Carlyle had by this time abandoned the thought of the "ministry" as his possible future profession—not without a struggle, for both his father's and his mother's hearts had been set upon it; but the "grave prohibitive doubts" which had risen in him of their own accord had been strengthened by Gibbon, whom he had found in Irving's library and eagerly devoured. Never at any time had he "the least inclination" for such an office, and his father, though deeply disappointed, was too genuine a man to offer the least re­monstrance. The "schoolmastering" too, after two years' experience of it, became intolerable. His disposition, at once shy and defiantly proud, had perplexed and displeased the Kirkcaldy burghers. Both he and Irving also fell into unpleasant collisions with them, and neither of the two was sufficiently docile to submit tamely to reproof. An opposition school had been set up which drew off the pupils, and finally they both concluded that they had had enough of it—"better die than be a Schoolmaster for one's living"—and would seek some other means of supporting themselves. Carlyle had passed his summer holidays as usual at Main­hill (1818), where he had perhaps talked over his prospects with his family. On his return to Kirkcaldy in September he wrote to his father explaining his situation. He had saved about £90, on which, with his thrifty habits, he said that he could support himself in Edinburgh till he could "fall into some other way of doing." He could perhaps get a
few mathematical pupils, and meantime could study for the bar.

The end was, that when December came Carlyle and Irving "kicked the schoolmaster functions over," removed to Edinburgh, and were adrift on the world. Irving had little to fear; he had money, friends, reputation; he had a profession, and was waiting only for "a call" to enter on his full privileges. Carlyle was far more unfavourably situated. He was poor, unpopular, comparatively unknown, or, if known, known only to be feared and even shunned. "In Edinburgh from my fellow creatures," he says, "little or nothing but vinegar was my reception—cup [i.e., a slight bow] when we happened to meet or pass near each other;—my own blame mainly, so proud, shy, poor, at once so insignificant-looking and so grim and sorrowful. That in Sartor, of the 'worm trodden & proving a torpedo,' . . . is not wholly a fable; but did actually befall once or twice, as I still (with a kind of small not ungenial malice) can remember."3 He had, however, as was said, nearly a hundred pounds, which he had saved out of his earnings; he had a consciousness of integrity worth more than gold to him. He had thrifty self-denying habits which made him content with the barest necessaries, and he resolutely faced his position. His family, though silently disapproving the step which he had taken and necessarily anxious about him, rendered what help they could. Once more the Ecclefechan carrier brought up the weekly or monthly supplies of oatmeal, cakes, butter, and, when needed, under-garments, returning with the dirty linen for the mother to wash and mend, and occasional presents which were never forgotten; while Carlyle, after a thought of civil engineering, for which his mathematical training gave him a passing inclination, sat down seriously, if not very assiduously, to study law.4

Carlyle had written a sermon on the salutary effects of "affliction," as his first exercise in the Divinity School. He was beginning now, in addition to the problem of living which he had to solve, to learn what affliction meant. He was attacked with dyspepsia, which never wholly left him, and in these early years soon assumed its most torturing form, like "a rat gnawing at the pit of his stomach." His disorder working on his natural irritability found escape in
expressions which showed, at any rate, that he was attaining a mastery of language. The pain made him furious; and in such a humour the commonest calamities of life became unbearable horrors.

While law lectures were being attended, the difficulty was to live. Pupils were a not very effective resource, and of his adventures in this department Carlyle gave ridiculous accounts. One, sometimes two, pupils were found willing to pay at the rate required [two guineas a month for an hour's instruction daily]. Dr. Brewster, afterwards Sir David, discovered Carlyle and gave him occasional employment on his [Edinburgh] Encyclopaedia. He was thus able to earn, as long as the session lasted, about two guineas a week, and on this he contrived to live without trenching on his capital.

Carlyle was thinking as much as his mother of religion, but the form in which his thoughts were running was not hers. He was painfully seeing that all things were not wholly as he had been taught to think them; the doubts which had stopped his divinity career were blackening into thunderclouds; and all his reflections were coloured by dyspepsia. "I... was entirely unknown in 'Edinburgh circles,' " he says; "solitary, 'eating my own heart,' fast losing my health, too; a prey, in fact, to nameless struggles and miseries, which have yet a kind of horror in them to my thought. Three weeks without any Sleep (from impossibility to be free of noise)." In fact he was entering on what he called "the three most miserable years of my life."\(^5\) He would have been saved from much could he have resolutely thrown himself into his intended profession; but he soon came to hate it, as just then, perhaps, he would have hated anything.

