotation marks; that is, phrases common in the mouths of people ranging from her father-in-law to the Carlyle’s servant Helen Mitchell and their friend the Italian patriot Mazzini. In the latter’s English, for example, “thanks to God” becomes “thanks God” and the things that must be attended to in daily life become “cares of bread.”

Born in 1801, Jane Welsh grows up in the Scottish Lowland town of Haddington, where her boldness and agility earn her a reputation as “a sticket callant” – a child who begins to grow up as a boy but gets stuck. Free from domestic tasks in her prosperous home, she is urged by her physician father to distinguish herself as a scholar, and she finds study congenial both for its own sake and as a means of gratifying the parent she idolises. When she is eighteen, he dies, and for a time her spirit is killed. Slowly she revives, and as a young woman to whom any man would give a second glance, she delights in the admiration of her male contemporaries while remaining devoted to her books. Elegance in a suitor has a great attraction

for her, but she longs also for genius. Unable to find a lover with both, she opts for genius and in 1826 marries the as yet poor Thomas Carlyle.

After beginning married life with a nineteen months' residence in Edinburgh, the couple move to Craigenputtock, an isolated farm inherited from Dr. Welsh, whose undomesticated daughter has to learn to cook, bake, and keep house while Thomas toils at his writing. Their lonely existence, relieved by occasional appearances of friends, rare visits to Edinburgh, and one excursion to London, continues until June 1834. At this point, they move permanently to the English capital and establish themselves at 5, Cheyne Row, a house that becomes famous in literature. With such books as *Sartor Resartus* (1836), *The French Revolution* (1837), *Heroes and Hero-Worship* (1841), and *Past and Present* (1843), Thomas wins fame and veneration as a critic of his age and an enemy to materialism, democracy, and faith in progress. The couple become well integrated into London's literary life and are admitted into the company of aristocrats who patronise intellectuals. While Jane suffers from sometimes crippling attacks of illness, an even worse evil begins to afflict her about 1843 when Thomas starts to become besotted with the admiration of the cultured, witty and imperious Harriet Baring, later Lady Ashburton, who likes to be surrounded by a court of brilliant men; there are periods when Thomas's neglect plunges Jane into soul-destroying despair, though she occasionally finds some relief in travelling to visit cousins in Liverpool and the scenes of her youth in Scotland.

In 1857 Lady Ashburton dies. Next year the widower remarries, and Jane is surprised to find in the second Lady Ashburton an intimate and loving friend. The Carlyles' life, however, is now blighted by the enormous task which Thomas, to his subsequent regret, has set himself – namely, to compile an immense biography of Frederick the Great, a task he only completes in 1865. Next year, while he is in Scotland, where he has just been installed as Rector of the University of Glasgow, Jane dies. Realising how much she has suffered from his neglect and his excessive household demands as well as her own ill health, Thomas assembles a large body of her brilliant letters, adds clarifying observations, and entrusts the manuscript to his friend the historian J. A. Froude. The latter publishes it in 1883, two years after Thomas, too, has died.

Except for one childhood note, Jane's surviving correspondence begins with expressions of her and her mother's overwhelming grief at her father's early death in September 1819. To her Edinburgh friend Eliza Stodart, she writes of their first venture out of doors after the bereavement, an excursion to attend church: "the very sight of the street was hateful to me.... I have no wish to live, except for two purposes – to be a comfort to my poor mother, and to make myself worthy of being reunited to my

adored father." Within a few months, however, she reassures Eliza she has honoured her father by resuming her studies and is again taking some interest in attractive youths. "I dare say," she adds, "you are a little curious to know the state of my *affairs* at present" and refers to Benjamin Bell as "one of the most frank, unaffected young men I have seen."

During the ensuing six years, Jane finds an outlet in her letters for the frustrations of a restricted life. Like the heroine of a traditional comedy of manners, she complains of the intolerable dullness of life in a country town, namely her native Haddington. She bewails the hardship of being dragged from her cherished studies to listen to the tedious talk of neighbours and to accompany her mother on visits to out-of-town relatives. In 1823, she declares to Eliza:

I must dwell in the open world, live amid life; but *here* is no life, no motion, no variety. It is the dimmest, dearest spot (I verily believe) in the Creator's universe; to look round in it, one might imagine that time had made a stand: the shopkeepers are to be seen standing at the doors of their shops, in the very same postures in which they have stood there ever since I was born.

Eliza also learns that "A tea-party, a quarrel, or a *report* of a marriage now and then, are the only excitements this precious little borough affords."

Family visits bring no ease. Carried off unwillingly for a three-week stay at her maternal grandfather's house, Templand, in Dumfriesshire, she protests:

If ever my excellent Mother gets me wheedled here again!... Oh my beloved German, my precious, precious time!... We have got my Uncle from Liverpool, his wife, the most horrid woman on the face of the earth, and five such children! in addition to our *family-party*; and what with the mother's scolding and the children's squalling, and my Uncle's fighting and my Grandfather fidgetting, I am half-demented.

While Jane aches to return to her books, and especially to her German studies, the pleasure she takes in them does not prevent her from relishing the attentions of suitors. In her letters, she unawares bequeaths to posterity a record of the antics of a number of disappointed young men. One of these is the young Dr. Fyffe, whom Jane thinks for a time she has disposed of as a lover but retained as a friend. When he is about to leave the district, she admits she will miss him, and then, as she later writes to Thomas,

He swore I made him weaker than any child; stormed through the room, talking with violence on the most trivial matters, and completed my dismay with a fit of laughter that made every drop of blood in me stand still.... Forgetful of everything but pity and terror, I threw my arms about his neck and besought him to be himself.

Among the shortcomings of this “little gunpowder man of medicine” is his jealousy of another suitor who is no more welcome to the lady than he is. She laments to Thomas that her Evil Genius prompted her in the summer of 1824 at Musselburgh Races to attract male eyes by a display of horsemanship and a “pretty riding-dress,” and especially the eyes of Dugald Gilchrist, a young man whose silken locks, sweet eyes, and musical voice do not compensate for his deficiencies of fire, wit and elegance. Unfortunately, his attractions take her mother’s fancy, and he and his young sister Catherine receive an invitation to visit. He proposes, she rejects him, and, to prevent a renewal of his offer, pretends to be engaged. He weeps himself into a feverish condition, and Jane’s mother persuades her to walk with him in the cool evening air. Suddenly, she tells Thomas,

he gave a sort of cry and fell down at my side. I shut my eyes and stood motionless: I could not stir to assist him; I thought he was dead. Fortunately my Mother had more presence of mind; she ran up to us when she saw him fall, and lifted him off his face. God! how he looked! He was as white as ashes, and his eyes were wide open and fixed.

Jane makes a fortunate escape when she avoids marrying her mother’s cousin Captain James Baillie. As they become closely acquainted in 1824, Jane enthuses about him both to Eliza and to Thomas. She teases the former:

‘You were sure that he was not a person at all to *my* taste.’ *Lord help your simplicity!* how you mistook the matter! He is my very *beau-idéal* in all respects but one. His nature is the most affectionate I ever knew, his spirit the most magnificent; he has a clear, quick intellect, a lively fancy: with beauty, brilliance, sensibility, native gracefulness, and courtly polish, he wants but *genius* to be — the destiny of my life.

Thomas has to read her description of Baillie as “the handsomest, most fascinating young man in England,” but in time he is reassured that this resplendent officer, who arrives “in a fine emblazoned chariot with four horses; and all glittering in jewels, from the gold pendant of his rose-coloured

cap, to the ruby buckles of his slippers" compares to himself as "A mere painted butterfly, fluttering over the flowery surface of the Earth,—the creature of a sun-shiny day!" compares to "the royal Eagle, who soars aloft thro' the regions of ether, and feasts his eye on the glories of the sun."

Alas! Captain Baillie, like the George Wickham of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, is all fine looks and outward polish. By 1842, Jane is informing her cousin Jeannie Welsh that she has just written to him "four pages of passionate remonstrance against the folly—not to say infamy—of his past and present course of life!" In 1844, she reports that he attempts to beg two sovereigns from her, ostensibly to redeem a portrait of his illegitimate son from a pawnshop. Soon afterwards, he writes to her from prison.

On 24 July 1825, Jane sends Thomas, who has advanced from friend to lover, that she has concealed from him her former passion for the preacher Edward Irving, though that passion did not stop her from persuading Irving to honour his prior engagement to Isabella Martin, the daughter of a fellow clergyman. It is Irving who, four years earlier, took Thomas Carlyle to call on the Welshes at Haddington. A few days after this visit, Thomas writes to Jane about her studies, and the long correspondence which is the medium of their courtship begins. Since her adored father's death more than a year and a half before, there has been a gap in her life. Slowly Thomas, a young scholar and thinker belonging to a rural family of a lower social class, and as yet poor, begins to fill it. Jane, who is romantic enough to adore genius not only in Byron and Rousseau but even in Napoleon, is soon satisfied she has an intimate friend who possesses it. "When will your genius," she asks in the summer of 1823, "burst through all obstructions and find its proper place?" As her father had done, Thomas encourages her in her scholarly pursuits, and he holds up a lure before her, claiming, when they have known each other less than a year, "I see a niche in the Temple of Fame—still vacant or but poorly filled—which I imagine your powers will yet enable you, if so cultivated, to occupy with glory to yourself and profit to others."

