The life at Hoddam Hill, singularly happy while it lasted, and promising to last, was not after all of long continuance. Differences with the landlord, General Sharpe, rose to a quarrel, in which old Mr. Carlyle took his son’s part. Hoddam Hill was given up; the lease of Mainhill, expiring at the same time, was not renewed, and the whole family, Carlyle himself with the rest, removed to Scotsbrig, a substantial farm in the neighbourhood of Ecclefechan, where the elder Carlyles remained to the end of their lives, and where their youngest son succeeded them.

The break-up at Hoddam precipitated the conclusion of Carlyle’s protracted relations with Miss Welsh. He sums up briefly his recollections of the story of this year, which was in every way so momentous to him.

My translation work [German Romance] went steadily on;—the pleasantest kind of labour I ever had; could be done by task, in whatever humour or condition one was in: and was, day by day (ten pages a-day, I think) punctually and comfortably so performed. Internally, too, there were far higher things going on; a grand and ever-joyful victory getting itself achieved at last! The final chaining down, and trampling home, “for good,” home into their caves forever, of all my Spiritual Dragons, which had wrought me such woe and, for a decade past, had made my life black and bitter: this year 1826 saw the end of all that. With such a feeling on my part as may be fancied. I found it to be, essentially, what Methodist people call their “Conversion,” the deliverance of their soul from the Devil and the Pit; precisely enough that, in my new form;—and there burnt, accordingly, a sacred flame of joy in me, silent in my inmost being, as of one henceforth superior to Fate,
Scotsbrig. The Carlyle family was reunited in moving to Scotsbrig at Whitsuntide 1826. Here Carlyle's parents lived until they died, and James, the youngest son, continued tenant in it until 1880. Although Carlyle lived at the farm for only a few months before his marriage with Jane Baillie Welsh in October 1826, he made nearly annual returns to see his mother after he moved to London in 1834. (Photograph by John Patrick, courtesy of the University of Edinburgh.)
able to look down on its stupid injuries with pardon and contempt, almost with a kind of thanks and pity. This "holy joy," of which I kept silence, lasted sensibly in me for several years, in blessed counterpoise to sufferings and discouragements enough; nor has it proved what I can call fallacious at any time since. . . .

In brief, after much survey and consideration of the real interests and real feelings of both parties, I proposed, and it was gently acceded to, that *German Romance* once done (end of September or so), we should wed, settle at Edinburgh, in some small suburban House (details and preparations there all left to her kind Mother and her);—and thenceforth front our chances in the world, not as two lots, but as one. For better, for worse; till Death us part!

House in Comely Bank, suitable as possible, had been chosen; was being furnished from Haddington,—beautifully, perfectly and even richly, by Mrs Welsh's great skill in such matters, aided by her Daughter's which was also great,—and by the frank & wordless generosity of both, which surely was very great!1

So Carlyle, at a distance of forty-two years, describes the prelude to his marriage—accurately so far as substance went, and with a frank acknowledgment of Mrs. Welsh's liberality, as the impression was left upon his memory. But, exactly and circumstantially as he remembered things which had struck and interested him, his memory was less tenacious of some particulars which he passed over at the time with less attention than perhaps they deserved, and thus allowed to drop out of his recollection. Details have to be told which will show him not on the most considerate side. They require to be mentioned for the distinct light which they throw on aspects of his character which affected materially his wife's happiness. There were some things which Carlyle was *constitutionally* incapable of apprehending, while again there are others which he apprehended perhaps with essential correctness, but on which men in general do not think as he thought. A man born to great place and great visible responsibilities in the world is allowed to consider first his position and his duties, and to regard other claims upon him as subordinate to these. A man born with extraordinary talents, which he has resolved to use for some great and generous purpose, may expect and demand the same privileges, but they are not so easily accorded to him. In the one instance it is assumed as a matter of course that secondary interests must be set aside; even in marriage the heir of a
large estate consults the advantage of his family; his wife’s pleasure, even his wife’s comforts, must be postponed to the supposed demands of her husband’s situation. The claims of a man of genius are less tolerantly dealt with; partly perhaps because it is held an impertinence in any man to pretend to genius till he has given proof of possessing it; partly because, if extraordinary gifts are rare, the power of appreciating them is equally rare, and a fixed purpose to make a noble use of them is rarer still. Men of literary faculty, it is idly supposed, can do their work anywhere in any circumstances; if the work is left undone the world does not know what it has lost; and thus, partly by their own fault, and partly by the world’s mode of dealing with them, the biographies of men of letters are, as Carlyle says, for the most part the saddest chapter in the history of the human race except the Newgate Calendar.  