Men who are out of humour with themselves often see their own condition reflected in the world outside them, and everything seems amiss because it is not well with themselves. But the state of Scotland and England also was well fitted to feed his discontent. The great war had been followed by a collapse. Wages were low, food at famine prices. Tens of thousands of artisans were out of work, their families were starving, and they themselves were growing mutinous. Even at home from his own sternly patient
father, who never meddled with politics, he heard things not calculated to reconcile him to existing arrangements.

These early impressions can be traced through the whole of Carlyle's writings; the conviction was forced upon him that there was something vicious to the bottom in English and Scotch society, and that revolution in some form or other lay visibly ahead. So long as Irving remained in Edinburgh "the condition of the people" question was the constant subject of talk between him and Carlyle. They were both of them ardent, radical, indignant at the injustice which they witnessed, and as yet unconscious of the difficulty of mending it. Irving, however, he had seen little of since they had moved to Edinburgh, and he was left, for the most part, alone with his own thoughts. There had come upon him the trial which in these days awaits every man of high intellectual gifts and noble nature on their first actual acquaintance with human things—the question, far deeper than any mere political one, What is this world then, what is this human life, over which a just God is said to preside, but of whose presence or whose providence so few signs are visible? In happier ages religion silences scepticism if it cannot reply to its difficulties, and postpones the solution of the mystery to another stage of existence. Brought up in a pious family where religion was not talked about or emotionalised, but was accepted as the rule of thought and conduct, himself too instinctively upright, pure of heart, and reverent, Carlyle, like his parents, had accepted the Bible as a direct communication from Heaven. It made known the will of God, and the relation in which man stood to his Maker, as present facts like a law of nature, the truth of it, like the truth of gravitation, which man must act upon or immediately suffer the consequences. But religion, as revealed in the Bible, passes beyond present conduct, penetrates all forms of thought, and takes possession wherever it goes. It claims to control the intellect, to explain the past, and foretell the future. It has entered into poetry and art, and has been the interpreter of history. And thus there had grown round it a body of opinion, on all varieties of subjects, assumed to be authoritative; dogmas which science was contradicting; a history of events which it called infallible, yet which the canons of evidence, by which other histories
are tried and tested successfully, declared not to be infallible at all. To the Mainhill household the Westminster Confession was a full and complete account of the position of mankind and of the Being to whom they owed their existence. The Old and New Testament not only contained all spiritual truth necessary for guidance in word and deed, but every fact related in them was literally true. To doubt was not to mistake, but was to commit a sin of the deepest dye, and was a sure sign of a corrupted heart. Carlyle's wide study of modern literature had shown him that much of this had appeared to many of the strongest minds in Europe to be doubtful or even plainly incredible. Young men of genius are the first to feel the growing influences of their time, and on Carlyle they fell in their most painful form. Notwithstanding his pride, he was most modest and self-distrustful. He had been taught that want of faith was sin, yet, like a true Scot, he knew that he would peril his soul if he pretended to believe what his intellect told him was false. If any part of what was called Revelation was mistaken, how could he be assured of the rest? How could he tell that the moral part of it, to which the phenomena which he saw round him were in plain contradiction, was more than a "devout imagination"? Thus to poverty and dyspepsia there had been added the struggle which is always hardest in the noblest minds, which Job had known, and David, and Solomon, and Aeschylus, and Shakespeare, and Goethe. Where are the tokens of His presence? where are the signs of His coming? Is there, in this universe of things, any moral Providence at all? or is it the product of some force of the nature of which we can know nothing save only that "one event comes alike to all, to the good and to the evil, and that there is no difference"?

Commonplace persons, if assailed by such misgivings, thrust them aside, throw themselves into occupation, and leave doubt to settle itself. Carlyle could not. The importunity of the overwhelming problem forbade him to settle himself either to law or any other business till he had wrestled down the misgivings which had grappled with him. The greatest of us have our weaknesses, and the Margaret Gordon business had perhaps intertwined itself with the spiritual torment. The result of it was that Carlyle was extremely
miserable, "tortured," as he says, "by the freaks of an imagination of extraordinary and wild activity."