Seven months after Jane and Thomas begin to correspond, a warning sign appears. She cautions him:

Now Sir, once for all, I beg you to understand that I dislike as much as my Mother disapproves your somewhat too ardent expressions of Friendship towards me ... if you cannot write to me as if—as if you were married, you need never waste ink or paper on me more.... I will be to you a true, a constant, and devoted *Friend*—but not a *Mistress*, a *Sister* but not a *Wife*.

At this time, Jane is declaring to Eliza that she will never marry because she will never find a husband equal to the creations of Rousseau's imagination in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. Thomas she compares with that author's St. Preux:

He has *his* talents, *his* vast and cultivated mind, *his* vivid imagination, *his* independence of soul, and *his* high-souled principles of honour. But then – Ah, these *buts!* – St. Preux never kicked the fire-irons, nor made puddings in his teacup. Want of Elegance! Want of Elegance, Rousseau says, is a defect which no woman can overlook.

By the end of 1822, Thomas cannot hide the fact that he is deeply in love with Jane. In September of the next year, he announces that his love for her will never cease, but that he will not be able to continue their correspondence after she marries. Her alarm is immediate: "Do you think I will ever marry at such a cost?... If 'Mrs. –' is to be estranged from your affections, I am Jane Welsh for life." Remembering her prostration at her father's death, she exclaims:

Were I again to lose the friend of my soul, again to be left alone in the midst of society, – loving no one and yet possessing the faculty to love, perceiving nothing but the blackness of death in the universe around me; in the bustle and glitter and grandeur of the earth, nothing but the parade of a funeral, – Great God, how wretched, how ruined I should be!

About a year later, she quotes one of his own letters back at him when she welcomes his return from France:

Well, I am flattering myself that your *residence on the Continent* will have made you a bit of a Dandy. At least you will not speak Annandale, surely, after having *travelled* – Apollo and the Nine Muses forbid! It would be so delightful, when I go South, to find you about a hundredth-part as 'elegant' as my amiable Cousin [Captain James Baillie]! I am quite sure that I should fall in love with you if I were, and then – 'Oh Heavens what a thing it might be *if it prospered*' – surely you will own no man had ever such inducement to study the Graces.

Her adoration of the genius does not prevent her from teasing the man. Learning that he has actually received a letter from the great Goethe, she chides him, "I expect to find you grown monstrous vain when we meet," and she is not afraid to confront him with a firm order: nine months before

their marriage, his proposal to rent a cottage and have two of his sisters care for it draws the retort, "Indeed you will do no such thing; for this project you will find, on reflection, to be none of the wisest."

In February 1825, Jane feels she is "half-engaged" to Thomas, and in September, duly warned about his mother's anxiety about her "rude irregular *ménage*," she visits his home, Hoddam Hill, and charms his family, which is so much poorer than her own. Looking back on this interlude in her life, she writes:

I must not keep house with you in Salisbury Street, as I did at Hoddam Hill – dear delightful *Hill*, where we lived together so happily – so married-like! Oh! when shall we have such Sabbath weeks again? Not, I suppose, till we are married in good earnest.

Jane has already made it clear to Thomas that her love for him "is deep and calm, more like the quiet river, which refreshes and beautifies where it flows, than the torrent which bears down and destroys." What she demands of him materially is far from extravagant: "I merely wish to see you earning a *certain* livelihood, and exercising the profession of a gentleman. For the rest, it is a matter of great indifference to me whether you have hundreds or thousands a-year, whether you are a Mr. or a Duke." In view of their subsequent history, one assurance of Thomas should be remembered: "I tell you I have firmly resolved that your mind *shall* not run to waste, but come forth in its native beauty, before all is done, and let the world behold it."

The wedding takes place on 17 October 1826. In marrying Thomas, Jane espouses a man whose values she shares and whose puncturing of nineteenth century society's widespread self-satisfaction she approves of. Though in later life he seems to be on the way to doctrines uncomfortably akin to fascism, the young Carlyle, like Dickens, aims some much needed moral barbs at his complacent contemporaries. He believes that all humans should strive to develop strong convictions about their relationship to the mystery of their existence in this universe and that their lives, whatever social class they belong to, should be anchored in purposeful work. Observing the society around him, he complains that the aristocracy devotes itself to such frivolous activities as shooting partridges, that the middle class is devoted to making money, and that the lower class is misguidedly demanding democracy. He likes to express contempt for what he calls "gigmanity" – the cult of respectability, which involves attaching supreme importance to such signs of superiority as owning a gig. Jane's letters, in keeping with Thomas's views, denounce those who devote their

lives to trivialities. From the home of her female cousins in Liverpool, she writes to Thomas:

Here sufficient for the day is the marketing, and eating, and dressing thereof! And a new satin dress can diffuse perfect beatitude through an immortal soul! The circulating library satisfies all their intellectual wants, and flirtation all the wants of their hearts ... somehow 'I as one solitary individual' would rather remain in Hell – the Hell I make for myself with my restless *digging* – than accept this drowsy placidity.

Writing to her friend Mrs. Russell in Scotland, Jane is equally scathing about London society:

[Sir Robert] Peel's death came like a black cloud over this scene of so-called 'gaities,' for a few days – but only for a few days. Nothing leaves a long impression here. People dare not let themselves think or feel in this centre of frivolity and folly; they would go mad if they did, and universally commit suicide; for to 'take a thoct and mend' is far from their intention.

Like her husband, Jane rejects the Christian doctrine of Incarnation and Atonement, but her references to God, Providence and Destiny show that she shares his deeply rooted belief in an overarching power. She is also convinced, as are Dr. Johnson and Keats, that the world is not a place made for joy: "who in a world like this," she asks her cousin Jeannie Welsh in 1843, "that has any more reflection than the Brutes can be what they call *happy* at my age? – but I am better than happy in having learnt to do without happiness." The easy doctrine that virtue brings happiness she despises, along with the Unitarians who notably espouse it, though she does strike up something of a friendship with the Unitarian minister James Martineau (brother of the famous Harriet), whose mind she respects. Once, in Liverpool, to reduce the friction with her churchgoing relatives, she agrees to attend the chapel where Martineau is preaching:

The poor man had got something to say which he did not believe, and could not conceal the difficulty he found in *conforming*. Flowers of rhetoric world without end, to cover over the barrenness of the soil! I felt quite *wae* for him; he looked such a picture of conscientious anguish while he was overlaying his *Christ* with similes and metaphors, that people might not see what a wooden puppet he had made of him to himself, – in great

need of getting *flung overboard* after the Virgin Mary, ‘*Madame sa Mère.*’

Jane has only contempt for “the emotionalness of the Wesleyan Methodist, — having its home in the senses rather than in the soul”: she asks, “Was not Christ Himself, on the cross, calm, simple?... Was there ever in the whole history of His life a trace of excitement?” When she and Thomas visit Edward Irving in London and find that he takes the uttering of meaningless gibberish by some of his followers as the speaking in tongues of Pentecost, she is appropriately distressed at his folly. Contrariwise, the pious who bear their religion lightly while believing fervently earn her respect: “to you I may safely confess,” she confides to the Rev. John Sterling, “that I care almost nothing about what a man believes in comparison with how he believes” and she honours an Irish clergyman who “has refused two bishoprics in the course of his life, for conscience sake.” She is satisfied that God has “planted in our hearts a sense of *justice* and of self-preservation,” and worrying over the question of immortality, she quotes Thomas back to himself:

‘My dear, you really ought not to go on with that sort of thing — all that questioning leads to nothing. We know nothing about it and cannot know, and what better should we be if we did?’
 ‘All very true, Mr. Carlyle, but’ — at least one cannot accept such solution on the authority of others, even of the wisest — one must have worked it out for oneself. And the working of it out is a sore business, very sore; especially with ‘a body apt to fall into holes.’

In an illness of 1864 that racks her body and makes her fear for her sanity, she exclaims, “Nobody can help me! Only God: and can I wonder if God take no heed of me when I have all my life taken so little heed of Him?” She holds that only “the exceptional natures” can be improved by suffering — most deteriorate.

Jane encounters her first great trial in May 1828, when she and Thomas move from Edinburgh, where they have lived comfortably enough, to Craigenputtock, a farm which she has described to Thomas before their marriage as “the most barren spot in the county of Dumfriesshire.” At the end of July, she informs Eliza Stodart:

Craigenputtock is no such frightful place as the people call it... The solitude is not so irksome as one might think. If we are cut off from good society, we are also delivered from bad; the roads are less pleasant to walk on than the pavement of Princes Street, but we have horses to ride, and instead of shopping and making

calls, I have bread to bake and chickens to hatch. I read and work, and talk with my Husband, and never weary.