Carlyle, restless and feverish, was convinced that no real work could be got out of him till he was again in a home of his own, and till his affairs were settled on some permanent footing. His engagement, while it remained uncompleted, kept him anxious and irritated. Therefore he conceived that he must find some cottage suited to his circumstances, and that Miss Welsh ought to become immediately the mistress of it. He had money enough to begin housekeeping; he saw his way, he thought, to earning money enough to continue it on the scale in which he had himself been bred up—but it was on condition that the wife that he took to himself should do the work of a domestic servant as his own mother and sisters did; and he was never able to understand that a lady differently educated might herself, or her friends for her, find a difficulty in accepting such a situation. He was in love, so far as he understood what love meant. Like Hamlet he would have challenged Miss Welsh’s other lovers “to weep, to fight, to fast, to tear themselves, to drink up Esil, eat a crocodile,” or “be buried with her quick in the earth”;  

but when it came to the question how he was himself to do the work which he intended to do, he chose to go his own way, and expected others to accommodate themselves to it.

Plans had been suggested and efforts made to secure some permanent situation for him. A newspaper had been
projected in Edinburgh, which Lockhart and Brewster were to have conducted with Carlyle under them. This would have been something; but Lockhart became editor of the Quarterly Review, and the project dropped. A Bavarian Minister had applied to Professor Leslie for someone who could teach English literature and science at Munich. Leslie offered this to Carlyle, but he declined it. He had set his mind upon a cottage outside Edinburgh, with a garden and high walls about it to shut out noise. This was all which he himself wanted. He did not care how poor it was so it was his own, entirely his own, safe from intruding fools.

Here he thought that he and his wife might set themselves up together and wish for nothing more. It did, indeed, at moments occur to him that, although he could be happy and rich in the midst of poverty, "for a woman to descend from Superfluity to live with a sick ill-natured man in Poverty, and not in wretchedness, would be the greatest miracle of all." But though the thought came more than once, it would not abide. The miracle would perhaps be wrought; or indeed without a miracle his mother and sisters were happy, and why should anyone wish for more luxuries than they had?

Mrs. Welsh being left a widow, and with no other child, the pain of separation from her daughter was unusually great. Notwithstanding a certain number of caprices, there was a genuine and even passionate attachment between mother and daughter. It might have seemed that a separation was unnecessary, and that if Mrs. Welsh could endure to have Carlyle under her own roof, no difficulty on his side ought to have arisen. Mrs. Welsh indeed, romantically generous, desired to restore the property, and to go back and live with her father at Templant; but her daughter decided peremptorily that she would rather live with Carlyle in poverty all the days of her life sooner than encroach in the smallest degree on her mother’s independence. She could expect no happiness, she said, if she failed in the first duty of her life. Her mother should keep the fortune, or else Miss Welsh refused to leave her.

All difficulties might be got over, the entire economic problem might be solved, if the family could be kept together. As soon as the marriage was known to be in con-
templation this arrangement occurred to everyone who was interested in the Welshes' welfare as the most obviously desirable. Mrs. Welsh was as unhappy as ever at an alliance that she regarded as not imprudent only, but in the highest degree objectionable. Carlyle had neither family nor fortune nor prospect of preferment. He had no religion that she could comprehend, and she had seen him violent and unreasonable. He was the very last companion that she would have selected for herself. Yet for her daughter's sake she was willing to make an effort to like him, and, since the marriage was to be, either to live with her or to accept him as her son-in-law in her own house and in her own circle.