He went home, as he had proposed, after the session [1819], but Mainhill was never a less happy home to him than it proved this summer. He could not conceal, perhaps he did not try to conceal, the condition of his mind; and to his family, to whom the truth of their creed was no more a matter of doubt than the presence of the sun in the sky, he must have seemed as if "possessed." He could not read; he wandered about the moors like a restless spirit. His mother was in agony about him. He was her darling, her pride, the apple of her eye, and she could not restrain her lamentations and remonstrances. His father, with supreme good judgement, left him to himself.

In November Carlyle was back at Edinburgh again, with his pupils and his law lectures, which he had not yet deserted, and still persuaded himself that he would persevere with. He did not find his friend; Irving had gone to Glasgow to be assistant to Dr. Chalmers; and the state of things which he found in the metropolis was not of a sort to improve his humour.

The law lectures went on, and Carlyle wrote to his mother about his progress with them. "The law," he said, "I find to be a most complicated subject; yet I like it pretty well, and feel that I shall like it better as I proceed. Its great charm in my eyes, is that no mean compliances are requisite for prospering in it."\(^6\)

Reticence about his personal suffering was at no time one of his virtues. Dyspepsia had him by the throat. Even the minor ailments to which our flesh is heir, and which most of us bear in silence, the eloquence of his imagination flung into forms like the temptations of a saint. His mother had early described him as "gey ill to deal wi',"\(^7\) and while in great things he was the most considerate and generous of men, in trifles he was intolerably irritable. Dyspepsia accounts for most of it. He did not know what was the matter with him, and when the fit was severe he drew pictures of his condition which frightened everyone belonging to him. He had sent his family in the middle of the winter a report of himself which made them think that he was seriously ill.\(^8\)
The fright had been unnecessary. Dyspepsia, while it tortures body and mind, does little serious injury. The attack had passed off. With his family it was impossible for him to talk freely, and through this gloomy time he had but one friend, though this one was of priceless value. To Irving he had written out his discontent. He was now disgusted with law, and meant to abandon it.

The University term ends early in Scotland. The expenses of the six months which the students spend at college are paid for in many instances by the bodily labours of the other six. The end of April sees them all dispersed, the class rooms closed, the pupils no longer obtainable; and the law studies being finally abandoned, Carlyle had nothing more to do at Edinburgh, and migrated with the rest. He was going home; he offered himself for a visit to Irving at Glasgow on the way, and the proposal was warmly accepted.

Carlyle went to Glasgow, spent several days there, and noted, according to his habit, the outward signs of men and things. He saw the Glasgow merchants in the Tontine, he observed them, fine, clean, opulent, with their shining bald crowns and serene white heads, sauntering about or reading their newspapers. He criticised the dresses of the young ladies, for whom he had always an eye, remarking that with all their charms they had less taste in their adornments than were to be seen in Edinburgh drawing-rooms. He saw Chalmers too, and heard him preach. "Never preacher went so into one's heart." Some private talk, too, there was with Chalmers, "the Doctor" explaining to him "some scheme . . . for proving Christianity by its visible fitness for human nature 'all written in us already,' " he said, "'as in sympathetic ink; Bible awakens it, and you can read!' "

But the chief interest in the Glasgow visit lies less in itself than in what followed it—a conversation between two young, then unknown men, strolling alone together over a Scotch moor, seemingly the most trifling of incidents, a mere feather floating before the wind, yet, like the feather, marking the direction of the invisible tendency of human thought. Carlyle was to walk home to Ecclefechan. Irving had agreed to accompany him fifteen miles of his road, and
then leave him and return. They started early, and breakfasted on the way at the manse of a Mr. French. Carlyle himself tells the rest.