Looking back long after, she remembers how bitterly she, “who had been so petted at home, whose comfort had been studied by everybody in the house,” resented her new chores until she recognized “that it is not the greatness or littleness of ‘the duty nearest hand,’ but the spirit in which one does it, that makes one’s doing noble or mean!”

Even though her kindly mother-in-law sends supplies and Eliza Stodart makes purchases for her in Edinburgh, her life at Craigenputtock remains exceedingly hard. A visiting pedlar describes this lonely place as “altogether *heathenish*.” The worst ordeal is a severe winter. “Oh for a sight of the green fields again,” she moans to Eliza, “or even the black *peat-moss*—anything rather than this wide waste of blinding snow.”

In June 1834, the couple escape from their solitude, but not from all their troubles, when they move to London, accompanied by a maidservant, Bessy Barnet, and establish the home in which they are to remain for the rest of their difficult lives together. The London climate makes constant assaults on Jane’s health, and her own wifely conscience increases the burden that her husband’s heavy demands impose on her. After eighteen months in the city, she suggests to Thomas’s mother:

You are to look upon it as the most positive proof of my regard that I write to you in my present circumstances; that is to say, with the blood all frozen in my brains, and my brains turned to a solid mass of ice; for such has, for several days, been the too cruel lot of your poor little daughter-in-law at *Lunnon*.

The summer heat—like “no other heat I ever experienced”—and “the dark dismal fog” are other seasonal torments.

Besides the unhealthy climate, Jane endures much from Thomas’s self-absorption. On the one hand, she takes great pride in his achievements and growing fame; on the other, she suffers often from his neglect and at times from his domestic tyranny. The composition of the books that make him famous and fill her with pride—she considers *Sartor Resartus* “a real ‘*work of Genius*’” and believes *Past and Present* is “calculated to waken up the Soul of England”—imposes an almost intolerable burden on her. She describes her fate as she lies in bed with influenza while Thomas works on *Oliver Cromwell’s Letters and Speeches*:

About *thrice* a day—on the average—Carlyle pops in his head between the curtains and asks firstly ‘how are you now, Jane?’

Secondly; 'have you had anything to eat?' Thirdly, 'you are not thinking of getting up yet?' – then off to his Cromwell in which he lives, moves, and has his being at present – as is always the way with him when he is writing a book.

(Jane always calls her husband Carlyle (or occasionally Mr. C.), even in her letters to his mother – perhaps a sign of the awe in which she holds his genius.)

Most often Thomas is almost oblivious to his sick wife's condition, but when his eyes do open he shows a real concern. She describes how one day,

from six in the morning till six at night I carried on one incessant alternation of fainting, retching, screaming, even Cromwell had to give place to me! – and Carlyle was out and in fifty times during the day – not with the usual 'how are you now Jane' – but – 'merciful heaven what *is* this? – what *can* I do for you?'

For her part, Jane is early dedicated to the daily care of Thomas. From Craigenputtock, she writes to Eliza Stodart that she will not be visiting the city without him: "It would be poor entertainment for one in Edinburgh or anywhere else to think one's husband was here in the desert *alone*, his stockings get[ting] all into holes, and perhaps even his tea running down." In London, his demands multiply. She can be afraid to enter his room for more writing paper, looks forward to his reception of his dinner "with a sort of panic, which the event for most part justifies," and negotiates with neighbours to put an end to the animal noises and piano music which disturb him. Her endurance of the construction of a silent room proves futile as the room proves not to be silent. A strain of meanness in Thomas becomes visible in one of her complaints: "Decidedly I begin to be weary of *doing* all the *bores* – while if ever perchance an exceptional human being drops in *that one* is carried off to smoke in the garden or talk tête à tête in the Library." The man's unhealthy habits add to her stress: she often warns him against his late hours, unwise eating, and excessive consumption of tea.

When Thomas is away from home, Jane undertakes radical cleaning and alterations to the house. She herself paints and glazes and supervises renovations. A passage in a letter of 1843 to her cousin Jeannie Welsh constitutes an indictment of her taskmaster together with a confession of her own share of responsibility for his behaviour:

I caught a fine rheumatism in the back of my head and shoulders – in consequence of spending a whole forenoon in

papering the broken parts of the plaster and all the afternoon of the same day in nailing carpets—*that* is a thing that Helen [her servant] *can not* do—and the hands of me are absolutely blackened and coarsified with the quantity of it I have had to transact this season.... The fact is I have spoiled Mr. C.—I have accustomed him to have all wants supplied ‘without visible means’.... When one had not any money—it was all well—I never grudged my work—but now that we have enough to live on it would be good sense in him to say ‘get in a carpenter to nail your carpets’ and a few other such considerate suggestions.

In 1858 she upbraids Thomas, who is on a visit to Scotland:

to see you constantly discontented, and as much so with me, apparently, as with all other things, when I have neither the strength and spirits to bear up against your discontent, nor the obtuseness to be indifferent to it—that has done me more harm than you have the least notion of. You have not the least notion what a killing thought it is to have put into one’s heart, gnawing there day and night, that one ought to be dead, since one can no longer make the same exertions as formerly.

Elsewhere she argues:

C. should have had ‘a strong-minded woman’ for wife, with a perfectly sound liver, plenty of *solid fat*, and mirth and good-humour world without end—men do best with their opposites. *I* am too like himself in some things—especially as to the state of our livers, and so we aggravate one another’s tendencies to despair!

Jane is quite capable of lecturing Thomas on his shortcomings. When he writes home complaining of the discomfort his Scottish host is subjecting him to, she is appropriately sceptical:

When you go to any house, one knows it is because you choose to go; and when you stay, it is because you choose to stay. You don’t, as weakly amiable people do, sacrifice yourself for the pleasure of ‘others.’ So pray do not think it necessary to be wishing yourself at home, and ‘all that sort of thing,’ on paper.

A review of G. M. Trevelyan’s 1953 publication *Carlyle: An Anthology* is headed “The Forgotten Thunder of an Angry Prophet,” and the man Jane forsakes her comfortable home to marry is indeed a formidable character—

in society as well as domestically. The couple has been resident in London for less than three months when Jane writes to his mother that he “seems to be regarded with a feeling of mingled terror and love in all companies.” She has a vision of him at the head of his table facing people he has been unwilling to invite and there “brandishing the carving knife and ordering his guests to ‘vanish in God or the Devil’s name lest a worse thing befall them!’”

In view of such an uneasy relationship, one should perhaps not be surprised to find Jane writing to her cherished Jeannie Welsh in 1851:

Oh Babbie! how I wish it had not been your *idea* to pitch your tent in this ‘valley of the shadow of *marriage*’ —it is a very *relaxing air* I am sure and peculiarly unsuitable to *your* constitution. But certainly I am not the best authorized person to tell people how they should manage their lives under that head of Method — having made such a mess of my own life — God help me!

Yet alongside the anger and resentment, a strong affection flows both ways between this demanding man and his protesting wife. On Thomas’s side, it is evident in the letters he writes to her whenever they are apart and the careful attention he pays her after she is stricken by her mother’s death in 1842 as well as his purchase of a one-horse brougham for her when she is “old and frail.” Affection can even shine through his playful teasing in 1846 when two jealous wives conceive they are in danger from her: “This morning as I was sitting very half-awake over my coffee, he suddenly exclaimed — ‘just to look at you there, looking as if butter would not melt in your mouth, and think of the profligate life you lead!’” For her part, Jane depends on the letters they write each other daily when they are apart. In 1850, she describes his, which comfort her during her frenetic house cleaning, as “my only comfort thro’ this *black* business,” and when, the previous year, she steels herself to revisit Scotland for the first time since her mother’s death, it is with him that she feels she must share her feelings on returning to her native town of Haddington: “to no other mortal would I, or indeed could I, write from this place at this moment; but it comes natural to me to direct a letter to you here, and that is still something, is it not?”

The plaintive note here may be related to one of the greatest of the trials that scar Jane’s life, her husband’s obsessive adoration of Lady Harriet Baring (from her father-in-law’s death in May 1848, Lady Ashburton). This gifted aristocrat has a passion for being surrounded by distinguished men ready to attend her at her bidding. Jane pours out her fluctuating feelings about this woman in letters to her Liverpool cousins — her mother’s nieces Helen, Margaret, and Jeannie Welsh.

Both propriety and curiosity spur Lady Harriet to become acquainted with her venerator's wife. In May 1843, when Jane first meets her rival, Thomas has already succumbed to her witchery and the phrase "Lady Harriet Baring's love-making to my husband" has appeared in a letter to Jeannie Welsh. By August 1844, she can declare, "I begin to have a real *admiration* for that woman—her *fascination* of Carlyle proves her to be the most masterly coquette of Modern Times!" Eventually Jane finds that waves of anger and jealousy corrode her peace of mind, and she loathes the way in which Thomas subjects himself and her to the lady's queen-like demands. In November 1846, she protests to Helen that after Christmas they must stay with the Barings for a month: "So the Lady Harriet wills *at present*—and her Ladyship's will is become the law of this house!"