Her consent to take Carlyle into her family removed Miss Welsh's remaining scruples, and made her perfectly happy. It never occurred to her that Carlyle himself would refuse, and the reasons which he alleged might have made a less resolute woman pause before she committed herself further. "It is impossible," he said, "for two households to live as if they were one. . . . I shall never get any enjoyment of your company till you are all my own." Mrs. Welsh had a large acquaintance. He liked none of them, and her "visitors would [not] be diminished in number or bettered in quality." No! he must have the small house in Edinburgh; and "the moment I am master of a house, the first use I turn it to will be to slam the door of it on the face of nauseous intrusions." It never occurred to him, as proved too fatally to be the case, that he would care little for "the right companionship" when he had got it; that he would be absorbed in his work; that, after all, his wife would see but little of him, and that little too often under trying conditions of temper; that her mother's companionship, and the "intrusions" of her mother's old friends, might add more to her comfort than it could possibly detract from his own.

However deeply she honoured her chosen husband, she could not hide from herself that he was selfish—extremely selfish. He had changed his mind indeed about the Edinburgh house almost as soon as he had made it up—he was only determined that he would not live with Mrs. Welsh.

[Jane Welsh jestingly, yet tearfully, summed up their respective positions:]
Suppose we take different roads, and try how that answers. There is Catherina Aurora Kirkpatrick, for instance, has fifty thousand pounds, and a princely lineage and “never was out of humour in her life”—with such a “singularly pleasing creature” and so much fine gold, you could hardly fail to find yourself admirably well off—While, I, on the other hand, might better my fortunes in many quarters; a certain, handsome stammering Englishman I know of would give his ears to carry me away South with him, my second-cousin too, the Dr. at Leeds has set up a fine establishment and writes to me that I am “the very first of my sex”—or, nearer home, I have an interesting young Widower in view, who has no scruple about making me Mother to his three small children, Bluestocking tho’ I be— But what am I talking about? As if we were not already married,—alas, married past redemption! God knows, in that case, what is to become of us! at times I am so disheartened that I sit down and weep—and then at other times! oh Heaven!

Carlyle could just perceive that he had not been gracious, that Mrs. Welsh’s offer had deserved “a more serious de­liberation, and at the very least a more courteous refusal.” He could recognise also, proud as he was, that he had little to offer in his companionship which would be a compensa­tion for the trials which it might bring with it.

You tell me that you often weep when you think what is to become of us. It is unwise in you to weep: if you are reconciled to be my wife (not the wife of an ideal me, but the simple actual prosaic me), there is nothing frightful in the future. I look into it with more and more confidence and composure. Alas! Jane you do not know me: it is not the poor, unknown, rejected Thomas Carlyle that you know, but the prospective rich known and admired. I am recon­ciled to my fate as it stands or promises to stand ere long: I have pronounced the word unpraised in all its cases and numbers; and find nothing terrific in it, even when it means unmonied, and by the mass of his Majesty’s subjects neglected or even partially contemned. I thank Heaven I have other objects in my eye than either their pudding or their breath. This comes of the circumstance that my Apprenticeship is ending, and yours still going on. O Jane! Jane! I could weep too; for I love you in my deepest heart.

There are hard sayings, my beloved child; but I cannot spare them; and I hope, tho’ bitter at first, they may not remain without wholesome influence.

That Carlyle could contemplate with equanimity being unpraised, unmoneyed, and neglected all his life, that he re­quired neither the world’s “pudding” nor its “breath,” and could be happy without them, was pardonable and perhaps
THE YEAR 1826

commendable. That he should expect another person to share this unmoneyed, puddingless, and rather forlorn condition, was scarcely consistent with such lofty principles. Men may sacrifice themselves, if they please, to imagined high duties and ambitions, but they have no right to marry wives and sacrifice them. Nor were these “hard sayings” which could not be spared exactly to the point, when he had been roughly and discourteously rejecting proposals which would have made his “unmonied” situation of less importance.⁹