The talk had grown ever friendlier, more interesting: at length the declining sun said plainly, You must part. We sauntered slowly into the Glasgow-Muirkirk highway... masons were building at a wayside Cottage near by, or were packing up on ceasing for the day: we leant our backs to a dry stone fence... , and looking into the western radiance, continued in talk yet a while, loth both of us to go. It was here, just as the sun was sinking, [Irving] actually drew from me by degrees, in the softest manner, the confession that I did not think as he of Christian Religion, and that it was vain for me to expect I ever could or should. This, if this were so, he had pre-engaged to take well of me,—like an elder brother, if I would be frank with him;—and right loyally he did so, and to the end of his life we needed no concealments on that head; which was really a step gained. The sun was about setting, when we turned away, each on his own path. Irving would have had a good space farther to go than I... —perhaps fifteen or seventeen miles,—and would not be in Kent Street till towards midnight. But he feared no amount of walking; enjoyed it rather,—as did I in those young years.¹⁰

Nothing further has to be recorded of Carlyle's history for some months. He remained quietly through the spring and summer at Mainhill, occupied chiefly in reading. He was beginning his acquaintance with German literature, his friend Mr. Swan, of Kirkcaldy, who had correspondents at Hamburg, providing him with books.¹¹ He was still writing small articles, too, for Brewster’s *Encyclopaedia*, unsatisfactory work, though better than none.¹²

August brought Irving to Annan for his summer holidays, which opened possibilities of companionship again. Mainhill was but seven miles off, and the friends met and wandered together in the Mount Annan woods, Irving steadily cheered Carlyle with confident promises of ultimate success. In September came an offer of a tutorship in a family, which Irving urged him to accept.

Irving’s judgement was perhaps at fault in this advice. Carlyle, proud, irritable, and impatient as he was, could not have remained a week in such a household. His ambition (downtrodden as he might call himself) was greater than he knew. At any rate the proposal came to nothing,¹³ and with the winter he was back once more at his lodgings in Edin-
burgh, determined to fight his way somehow, though in what direction he could not yet decide or see.

To his family Carlyle made the best of his situation; and indeed, so far as outward circumstances were concerned, there was no special cause for anxiety. His farmhouse training had made him indifferent to luxuries, and he was earning as much money as he required. It was not here that the pinch lay; it was in the still uncompleted "temptations in the wilderness," in the mental uncertainties which gave him neither peace nor respite. He had no friend in Edinburgh with whom he could exchange thoughts, and no society to amuse or distract him. And those who knew his condition best, the faithful Irving especially, became seriously alarmed for him. So keenly Irving felt the danger, that in December he even invited Carlyle to give up Edinburgh and be his own guest for an indefinite time at Glasgow.

Well might Carlyle cherish Irving's memory. Never had he or any man a truer-hearted, more generous friend. The offer could not be accepted. Carlyle was determined before all things to earn his own bread, and he would not abandon his pupil work. Christmas he did spend at Glasgow, but he was soon back again. He was corresponding now with London booksellers, offering a complete translation of Schiller for one thing, to which the answer had been an abrupt No.¹⁴

The gloomy period of Carlyle's life—a period on which he said that he ever looked back with a kind of horror—was drawing to its close, [and] the natural strength of his intellect was asserting itself. Better prospects were opening; more regular literary employment; an offer, if he chose to accept it, from his friend Mr. Swan, of a tutorship at least more satisfactory than the Yorkshire one. His mother's affection was more precious to him, however simply expressed, than any other form of earthly consolation.

Friends and family might console and advise, but Carlyle himself could alone conquer the spiritual maladies which were the real cause of his distraction. In June of this year 1821 was transacted what in Sartor Resartus he describes as his "conversion," or "new birth," when he authentically took "the Devil by the nose," when he began to achieve the convictions, positive and negative, by which the whole of his later life was governed.
Nothing in "Sartor" thereabouts is fact (symbolical myth all) except that of the "incident in the Rue St. Thomas de l'Enfer,"—which occurred quite literally to myself in Lieth [Leith] Walk, during those 3 weeks of total sleeplessness, in which almost my one solace was that of a daily bathe on the sands between Lieth and Portobello. Incident was as I went down (coming up I generally felt a little refreshed for the hour); I remember it well, & could go yet to about the place.\(^{15}\)

As the incident is thus authenticated, I may borrow the words in which it is described, opening, as it does, a window into Carlyle's inmost heart.