As the years pass, Jane's increasing anguish at the alienation of her husband's affection is most fully expressed in her private journals but is far from absent from her letters. In October 1851, after Thomas has just spent time with Lady Harriet and her husband in Paris, she writes to Jeannie:

She [Lady Harriet] brought me a woollen scarf of *her own knitting* during their stay in Switzerland and a cornelian bracelet and—a similar scarf only smaller for Mr. C.—in fact I believe the dear woman would never have done all that knitting for *me* unless as a handsome preparation for doing the comforter for Mr. C.

Particularly dismaying is her *cri de coeur* to Thomas in October 1850 when Lady Harriet wants her to prolong her visit: "Who cares one doit for me here, that I should stay here, when you, who still care a little for me, more anyhow than any other person living does, are again at home?"

In spite of all the hurt and rivalry, the unsteady relationship between the two devotees of Carlyle's genius does have some rewards for them both. Lady Harriet is able to call on Jane to keep company with her mother, Lady Sandwich, whom Jane much likes but whom she herself "can hardly endure"; to entertain Thackeray's children when they, along with their father, are her guests; to help her with "flirting young Ladies and gentlemen"; to serve as a human dictionary when she is learning German; and to play chess with her "in her private sitting-room—which is the beautifullest room you can imagine"—when she is unwell. Sometimes Jane stays with Lady Harriet when Thomas is away from home, and on one such occasion she sends him an account of her venture into the Barings' kitchen to instruct the cook how to make orange marmalade. Referring to an episode in the Italians' struggle to expel their Austrian overlords, she writes:

that is one job 'got thro' with an honourable throughbearing,' — a *Savoy's Expedition*, in its own way, *not* turned back by a toll-bar! For I assure you I would rather lead a 'few brave men' against the Austrians than present myself alone in that kitchen amidst the scowls of women in pinafores, and suppressed cries of '*à bas la systême*,' — to give orders and see them obeyed. Mrs. Achison, however, is fairly *got under* now, and the kitchen-maid would go thro' boiling sugar for me.

The woman named, indeed, thanks her next morning "for having taught her such a good and beautiful thing!"

For her part, Lady Harriet enlarges Jane's experience by introducing her to the highest rank of society and the lifestyle of the very rich. She includes her among the guests at Bath House in London, at Bay House on the south coast, at the Grange — her parents-in-laws' magnificent home in Hampshire — and at the Ashburton estate at Addiscombe in Surrey. In September 1845, Jane makes her first visit to the London residence, when Lady Harriet, being indisposed, sends a brougham for her. She describes her arrival to Thomas:

I was rather surprised to be set down at a great Unknown House, and conducted thro' large Halls and staircases by unknown servants. If it had not been for the indubitability of the brougham, I should have begun to fancy myself kidnapped, or in a Fairy Tale.

Five years later, at his urging, she reluctantly accompanies Thomas to the Bath House Ball and discovers,

it is an additional idea for life to have seen such a party — all the Duchesses one ever heard tell of blazing in diamonds, all the young beauties of the season, all the distinguished statesmen &c., &c. were to be seen among the six or seven hundred people present — and the rooms all hung with artificial roses looked like an Arabian Nights entertainment ... Lady Ashburton receiving all these people with her grand-Lady airs was also a sight worth seeing.

On many occasions, however mixed her motives may be, Lady Harriet shows kindness to Jane, breaking convention, for example, to order her "some hot soup — *before dinner*" when she arrives at Bay House in a "*weak state*," recommending remedies for her chronic headaches, and offering

her a refuge from the paint fumes during renovations at 5, Cheyne Row when Thomas is travelling.

Occasionally a snatch of Lady Harriet's talk is preserved in a letter of Jane's. On the latter's claiming that "it greatly took away from one's sympathy with a man's religious scruples to find that they were merely symptoms of a diseased liver," Lady Harriet replies, that "until the dominion of the liver was precisely ascertained, it were safer to speak respectfully of it." She is, Jane reports, "the woman of largest intellect I have ever seen" and also a "gay hearted, high spirited woman ... the enemy of *cant* and lover of all mirthful things." She despises sentiment and wields the phrase "all about feelings" as a favourite term of censure.

In her judgment of Lady Harriet, Jane wavers. Quite early in their acquaintance, she remarks, "I have an unconquerable persuasion that she does not and never can like me!" While giving her credit for her "good sense and perfect good breeding," she feels there will never be "warm affection" on either side. As their intercourse continues, she finds that Lady Harriet is sometimes very kind to her and sometimes neglectful. When her hostess leaves her sick in bed unvisited, she concludes that "in great Houses ... the aim of existence is to *ignore* as much as possible that there is such a thing as human suffering in any form," and she notices how quickly Lady Harriet casts off her initial grief at the death of their mutual friend Charles Buller. She comes to feel "a certain sorrow" that wealth and high rank have condemned such a gifted woman to a merely decorative life: when the subject arises, Lady Harriet explains that to live more productively, "one would have to begin by quarrelling with all one's husband's relations and one's own."

On one of the rare occasions when Jane seems really at ease in aristocratic company, she, Lady Harriet, and Lady Sandwich are dressing dolls for charity. The servants refuse to have anything to do with the dolls – footmen told to bring them "simply disappear." Jane records:

I remarked on this with some impatience yesterday, and Lady A[shburton] answered, 'Perfectly true, Mrs. Carlyle – they *won't bring the doll!* – I know it as well as you do – but what would you have me do? – turn all the servants men and women out of the house.... Perhaps it would be the right thing to do – but then what should we do next week without servants when all the company come?' Such is the slavery the grandest people live under *to what they call* their '*inferiors*.'

A woman as prominent in the letters as Lady Harriet is Geraldine Jewsbury; Jane sees in these two females "the opposite poles of woman-nature."

Though there is a rebellious side to Jane's character—she smokes, climbs over a locked churchyard wall at Haddington at the age of forty-eight, and is the only member of her family to acknowledge the existence of her “unlawful cousin” Jackie Welsh—her boldness has quite stringent limits. She opposes the publication of her friend Miss Jewsbury's first novel, *Zoe: the History of Two Lives*, because it exposes “whole minds naked as before the fall” and refuses the dedication of a later book by this author as she does not wish to promenade herself “as an ‘emancipated’ woman.”

Over the years, Jane's feeling for Geraldine Jewsbury seesaws between love and contempt. Faced with the manuscript of *Zoe*, she begins to think of its unmarried author's need for financial security in her old age, and takes the work to Chapman and Hall, who, to her astonishment, publish it in 1845, despite subsequent qualms at its feminist questioning of the sacredness of marriage, motherhood, and religious faith. Jane is similarly critical of her friend's second novel, *The Half Sisters* (1848). Only with the third, *Marian Withers* (1851), does she decide that Geraldine “has made an immense progress in common-sense and common decency.”

A plain woman, Geraldine is assiduous in her pursuit of men. When Jane assures Jeannie Welsh she need not apologise for a preoccupation with her domestic staff, she observes, “I think, talk, and write about my own servant as much as Geraldine does about her lovers.” Jane, however, turns out to be right when she remarks:

On the whole I rather imagine no man will ever be found so constituted as to fall in love with Geraldine and think of her as a Wife — which is a pity — as her heart seems to me set on being married to any sort of a male biped who could maintain her — at all risks!

In keeping with her emotional makeup, Geraldine also has intense friendships with women. Jane describes her surprise at finding herself the object of her friend's “mad, lover-like jealousy” and tells how,

I set the whole company into fits of laughter, the other day, by publicly saying to her after she had been flirting with a certain Mr. [Telo] that “I wondered she should expect me to behave decently to her after she had for a whole evening been making love before my very face to *another man!*”

Once, when she is sufficiently exasperated by her temperamental friend's behaviour, she bursts out, “Geraldine, until you can behave like a gentle-

woman, if not like a woman of common-sense, I cannot possibly remain in the same room with you."

As wearing as her erratic behaviour and hysterics can be, Geraldine has a real devotion to Jane. Although she "can't cook or make a bed" and is unable to help out in the absence of a competent servant, she and her brother prove attentive and thoughtful hosts when the convalescent Jane stays in their Manchester home. She can be "very teasing and absurd—but let one be ill—suffering—especially *morbidly* suffering—and then one knows what Geraldine is."

The letters of Jane Carlyle portray such a wealth of characters that in this respect they rival Horace Walpole's. They show that she wins the respect and even the devotion of many people. Among them, Erasmus Darwin, the cultured, bachelor elder sibling of Charles, who continually drives her in his carriage and is, she says, "the likeliest thing to a brother I ever had in the world." She is pleasantly surprised when this perfect "*English gentleman*" is capable of enjoying her rebellious friend's *Zoe*. With Erasmus, Jane seems always at ease, whereas her friendship with the daughter of Lord and Lady Stanley is tinged with embarrassment. "Blanche," she writes to Thomas, "has confided to me all the secrets of her heart—her ideas about her father and mother and sisters and lovers." Once she throws herself on Jane's neck and exclaims, "Oh! does not everyone love you?" As a married woman, she is no more restrained: Jane complains that "the young Countess ... continues to send me letters *so* confidential, that I feel as if I were being constituted *dry nurse* to her soul!—without having been 'trained to the business.'"