He had said that Miss Welsh did not know him, which was probably true; but it is likely also that he did not know himself. She had answered this last letter of his with telling him that she had chosen him for her husband, and should not alter her mind. Since this was so he immediately said, she had better “wed a wild man of the woods, and come and live with him in his cavern, in hope of better days.”¹⁰ The cavern was Scotsbrig. When it had been proposed that he should live with Mrs. Welsh at Haddington, he would by consenting have spared the separation of a mother from an only child, and would not perhaps have hurt his own intellect by an effort of self-denial. It appeared impossible to him, when Mrs. Welsh was in question, that two households could go on together. He was positive that he must be master in his own house, free from noise and interruption, and have fire and brimstone cooked for him if he pleased to order it. But the two households were not, it seemed, incompatible when one of them was his own family. If Miss Welsh would come to him at Scotsbrig, he would be “a new man”; “the bitterness of life would pass away like a forgotten tempest,” and he and she “should walk in bright weather”¹¹ thenceforward to the end of their existence. This, too, was a mere delusion. The cause of his unrest was in himself; he would carry with him, wherever he might go or be, the wild passionate spirit, fevered with burning thoughts, which would make peace impossible, and cloud the fairest weather with intermittent tempests. Scotsbrig would not have frightened Miss Welsh. She must have perceived his inconsistency, though she did not allude to it. But if Carlyle had himself and his work to consider, she had her mother. Her answer was very beautiful.
Were happiness, then, the thing chiefly to be cared for, in this world; I would even put my hand in yours now, as you say, and so cut the gordian knot of our destiny at once. But, oh my Husband, have you not told me a thousand times and my conscience tells me also that happiness is only a secondary consideration—it must not . . . be sought out of the path of duty. . . . Should I do well to go into Paradise myself, and leave the Mother who bore me to break her heart? She is looking forward to my marriage with a more tranquil mind, in the hope that our separation is to be in a great measure nominal,—that by living wheresoever my Husband lives she may at least have every moment of my society which he can spare. And how would it be possible not to disappoint her in this hope, if I were to reside with your people in Annandale? Her presence there would be a perpetual cloud over our little world of love and peace. For the sake of all concerned it would be necessary to keep her quite apart from us—and apart from us—yet so near she would be the most wretched of Mothers, the most desolate woman in the world. Oh is it for me to make her so—me who am so unspeakably dear to her in spite of all her caprice, who am her only, only child—and her a widow—I love you Mr Carlyle, tenderly, devotedly as ever Woman loved; but I may not put my Mother away from me even for your sake— I cannot do it! I have lain awake whole nights . . . trying to reconcile this act with my conscience; but my conscience will have nothing to say to it—rejects it with indignation—

What is to be done then? Indeed, I see only one way of escape out of all these perplexities. Be patient with me while I tell you what it is.— My Mother, like myself, has ceased to find any contentment in this pitiful Haddington, and is bent on disposing of our house here as soon as may be and hiring one elsewhere. . . . now, why should it not be the vicinity of Edinburgh after all? and why should not you live with your wife in her Mothers house?12

The arrangement was at least as reasonable as that which he had himself proposed, and Carlyle, who was so passionately attached to his own mother, might have been expected to esteem and sympathise with Miss Welsh’s affection for hers. At Scotsbrig he would have had no door of his own to slam against “nauseous intrusions”; his father, as long as he lived, would be master in his own house; while the self-control which would have been required of him, had he resided with Mrs. Welsh as a son-in-law, would have been a discipline which his own character especially needed. But he knew that he was “gey ill to deal wi’.” His own family were used to him, and he in turn respected them, and could, within limits, conform to their ways. From others he would submit to no interference. He knew that he would not,
and that it would be useless for him to try. He felt that he had not considered Mrs. Welsh as he ought to have done; but his consideration, even after he had recognised his fault, remained a most restricted quantity.