"But for me, so strangely unpensperous had I been, the net-result of my Workings amounted as yet simply to—Nothing. How then could I believe in my Strength, when there was as yet no mirror to see it in? Ever did this agitating, yet, as I now perceive, quite frivolous question, remain to me insoluble: Hast thou a certain Faculty, a certain Worth, such even as the most have not; or art thou the completest Dullard of these modern times? Alas, the fearful Unbelief is unbelief in yourself; and how could I believe? Had not my first, last Faith in myself, when even to me the Heavens seemed laid open, and I dared to love, been all-too cruelly belied? The speculative Mystery of Life grew ever more mysterious to me: neither in the practical Mystery had I made the slightest progress, but been everywhere buffeted, foiled, and contemptuously cast out. A feeble unit in the middle of a threatening Infinitude, I seemed to have nothing given me but eyes, whereby to discern my own wretchedness. Invisible yet impenetrable walls, as of Enchantment, divided me from all living. . . . Now when I look back, it was a strange isolation I then lived in. The men and women around me, even speaking with me, were but Figures; I had, practically, forgotten that they were alive, that they were not merely automatic. In the midst of their crowded streets and assemblages, I walked solitary; and (except as it was my own heart, not another's, that I kept devouring) savage also, as the tiger in his jungle. Some comfort it would have been, could I, like a Faust, have fancied myself tempted and tormented of the Devil; for a Hell, as I imagine, without Life, though only diabolic Life, were more frightful: but in our age of Downpulling and Disbelief, the very Devil has been pulled down, you cannot so much as believe in a Devil. To me the Universe was all void of Life, of Purpose, of Volition, even of Hostility: it was one huge, dead, immeasurable Steam-engine, rolling on, in its dead indifference, to grind me limb from limb. O, the vast, gloomy, solitary Golgotha, and Mill of Death! Why was the Living banished thither companionless, conscious? Why, if there is no Devil; nay, unless the Devil is your God? . . .

"So had it lasted," concludes the Wanderer, "so had it lasted,
as in bitter protracted Death-agony, through long years. The heart within me, unvisited by any heavenly dew-drop was smouldering in sulphurous, slow-consuming fire. Almost since earliest memory I had shed no tear; or once only when I, murmuring half-audibly, recited Faust's Death-song, that wild Selig der den er im Siegesglanze findet (Happy whom he finds in Battle's splendour), and thought that of this last Friend even I was not forsaken, that Destiny itself could not doom me not to die. Having no hope, neither had I any definite fear, were it of Man or of Devil; nay, I often felt as if it might be solacing, could the Arch-Devil himself, though in Tartarean terrors, but rise to me, that I might tell him a little of my mind. And yet, strangely enough, I lived in a continual, indefinite, pining fear; tremulous, pusillanimous, apprehensive of I knew not what; it seemed as if all things in the Heavens above and the Earth beneath would hurt me; as if the Heavens and the Earth were but boundless jaws of a devouring monster, wherein I, palpitating, waited to be devoured.

"Full of such humour . . . was I, one sultry Dog-day, after much perambulation, toiling along the dirty little Rue Saint-Thomas de l'Enfer, . . . in a close atmosphere, and over pavements hot as Nebuchadnezzar's Furnace; whereby doubtless my spirits were little cheered; when, all at once, there rose a Thought in me, and I asked myself: "What art thou afraid of? Wherefore, like a coward, dost thou for ever pip and whimper, and go cowering and trembling? Despicable biped! what is the sum-total of the worst that lies before thee? Death? Well, Death; and say the pangs of Tophet too, and all that the Devil and Man may, will or can do against thee! Hast thou not a heart; canst thou not suffer whatsoever it be; and, as a Child of Freedom, though outcast, trample Tophet itself under thy feet, while it consumes thee? Let it come, then; and I will meet it and defy it!" And as I so thought, there rushed like a stream of fire over my whole soul; and I shook base Fear away from me forever. I was strong, of unknown strength; a spirit, almost a god. Ever from that time, the temper of my misery was changed; not Fear or whining Sorrow was it, but Indignation and grim fire-eyed Defiance.

"Thus had the EVERLASTING NO (das ewige Nein) pealed authoritatively through all the recesses of my Being, of my Me; and then was it that my whole Me stood up, in native God-created majesty, and with emphasis recorded its Protest. Such a Protest, the most important transaction in Life, may that same Indignation and Defiance, in a psychological point of view, be fitly called. The Everlasting No had said: 'Behold, thou art fatherless, outcast, and the Universe is mine (the Devil's)'; to which my whole Me now made answer: 'I am not thine, but Free, and forever hate thee!'

"It is from this hour I incline to date my spiritual New-birth, or Baphometic Fire-baptism; perhaps I directly thereupon began to be a Man."16