Very different from Blanche Stanley is Amely Bölte, a German governess and translator who is apt to sit in company staring at people silently, but Jane acknowledges that she has brought about a "miraculous improvement" in the mischievous Theresa Reviss (a probable model for Becky Sharp in Thackeray's novel *Vanity Fair*), a protégée of Mrs. Buller. This lady according to Jane, "had tired of parties, of politics, of most things in heaven and earth" and decided that taking on this pretty, clever daughter of a disreputable woman would bring her "the excitement of making a scandal and braving public opinion, and of educating a flesh and blood girl into the heroine of the three-volume novel, which she had for years been trying to write, but wanted perseverance to elaborate." The Bullers, whose two boys Thomas tutors in his bachelor days, are good friends of Jane. "Mrs. Buller," she writes, while staying at their son Reginald's rectory in Troston, Suffolk, "is kind to me beyond expression—not as people are kind to their visitors generally, but as if I were the daughter of the house. She speaks to me so *out of her heart* as women of the world rarely speak at all—and hardly ever to a person so much younger than themselves." When the other son, Charles, a most promising young politician, dies suddenly in

1848, it is for Jane his mother sends, and Jane, though racked by insomnia and discouraged by Thomas, feels, as she afterwards explains, "I could do no otherwise than go."

When she is with the family, Jane partners Mr. Buller at chess. She describes how, challenged "in the most provokingly slighting tone" to play more skilfully, "I felt myself injured—he should see I was determined that I *could* play if I liked—and so I *beat* him the next game and the next—and he has had sore thrashing of his brains for any game he has won from me since."

Among other players Jane faces at the chessboard is Edward Sterling, editor of *The Times*, whose leading articles earn him the nickname of the Thunderer. When she has resided in London for little more than a year, she writes to one of Thomas's sisters about the friends she has made including the Sterlings, who, she enthuses, "from the master of the house down to the footman, are devoted to me body and soul." In the summer of 1837, Edward Sterling and his wife take Jane with them on a tour in the south of England. They refer to her as the young lady (she is thirty-six) and seem to regard her accompanying them as a favour, despite some moments of friction on political grounds. She disturbs Mrs. Sterling by asking why Oliver Cromwell's portrait is not in the Bodleian Picture Gallery along with those of so many of his contemporaries. Shortly afterwards, apropos of the stupid stubbornness of donkeys being useful on dangerous ground, she remarks, "Now for the first time in my life I perceive why Conservatives are so stupidly stubborn; stubbornness, it seems, is a succedaneum for *sense*"; the Thunderer retorts, "Do you know, Mrs. Carlyle, you would be a vast deal more amiable, if you were not so damnably clever!"

Mrs. Sterling's great kindness to Jane has already led the latter to write to her mother-in-law, "I feel to her as to a third mother," and when the irascible Edward Sterling becomes a widower, he leans on Jane, whom he refers to as "that Angel of Consolation and Mercy," even though friction between them erupts intermittently. She details her reaction when he comes out with "the most monstrous impertinences" concerning Thomas's *Past and Present*, which she knows he has not read: "I gave him of course as *good* or a pretty deal *better* than he brought and came away—abruptly—telling him that he must learn good manners before I visited his house or received him into mine again." Two days later he delivers a letter of apology.

The Sterlings' sons—John, who is a clergyman, and Anthony, who is a captain in the army—also have a strong attachment to Jane, who expresses her puzzlement to Jeannie Welsh: "I wonder what strange attraction lies in me for all of the blood of Sterling? For Father and Mother and *both* sons I have been more than any other woman—not married to them."

While Jane is ready enough to travel in England, as she does with the Sterlings, for seven years after her mother's death she cannot bring herself to revisit Scotland. As a young girl, she is often at loggerheads with her mother, and when, thirteen years after her marriage, she spends time with her at Ayr, she writes to Thomas: "My Mother continues the worst-natured of women; but I let her be doing, and keep 'never minding.' Once a day, generally after breakfast, she tries a fall with me. And in three words I give her to understand that I will not be snubbed." When the day of bereavement comes, however, in February 1842, Jane can find no consolation. After four months have passed, she laments to her Edinburgh friend Eliza Stodart, now Mrs. Aitken:

I feel as helpless and desolate as a little child turned adrift in the world! I who have so many friends! But what are friends? What is a husband even, compared with one's Mother?... I do not think I shall ever have the heart to set foot in Scotland any more. Alas! alas! what a changed Scotland for me — a place of graves!

Not till 1849, can Jane bring herself to revisit her native land, but once having done so, she returns seven more times.

Apart from her and her mother's old friend Mary Russell, whose husband was Mrs. Welsh's physician during her last illness, the people in Scotland whom Jane most loves are the aged Misses Donaldson — Catherine, Jane's godmother, and Jess, who watches over the now blind Catherine — and Betty Braid, a maid to the Welsh household from the time of Jane's childhood. A letter to Thomas conveys the fervour of the Donaldson sisters' welcome in 1857:

Miss Jess, tumbling into my arms on the threshold, 'faintly ejaculating' (as a novelist would say), 'Our Precious!' 'Our Beloved!' and beyond her my godmother, advancing with her hands stretched out, groping the air, and calling out in an excited way, "Is that my bairn?"

Explaining that she does not yet know the date of her return, Jane tells Thomas:

At the least allusion to my departure, my dear old friends fall to *fluttering* on their chairs like birds frightened in their nests; and utter such plaintive, almost sobbing protests, that I haven't the heart to pursue the subject.

Thomas also learns that Betty Braid, long married and now dedicated to the care of her adult invalid son, displays an equal devotion to the middle-aged lady whose childhood days she remembers so well:

how she does love me, that woman, and how good and pious-hearted she is! While I sat on her knee, with my arms about her neck, and she called me her 'dear bairn,' and looked at me as if she would have made me welcome to her 'skin,' I felt, as nearly as possible, perfectly happy – just fancy that!

Told that the strange object on Jane's head in a photograph is a bonnet and that it would be "a shame" for a woman of her age to go bareheaded, Betty responds, "Ay, ay, I dar' say, it's no very richt; but ye ken, bairn, ye wasna brocht up to dae just like ither folk."

On Jane's visits to Scotland, three sisters of her late father constitute a second tier of hostesses. These evangelical Edinburgh spinsters – Anne, Elizabeth and Grace – long to convert their infidel niece; if one of them writes to her, the letter is liable to be accompanied by tracts. In September 1849, following their first reunion, Jane reports to Thomas:

My heart was opened by their kindness to tell them that it was nothing but apprehension of their bothering me about my soul which had estranged me from them so entirely. Anne's reply, given with an arch look and tone, was very nice, 'Indeed, Jeannie, you need not have been afraid of our setting ourselves to reform you; it is plain enough that nothing short of God's own grace can do that.'

On subsequent visits, Jane recognizes their earnest care to make her as comfortable as their religious practice allows:

But on Sundays it is the rule of the house to have *no* dinner! only *tea* two hours earlier than usual; along with which *I*, as a stranger still in the bonds of the flesh, was permitted to have *one* egg. Then, to compensate to the soul for the exigence of the body, *five* sermons were read to me in the course of the day!

Jane explains to Mrs. Russell that she reacts against "the religiosity" as opposed to "the religion" of her aunts' home, and she tells Thomas that she speaks about their "fuss of religion" to the devout but acute Betty Braid, who replies, "My dear! they were idle – plenty to live on, and nocht to do for't; they might hae ta'en to waur; so we maun just thole them, and no compleen."

Dearer to Jane than her Edinburgh aunts is her Liverpool uncle, her mother's brother John. Her strong affection for him survives his "detestable politics," namely the Toryism which is strong enough to make him denounce the Italian patriot Mazzini as "a beggarly refugee turned out of his own country for misconduct." Jane declares that at this outburst, "the only alternative was to hold my peace altogether, or produce a collision that must have ended in my calling a coach." Politics is not the only subject on which they clash:

My uncle at the last minute came to me in the room where I had fortified myself (morally), and asked with a certain enthusiasm, 'Are you not going to church?' 'No, I have no thought of it.' 'And why not?' (crescendo.) 'Because your minister is a ranting jackass, that cracks the drum of one's ears.' 'Who told you that?' (stamping like my grandfather.) 'I do not choose to compromise anyone by naming my authority.' 'And what has that to do with going to a place of worship?' 'Nothing whatever; but it has a great deal to do with staying away from a place that is not of worship.'... The girls [her uncle's two daughters], who came in fear and trembling to pick up my fragments, were astonished to find that I had carried the day. We get on famously, my uncle and I, and by dint of defiance, tempered with kisses, I can manage him better than anyone else does.