Perhaps, as I have told you, Love, I may not yet have got to the bottom of this new plan so completely as I wished: but there is one thing that strikes me more and more, the longer I think of it. This the grand objection of all objections, the head and front of offence, the soul of all my counter-pleading; an objection which is too likely to overset the whole project. It may be stated in a word: The Man should bear rule in the house and not the Woman. This is an eternal axiom, the Law of Nature h[erself w]hich no mortal departs from unpunished. I have meditated on this ma[ny long] years, and every day it grows plainer to me: I must not and I cannot live in a house of which I am not head. I should be miserable myself, and make all about me miserable. Think not, Darling, that this comes of an imperious temper; that I shall be a harsh and tyrannical Husband to thee. God forbid! But it is the nature of a man that if he be controuled by any thing but his own Reason, he feels himself degraded; and incited, be it justly or not, to rebellion and discord. It is the nature of a woman again (for she is essentially passive not active) to cling to the man for support and direction, to comply with his humours, and feel pleasure in doing so, simply because they are his; to reverence while she loves him, to conquer him not by her force but her weakness, and perhaps (the cunning gipsy!) after all to command him by obeying him.  

The Greek chorus would have shaken its head ominously, and uttered its musical cautions, over the temper displayed in this letter. Yet it is perfectly true that Carlyle would have been an unbearable inmate of any house, except his father's, where his will was not absolute. "Gey ill to deal wi'," as his mother said. The condition which he made was perhaps not so much as communicated to Mrs. Welsh, for whom it would have furnished another text for a warning sermon. The "judicious desperation" which Carlyle recommended to her daughter brought her to submit to going to live at Scotsbrig. Under the circumstances Mrs. Welsh, in desperation too, decided that the marriage should be celebrated immediately and an end made. She comforted herself with the thought that being at Templand with her father, she would at least be within reach, and could visit Scotsbrig as often as she pleased. Here, however, new difficulties arose. Carlyle, it seems, had made the proposition without so much as consulting his father and mother. They at least,
if not he, were sensible, when they heard of it, of the unfitness of their household to receive a lady brought up as Miss Welsh had been. "Even in summer," they said, "it would be difficult for you to [live at Scotsbrig], in winter altogether impossible"; while the notion that Mrs. Welsh should ever be a visitor there seemed as impossible to Carlyle himself. He had deliberately intended to bring his wife into a circle where the suggestion of her mother's appearance was too extravagant to be entertained.

You talked of your Mother visiting us! By Day and Night! it would astonish her to see this same household. O No, my Darling! Your Mother must not visit mine. What good were it? By an utmost exertion on the part of both, they might learn perhaps to tolerate each other, more probably to pity and partially dislike each other; better than mutual tolerance I could anticipate nothing from them.¹⁵

It is sad to read such words. Carlyle pretended that he knew Mrs. Welsh. Human creatures are not all equally unreasonable; and he knew as little of her as he said that her daughter knew of Scotsbrig. The two mothers, when the family connection brought them together, respected each other, could meet without difficulty, and part with a mutual regard which increased with acquaintance. Had the incompatibility been as real as he supposed, Carlyle's strange oblivion both of his intended wife's and his wife's mother's natural feelings would still be without excuse. His mind was fixed, as men's minds are apt to be in such circumstances. He chose to have his own way, and since it was impossible for Miss Welsh to live at Scotsbrig, and as he had on his side determined that he would not live with Mrs. Welsh, some alternative had to be looked for. Once more he had an opportunity of showing his defective perception of common things. Mrs. Welsh had resolved to leave Haddington and to give up her house there immediately. The associations of the place after her daughter was gone would necessarily be most painful. All her friends, the social circle of which she had been the centre, regarded the marriage with Carlyle as an extraordinary mésalliance. To them he was known only as an eccentric farmer's son without profession or prospects, and their pity or their sympathy would be alike distressing. She had
herself found him moody, violent, and imperious, and she at least could only regard his conduct as extremely selfish. Men in the situation of lovers often are selfish. It is only in novels that they are heroic or even considerate. It occurred to Carlyle that since Mrs. Welsh was going away the house at Haddington would do well for himself. There it stood, ready provided with all that was necessary. He recollected that Edinburgh was noisy and disagreeable, Haddington quiet, and connected with his own most pleasant recollections. It might have occurred to him that under such altered circumstances, where she would be surrounded by a number of acquaintances, to every one of whom her choice appeared like madness, Miss Welsh might object to living there as much as her mother. She made her objections as delicately as she could; but he pushed them aside as if they were mere disordered fancies; and the fear of "nauseous intrusions," which had before appeared so dreadful to him, he disposed of with the most summary serenity. "To me," he calmly wrote, "among the weightier evils and blessings of existence the evil of impertinent visitors and so forth seems but as the small drop of the bucket and an exceedingly little thing. I have nerve enough in me to dispatch that sort of deer forever by dozens in the day."  

"That sort of deer" were the companions who had grown up beside Miss Welsh for twenty years. She was obliged to tell him peremptorily that she would not hear of this plan. It would have been happier and perhaps better both for her and for him had she taken warning from the unconscious exhibition which he had made of his inner nature. After forty years of life with him—forty years of splendid labour, in which his essential conduct had been pure as snow, and unblemished by a serious fault, when she saw him at length rewarded by the honour and admiration of Europe and America—she had to preach nevertheless to her younger friends as the sad lesson of her own experience, "My dear, whatever you do, never marry a man of genius." The mountain-peaks of intellect are no homes for quiet people. Those who are cursed or blessed with lofty gifts and lofty purposes may be gods in their glory and their greatness, but are rarely tolerable as human companions. Carlyle consented to drop the Haddington proposal, not, however,
without showing that he thought Miss Welsh less wise than he had hoped.

[Mother and daughter] settled the matter at last in their own fashion. The Haddington establishment was broken up. They moved to Edinburgh, and took the house in Comely Bank which Carlyle mentioned. Mrs. Welsh undertook to pay the rent, and the Haddington furniture was carried thither. She proposed to remain there with her daughter till October, and was then to remove finally to her father's house at Templand, where the ceremony was to come off. Carlyle when once married and settled in Edinburgh would be in the way of any employment which might offer for him. At Comely Bank, at any rate, Mrs. Welsh could be received occasionally as a visitor. For immediate expenses of living there was Carlyle's £200 and such additions to it as he could earn.

Carlyle was supremely satisfied. The knotty problem which had seemed so hopeless was now perfectly solved. The great business having been once arranged, the rest of the summer flew swiftly by. German Romance was finished, and paid for the marriage expenses. The world was taken into confidence by a formal announcement of what was impending: Miss Welsh, writing for the first time to her relations, sent a description of her intended husband to the wife of her youngest uncle, Mrs. George Welsh. She was not blinded by affection—no one ever less so in her circumstances. I have not kept back what I believe to have been faults in Carlyle, and the lady to whom he was to be married knew what they were better than anyone else can know; yet here was her deliberate opinion of him. He stood there such as he had made himself: a peasant's son who had run about barefoot in Ecclefechan street, with no outward advantages, worn with many troubles bodily and mental. His life had been pure and without spot. He was an admirable son, a faithful and affectionate brother, in all private relations blamelessly innocent. He had splendid talents, which he rather felt than understood; only he was determined, in the same high spirit and duty which had governed his personal conduct, to use them well, whatever they might be, as a trust committed to him, and never, never to sell his soul by travelling the primrose path to wealth and
distinction. If honour came to him, honour was to come unsought. I as if feel in dwelling on his wilfulness

I did him wrong, being so majestical,
To offer him the show of violence.17

But I learnt my duty from himself: to paint him as he was, to keep back nothing and extenuate nothing. I never knew a man whose reputation, take him for all in all, would emerge less scathed from so hard a scrutiny.