Two-sided as it is, Jane's relationship with her Liverpool uncle seems easy and simple when set beside the story of her connection with her brother-in-law. The figure of Dr. John Carlyle is forever popping up in the correspondence as he takes on roles ranging from underminer of all household order to helper in time of need. In the summer of 1825, her first visit to the Carlyle family leaves Jane with "a real affection" for John, who goes on to study medicine at Edinburgh and Munich and then takes a post as travelling physician to Lady Clare. This restless young man finds great difficulty in settling down as a London doctor and in the spring of 1843 parks himself in Thomas's house. Here Jane has to endure the disruption of her daily routine:

now the question presses itself on me with some emphasis 'what will he do or attempt to do next? Above all how long will he stay *here?*—running up and down stairs—fretting me with distracted queries and remarks—making the house—what he has on so many former occasions made it—a scene of *worry* world without end!

When he sends a present of books to Jeannie Welsh, Jane warns her cousin not to take it as “a love-token” for “he does not *love* you the least bit—loves no woman—never did, and never will—not tho’ Trojan Helen should return from the shades to tempt him.” In 1852, however, John marries Phoebe Watts, a widow with three young sons. Jane visits the family and reports to Thomas: “The three boys are as clever, well-behaved boys as I ever saw, and seem excessively fond of ‘the Doctor,’” but their mother gives the impression of being “formal and cold” though she appears “very content with John” and “to suit him entirely.” Two years after the marriage, Phoebe dies.

For all her resentment of his behaviour in her house, Jane does not doubt John’s ability and moral integrity. That ability is both medical and literary. John undertakes the daunting task of translating Dante, and in 1848 she observes that “He is much *subsidied* and improved since he got his *Book* under weigh—especially in regard for *me* he is singularly improved.” As a doctor, he gives sensible advice on diet to Thomas and Jane. The latter’s attitude towards him fluctuates, and it is characteristic of her reservations that when he is to accompany her on her return from Scotland in 1864, she should write to Thomas, “I . . . must be thankful for his escort, the best that offers.”

Friends and relatives are not the only people Jane seeks out in Scotland. When she needs a new servant, she often thinks of her native country as the best place in which to look for one. In the long line of her domestics, Helen Mitchell from Kirkcaldy stands out as the foremost character: she looms almost as large in her employer’s letters as Lady Harriet and Geraldine Jewsbury. Her story begins as a comedy and ends as a tragedy.

Helen’s speech is broad Scots, and her turns of phrase intrigue Jane. If the weather is in an unsettled state, she terms it “dilatatory,” and when she is much impressed by something—such as a fine painting of the Virgin and Child—she exclaims, “Oh, how expensive!” On one occasion, she remarks that men nowadays remarry soon after losing their wives, resumes her dusting, and then observes, “But I *do* think Mr. Carlyle *will be* a very *desultory* widow! he is so *easily put about*—and seems to take no pleasure *in new females!*” Jane decides this woman is “the strangest mixture of philosopher and perfect idiot that I have met with in my life.”

Helen takes up her position with the Carlyles in 1837, and next year Jane decides that she is “very kind.” By September 1839, however, she is confiding to Helen Welsh, “I only pray that she may not bethink her some fine day that her *‘resolution deserves a dram.’*” The fine day comes next summer, when Helen Mitchell is found lying “*dead drunk* on the kitchen floor, amid a chaos of upset chairs, broken crockery, and heaven knows what besides.” Desperate pleadings follow: “what would become of you I should

just like to know; fancy you ill and me not there to take proper care of you!" Jane rescinds the sentence of dismissal.

All goes well for the next six years. Then, in the summer of 1846, Helen's brother, who has all but ignored her while he has made his fortune as a manufacturer in Ireland, invites her to join him and keep his house. Jane feels she cannot properly voice her misgivings:

Helen cries about leaving me; but to be made a Lady of all on a sudden, does not fall in one's way every day!—For myself, I am far from feeling the confidence *she* does in this Brother's promises and prospects; still I can do no other under the circumstances than encourage her to try this opportunity of providing herself an independent home.

Though Helen can write for a time "about her 'servants,' and 'country house,' and 'housefuls of visitors,'" her happiness does not last, and the little shop she resorts to in her native town after her brother abandons her does not succeed. Jane re-engages her, but only a few weeks pass before the Carlyles return from a visit to encounter, when their door is eventually opened, "Helen—her mouth all over blood, her brow and cheeks white with chalk from the kitchen floor—like an excessively *ill got up* stage ghost!" She has held "*drinking parties*" in her employers' absence, manages to obtain more liquor that afternoon, and faces her final dismissal next morning. Jane deposits the woman at the house of a friend in Camden Town. When this friend calls next year, after Helen has served three months for attempted suicide, to obtain a reference for her, Jane recommends "the Chelsea Workhouse, where they would take care to keep drink from her, and *force* her to work."

Almost as memorable a servant as Helen Mitchell is Charlotte Southam, who comes to the Carlyle household in mid-1858 at the age of fifteen. From the beginning, a strong affection springs up between this cheerful girl, so eager to please, and her childless employer. In August, when Charlotte has only been engaged for a few months, Jane goes on a visit to the Ashburtons while Thomas is in Scotland. She leaves 5, Cheyne Row in the care of Charlotte, whose mother comes to sleep in the house each night. Jane writes to her young servant, "Oh, little woman! little woman! I wonder how you get on there, all by yourself, in that 'highly *genteel* seven-roomed House' (as the retired Cheesemonger would describe it) ... I can't help making myself anxious about you." On receiving a reply, she responds:

Good little woman! It was a nice thought in you to write to me, and nicely carried into effect! There was both *consideration* and

energy in the small action, and I am glad to see these qualities in my little woman, as they will be very useful to her in Life, if she give them fair play!

Late in September, Jane returns from a visit to Scotland and reports, "My house was all right; indeed, I never found it as thoroughly cleaned, or the general aspect of things as satisfactory. She is a perfect jewel, that young girl." To Mrs. Russell, she exults that Charlotte is "Far more like an adopted child than a London maid-of-all-work."

In time, Jane's enthusiasm evaporates, and praise gives way to complaints that Charlotte is unmethodical and untidy—complaints that lead to her dismissal. The servants that succeed her all prove less than satisfactory—even "big Charlotte," who serves efficiently but without affection. With "big Charlotte" and her teenage assistant, Sarah, Jane feels she has "taken in *Lodgers* for down-stairs." "With *one* servant," she recalls, "especially with *one Charlotte*, we were *one* family in the House." She refers to "the ever-recurring 'we,' which in little Charlotte's mouth meant Master and Mistress and self; but in the mouth of the new tall Charlotte means, — most decidedly 'I and Sarah.'" In November 1860, Jane re-engages the young Charlotte and finds that she and Sarah, who, she discovers, detested "big Charlotte," make friends in half an hour. To her Liverpool cousin Margaret Welsh, she writes:

if the work of the house does not get done with as much order and method as under the tall Charlotte, it is done with more thoroughness, and infinitely more heartiness and pleasantness; and the 'bread-puddings' are first rate. Sarah's tidiness and method are just what were wanted to correct little Charlotte's born tendency to muddle; while little Charlotte's willingness and affectionateness warm up Sarah's drier, more selfish nature.

Sadly, in the spring of 1861, Jane and the young Charlotte quarrel. It appears that because some friends of the latter persuade her that she should seek advancement, she ceases to be the happy, willing servant she has been. Jane, perhaps confusing getting on in society, "the aim of so much female aspiration and effort," with progressing in one's line of work and making provision for the future, decides that the Devil has got into her favourite and resolves on irrevocable dismissal. When asked for a reference, she testifies that Charlotte is honest, sober and industrious but will say no more in her favour.

The affection between mistress and maid, however, is not so easily dissolved. More than a year later, Jane receives a present of violets from Charlotte, now third housemaid to the Marquis of Camden, and opens her

heart in a letter of thanks: "Oh child! child! you have no idea of the disappointment, the heart-sorrow you caused me." The two remain in touch, and in December 1865 Jane writes to her former maid:

I brought with me from Dumfriesshire, a capital housemaid— whose mother and grandfather were servants to my mother and grandfather.... But with all her cleverness, and nice looks, I have none of the *love* for Jessy I had for *you*! No servant has ever been for me the sort of *adopted* child that *you* were!

Soon after Jane's death, Charlotte marries a carpenter named Mills. She cherishes her mementoes of Jane and remains in friendly contact with Thomas.

Jane is indebted to Mrs. Southam, Charlotte's mother, for the exposure of her very worst servant, an apparently devoted cook named Mary, who has stolen objects from the house and even given birth to an illegitimate child in the Carlyles' kitchen.

There has been some discussion of the difficulties Jane encounters with her servants. Bad luck seems to be as responsible as bad judgment. She may also be a difficult employer as she is something of a perfectionist and eschews "the 'no-interference' principle" of leaving servants to do their work on their own. Her domestic Anne "wondered where there was another lady that could stuff chair-cushions, and do anything that was needed, and be a lady too!"

In 1865, Jane engages her last new servant, Jessie Hiddleston. Their relationship follows a familiar pattern. In July, the newcomer is "So quick, so willing, so intelligent; never needs to be told a thing twice; and so warmly human!" By October, she is a "*vixen*" and not very truthful. January finds her "only amenable to good sharp snubbing," and "she shall have it!"

At the opposite extreme to the shock and grief that follow disillusion about a servant, is the astonishment Jane experiences in August 1862. While she is staying with Mrs. Russell in Scotland, Thomas sends her news about a former maid. Her reply explains her reaction:

Nothing in this Bessy Barnet romance surprises me so much as the cool manner in which you seem to have taken the fact of her being alive! I at this distance *screamed* to hear of her being *alive*! And *you*, having a Bessy announced to you, calmly ask was it Bessy Barnet! after she had been dead and buried (according to Tom Holcroft) for a quarter of a century!

Bessy Barnet was the highly valued first servant of the Carlyles in London.

Several months after receiving Thomas's letter, Jane describes to Mrs. Russell how the maid Mary brings her a message that "Mrs. Blackett wished to know if she could see me for a few minutes?" But she quickly sees that the woman is not Mrs. Blackett:

when she turned round, she showed me a pale beautiful face, that was perfectly strange to me! But I was no stranger to her seemingly, for she glided swiftly up to me like a dream, and took my head softly between her hands and kissed my brow again and again, saying in a low dreamlike voice, 'Oh, you dear! you dear! you dear! Don't you know me?' I looked into her eyes in supreme bewilderment. At last light dawned on me, and I said one word – 'Bessy?' 'Yes, it is Bessy!' And then the kissing wasn't all on one side, you may fancy.

Bessy's husband, the physician Dr. Blakiston, is brought in from the coach outside to talk to Thomas. Bessy was formerly a servant to the Doctor and his first wife, and after the latter's death has married the widower to the displeasure of his relatives: her husband is the son of a baronet.

In a week or two, Bessy returns, having been haunted by the ghastly appearance of Jane, who, she confides, "looked just as Mrs. B[lakiston] had looked when she was dying of cancer!!" She persuades Jane to come and stay at their home in St. Leonard's on the south coast, a home Jane is to visit several times. She reports to Mrs. Russell:

the Blakistons' house is situated within a stonecast of the sea, and is a fine airy, lofty house, handsomely but plainly furnished; and Bessy looked very natural, gliding about as Mistress of it! Dr. Blakiston is a clever, energetic, kindhearted man, – very vain, rather egotistic, and as excitable and impatient as my Grandfather Walter! But Bessy understands him entirely.... They live the quietest life, except for his Practice. She will visit nowhere; 'does not choose to be patronised.'

Bessy, Jane adds, "was never so pleased as when we talked of the things that happened when she was my servant. Dr. Blakiston, too, talked of all that so frankly that there was no awkwardness in my changed position towards her."

Bessy Barnet is someone Jane never seems to misjudge, although her early impressions of people often prove wrong. She discovers that her paternal Uncle Robert, who in 1820 seems to come nearer than anyone else to taking her late father's place, loses all interest in her; that the poverty-stricken boy genius she thinks she has found and encouraged at Haddington turns

out to be dirty, greedy, untruthful and ungrateful; that the “noble lady” Mrs. Montague, Thomas’s admirer who sends her wise advice, is acting a part; and that her cousin Jeannie Welsh, now Mrs. Chrystal, to whom she has entrusted her private thoughts and feelings, has become “an affected, bedizened, caricature of a *fine-lady*.”

In one instance, it is the initial judgment of a character that is unfair. On hearing that Louisa Mackenzie has agreed to become Lord Ashburton’s second wife, Jane comments that this woman has been in quest of an illustrious marriage for a decade. The marriage takes place, and she finds in the second Lady Ashburton “kindness’s self” and a confidante as trustworthy as the younger Jeannie Welsh and Mary Russell.

To fill out the survey of Jane’s self-portrait, it is necessary to turn to other aspects of her character and experience on view in her letters. Most prominent is her appalling ill health. For most of her life, Jane suffers from chronic headaches, influenza-like infections, and extreme insomnia. The long walks, the wines and spirits, the morphine, the Scotch porridge, and the cold showers to which she resorts do not cure her sleeplessness, which is aggravated whenever she indulges in the excitement of the animated conversation that is London’s main attraction for her. Describing a successful dinner party, she writes:

the whole thing went off like a sort of firework—crackers of wit exploding in every direction—[Erasmus] Darwin spoke only in epigrams—Carlyle in flights of genius—Milnes in poetical paradoxes—Helps in witticisms, rather small, but perfectly well turned—and John Carlyle did his best to resemble *Solomon*. As for myself ... every opening of my lips was sensibly felt—and Miss Jessie [a Scottish friend] must have gone away with the feeling that she had seen for the first time in her life a woman of superhuman intelligence! Pity that one can only be superhumanly intelligent in *dadding* one’s nerves *a-abreed!*—I went to bed feeling a decided tendency to fly—and lay *the whole night thro’* without *once* closing my eyes.

Added to Jane’s continuous afflictions are periodic attacks of toothache, neuralgia, rheumatism and, in later life, several agonizing injuries. Her sufferings may equal Coleridge’s. However, she seems to realize, as some of her doctors certainly do, that there is a crucial psychological element in her condition. Dr. Blakiston, after assiduous attention to her in his south coast home, concludes he can “do nothing against hysterical mania!”

Late in 1849, Jane finds some alleviation of her pains in the acquisition of a small mongrel named Nero. She is able to assure John Forster that,

Mr. C. has accepted it with an amiability. To be sure, when he comes down gloomy in the morning, or comes in wearied from his walk, the infatuated little beast dances round him on its hind legs as I ought to do and can't; and he feels flattered and surprised by such unwonted capers to his honour and glory.

Nero rapidly becomes, she tells Jeannie Welsh, "the chief comfort of my life," and in a spirit with which any lover of that species will sympathize, she confesses to her sister-in-law Jane Aitken, "I have a little dog that I make more fuss about than beseems a sensible woman." For the next decade, the adventures of Nero, at home and abroad, are threaded through the letters: he narrowly escapes being kidnapped for ransom, is smuggled onto a train in a basket, jealously flies at a cat when Jane strokes it—then flees the house, conceives a passion for Mrs. Todhunter's spaniel at Willesden, and goes bathing with Thomas on the Scottish coast. Tragically, in October 1859, Nero is run over by a butcher's cart, and after a few weeks of futile struggle to recover is mercifully euthanized. The whole household is stricken, Jane most of all, but she writes to Mrs. Russell, "Mr. C. couldn't have reproached me, for he himself was in tears at the poor little thing's end! and his own heart was (as he phrased it) 'unexpectedly and distractedly torn to pieces with it!'"

For other animals, too, Jane displays much feeling. When Thomas can no longer ride his beloved horse Fritz, for which he paid fifty pounds, the couple sell him for nine pounds to an apothecary who can and will ride him and not try to whip him into drawing a vehicle, which he hates. Sending a pheasant to her young friend Miss Barnes, Jane accompanies it with a letter describing her reaction to the "massacre of feathered innocents":

from seven hundred to a thousand pheasants shot in one day!
The firing made me perfectly sick. Think of the bodily and mental state of the surviving birds when the day's sport was ended!
Decidedly, men can be very great brutes when they like!

Jane is fond of alluding, with a mixture of affection and humour, to Nero's possessiveness. From her Scottish friend Mrs. Pringle's opulent home, she writes to Charlotte Southam, "It is a beautiful place this, and the kindest Hostess that ever was seen—and there are three charming little boys of whom Nero would be dreadfully jealous if he saw how much I make of them." Though there are some other references in the letters to likeable children, Jane is not always so well disposed to the young of the human species. In her courtship days, she asks Thomas to kiss Edward Irving's baby for her, commenting, "I would not do it myself for five guineas.

Young children are such nasty little beasts!" Years afterwards, as a guest at a house party at Addiscombe, she informs Thomas that the Brookfields' baby was "a 'bit of fascination' seemingly for everyone but me."

One baby that does touch Jane is first encountered by Thomas in the arms of a sad-looking but dignified woman sitting in the street. The Carlyles listen to her story and give her some relief, only to discover that she is a fraud who carries "a borrowed baby!"

It is not at all unusual for Jane to assist the poor and the troubled. From her early years, she is of a compassionate disposition and follows her mother's example of trying to ease the way of the unfortunate. At Craigenputtock, where she is regarded as "a skilful Doctor," she rises from her bed at night to answer a call from one John Carr. In 1843, when others withdraw from assisting the destitute Mrs. Mudie because "she *may* have been tempted to take more drink than was lady-like," she obtains, with some help from Geraldine Jewsbury, domestic employment for the widow's two grown daughters. Though one proves prone to tantrums and is dismissed, the other becomes a good servant.

Something far worse than a tantrum confronts Jane in the case of her German friend Richard Plattnaeur. In 1844, this man lapses into madness, and his violent behaviour causes him to be committed to Wandsworth Lunatic Asylum. Here Jane visits him and his physician; she reports that she found "my poor friend had fallen into excellent hands." When he is ready to be discharged provided a friend can be found to escort him, she and Thomas readily accommodate him in their home, though Mrs. Buller thinks this puts her life in danger: Jane protests, "no madman will ever hurt a hair of *my* head. I have too much *affinity* with them."

The stimulus Jane finds in London company never makes her forget her old associates. All her life, she sends annual gifts to Mary Mills and Margaret Hiddlestone, her mother's servants, and tries to make sure they have some comforts. Her own domestics have a demanding but a caring mistress. In 1861, the cook Matilda, who "is such a good creature, and hasn't a relation in the world to depend upon," has to go into St. George's hospital with a strangled hernia. In spite of the extra work she has in caring for Thomas, Jane goes two miles to visit Matilda nearly every day.

Jane's compassion, however, can have disconcerting limitations. In 1865, when Governor Eyre puts down a rebellion in Jamaica with an orgy of executions, floggings, and house burnings, a fierce controversy over his actions erupts in Britain. At a party, a man who argues that women are "naturally cruel" and may well support Eyre, but that no man could draw from Jane the ugly reply, "I hope Mr. Carlyle does. I haven't had an opportunity of asking him; but I should be surprised and grieved if I found him sentimentalising over a pack of black brutes!"

Such an ill-considered outburst is not typical of Jane, but sharp comments and bitter judgments are. She describes Mrs. Christie, a fellow guest at a dinner, as “some dozen years younger than I, – and a hundred years stupider.” When her uncle Robert Welsh’s son John imposes himself on the Carlyle household, she writes of him to Jeannie Welsh:

He is a long sprawling ill-put together youth – with a low brow, a long nose and hanging jaw [.] a sort of cross betwixt a man and a greyhound! – He never *sits* – and his boots always creak as if they had a Devil. He is argumentative and self-complacent beyond anything that one can conceive out of Edin.

Sir James Graham, a Home Secretary who orders Mazzini’s letters to be opened, Jane describes as “a *dirty* animal” who “does things which a street sweeper would not stoop to!” Among her tart observations is the statement that “People who are so dreadfully ‘devoted’ to their wives are so apt, from mere habit, to get devoted to other people’s wives as well.”

Such passages help to explain a view of the celebrated Mrs. Carlyle that she herself finds hard to understand:

What on earth puts it in people’s heads to call *me* formidable? There is not a creature alive that is more unwilling to hurt the feelings of others, and I grow more *compatible* every year that I live. I can’t count the people who have said to me first and last, ‘I was so afraid of you! I had been told you were so sarcastic!’

In one condemnation, as Mitford’s and Byron’s letters bear witness, Jane is fully justified. At a dinner at Dickens’s, she is set on by Samuel Rogers, who, she asserts, “ought to have been buried long ago, so old and ill-natured he is grown.” The aged poet cross-questions her about her husband’s infatuation with Lady Ashburton and the report that “he spends all his evenings with her,” but she succeeds in disappointing him by praising the Lady’s kindness to herself and the observation that on this evening Thomas is here: “‘Yes,’ he said in a tone of vexation, ‘I *see* he is here *this* evening – and *hear* him too – for he has done nothing but talk across the room since he came in.’”

In the age of Tennyson and Dickens, Rogers’s poetic lustre has faded, and Jane does not discuss literature with him. She has remained, however, an avid consumer of books in at least three languages. In her early years, she idealizes the Rousseau of *La Nouvelle Héloïse* and the Madame de Staël of *Corinne*. She is devoted to the work of Schiller, and on Byron’s death in 1824 she feels that there is an “awful and dreary blank in the creation.” A

little later, she starts to enthuse over the novels of George Sand. Living on into the great age of Victorian literature, she early recognizes Tennyson's genius, but has reservations about Dickens, classifying him as "the cleverest *popular* writer we have just now." She reads Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* during the course of its publication in monthly numbers judging that it "beats Dickens out of the world." She is not impressed by Charlotte Brontë but appreciates George Eliot's *Adam Bede*, and finds all Trollope's novels charming. When she is kept furiously busy by a house renovation, she can write, "I shall get my hands kept clean and put into mitts for a time so soon as I have patched together a carpet for the new bedroom—and will lie on the sofa by heaven for two weeks and read French novels!"

Jane lacks any interest in the great scientific advances of her time, has a limited fondness for nature, and is little concerned with politics, though she shares Thomas's opposition to the extension of the franchise in 1832 and sympathises with her friend Mazzini's campaign for a free, united Italy. While she appreciates some of the inventions of her century—she compares the railway to a flying carpet and sees photography, which overcomes time and distance, as an even greater blessing than chloroform—her serious interests are her household, literature, and people. With her reservations about the idle rich who are conditioned by the rarefied society in which they live, she is drawn to those engaged in the workaday world. On a visit to Geraldine Jewsbury in Manchester in 1846, she writes to Thomas of how much she is learning:

Geraldine no sooner perceived that I took interest in the practical activity of this place than she applied herself to getting me admission into all sorts of Factories; and day after day has passed for me in going up and down in 'hoists' and thro' forests of machinery for every conceivable purpose. I have seen more of the condition of my fellow-creatures in these two weeks than in any dozen years of my previous existence.

The people here, she finds, are superior to London people in that they do not reply to a question with "God knows!" but give a straightforward answer. Talking to the inventor Whitworth, she says, "one feels to be talking with a *real live man*, to my taste worth any number of the Wits 'that go about.'"

In 1852, Jane writes to Thomas that the publisher Chapman "made me again the offer of 'very advantageous terms' for a novel of my own." Why, with her literary talent, steady interest in human character, capacity for empathy, and appetite for spearing people's frailties, does Jane not become the novelist she should have been? Dickens thinks she would sur-

pass all the women then writing. Thomas remarks to his brother Alick that she needs an occupation since her necessary domestic work occupies but a small part of her day. Her friend Geraldine urges her to write, but she protests that one author in the house is sufficient. Ill health must play some part, and it is probably unfortunate that her ambition in youth is focused on scholarship rather than fiction. Later, as she watches closely over renovations, she feels, as she informs John Carlyle, that she has found an alternative vocation: "in superintending all these men I begin to find myself 'in the career open to my particular talents'" and she boasts to Thomas, "I have prevented so many mistakes being made, and afforded so many capital suggestions, that I begin to be rather proud of myself, and to suspect I must have been a builder in some previous state of existence."

When renovations in progress prevent the house being securely locked, Jane decides to sleep with loaded pistols beside her. A painter says to her maid, "I shouldn't like to be a thief within twenty feet of your mistress, with one of these pistols in her hand. I shouldn't give much for my life; she has such a devil of a straight eye!" Jane comments, "The workmen have all had to suffer a good deal from my 'eye,' which has often proved their foot rules and leads in error."

In spite of her reservations, Jane does seem to have found a further vocation, or perhaps an avocation, as a much appreciated if sometimes feared wit and raconteuse. On a trip to Liverpool in 1841, she finds herself denied the rest she needs because she is "forcibly made a Lion of!!" After a dinner at Charles Buller's in 1843, his mother, she complains, "insisted on my telling *three* long stories which I had told to her at Troston." During her last visit to Scotland, a housemaid tells her, "when Mr. Morison (the minister of Durrisddeer) 'cam' to his dinner yesterday, the first word oot o' his heed, on the very door-steps, was: 'Is Mrs. Carlyle still here?'" The quality of her mind and society is reflected in one of her memorable anecdotes. Tennyson, up from the country, happens to call when Thomas is out:

Alfred is dreadfully embarrassed with women alone.... The only chance of my getting any right good of him was to make him forget my womanness — so I did just as Carlyle would have done, had he been there; got out *pipes* and *tobacco* — and *brandy* and *water* — with a deluge of *tea* over and above. — The effect of these accessories was miraculous — he *professed* to be *ashamed* of polluting my room, 'felt,' he said 'as if he were stealing cups and sacred vessels in the Temple' — but he smoked on all the same — for *three* mortal hours! — talking like an angel — only exactly as if he were talking with a clever *man* — which — being a thing I am not used to — men always *adapting* their conversation to what

they *take to be* a woman's taste—strained me to a terrible pitch of intellectuality.

One evening eight months later, a cab arrives at the house. Who, Jane asks herself, is it?

Mr. Strachey? No. Alfred Tennyson alone! Actually, by a superhuman effort of volition he had put himself into a cab, nay, brought himself away from a dinner party, and was there to smoke and talk with me!—by myself—me!

The expectation which Thomas Carlyle held up before young Jane Carlyle of “a niche in the Temple of Fame” and his assurance that her mind would shine before the world remain at her death a hope and a promise unfulfilled. Instead, the literary fame is all his, while she has become something of a social celebrity. However, unlike most celebrities, she has unawares left the materials for a lasting record in which her voice, her personality and her judgments will be preserved. A bereaved and remorseful Thomas gathers the first harvest of these materials, which appears in print after he, too, dies, as *Letters and Memorials of Jane Welsh Carlyle*.