The wedding day drew on; not without (as was natural) more than the usual nervousness on both sides at the irre­vocable step which was about to be ventured. Carlyle knew too well he was “a perverse mortal to deal with,” that “the best resolutions make shipwreck in the sea of prac­tice,”18 and that “it was a chance if any woman could be happy with him.” “The brightest moment of his existence,” as in anticipation he had regarded his marriage, was within [four] weeks of him, yet he found himself “so splenetic, so sick, so sleepless, so void of hope, faith, charity, in short so altogether bad and worthless. I trust in Heaven I shall be better soon,” he said; “a certain incident otherwise will wear a quite original aspect.”19 Clothes had to be provided, gloves thought of. Scotch custom not recognising licences in such cases, required that the names of the intending pair should be proclaimed in their respective churches; and this to both of them was intolerable. They were to be married in the morning at Templand church, and to go the same day to Comely Bank.

Jest as she would, however, Miss Welsh was frightened and Carlyle was frightened. They comforted one another as if they were going to be executed. Carlyle, on his side, tried to allay his fears of what Miss Welsh called “that odious ceremony” by reading Kant, and had reached the hundred and fiftieth page of the Kritik der reinen Vernunft, when he found that it was too abstruse for his condition, and that Scott’s novels would answer better.20 With this assistance he tried to look more cheerfully on the adventure.

So the long drama came to its conclusion. The banns were published, the clothes made, the gloves duly provided. The day was the 17th of October, 1826. Miss Welsh’s final letter, informing Carlyle of the details to be observed, is
humorously headed, "The last Speech and marrying words of that unfortunate young woman Jane Baillie Welsh."[21]

[To which Carlyle replied:]

Truly a most delightful and swan-like melody was in them; a tenderness and warm devoted trust, worthy of such a maiden bidding farewell to the (unmarried) Earth, of which she was the fairest ornament. . . . Let us pray to God that our holy purposes be not frustrated; let us trust in Him and in each other, and fear no evil that can befall us.[22]

They were married in the parish church of Templand in the quietest fashion, the minister officiating, John Carlyle the only other person present except Miss Welsh’s family.[23]
Breakfast over, they drove off in a post-chaise. In the evening they arrived safely at Comely Bank.  

Regrets and speculations on "the might have been's" of life are proverbially vain. Nor is it certain that there is anything to regret. The married life of Carlyle and Jane Welsh was not happy in the roseate sense of happiness. In the fret and chafe of daily life the sharp edges of the facets of two diamonds remain keen, and they never wear into surfaces which harmoniously correspond. A man and a woman of exceptional originality and genius are proper mates for one another only if they have some other object before them besides happiness, and are content to do without it. For the forty years which these two extraordinary persons lived together, their essential conduct to the world and to each other was sternly upright. They had to encounter poverty in its most threatening aspect—poverty which they might at any moment have escaped if Carlyle would have sacrificed his intellectual integrity, would have carried his talents to the market, and written down to the level of the multitude. If he ever flagged, it was his wife who spurred him on; nor would she ever allow him to do less than his very best. She never flattered anyone, least of all her husband; and when she saw cause for it the sarcasms flashed out from her as the sparks fly from lacerated steel. Carlyle, on his side, did not find in his marriage the miraculous transformation of nature which he had promised himself. He remained lonely and dyspeptic, possessed by thoughts and convictions which struggled in him for utterance, and which could be fused and cast into form only (as I have heard him say) when his whole mind was like a furnace at white heat. The work which he has done is before the world, and the world has long acknowledged what it owes to him. It would not have been done as well, perhaps it would never have been done at all, if he had not had a woman at his side who would bear, without resenting it, the outbreaks of his dyspeptic humour, and would shield him from the petty troubles of a poor man's life—from vexations which would have irritated him to madness—by her own incessant toil.

The victory was won, but, as of old in Aulis, not without a victim. Miss Welsh had looked forward to being Carlyle's intellectual companion, to sharing his thoughts and helping
him with his writings. She was not overrating her natural powers when she felt being equal to such a position and deserving it. The reality was not like the dream. Poor as they were, she had to work as a menial servant. She, who had never known a wish ungratified for any object which money could buy; she, who had seen the rich of the land at her feet, and might have chosen among them at pleasure, with a weak frame withal which had never recovered from the shock of her father’s death—she after all was obliged to slave and cook and wash and scour and mend shoes and clothes for many a weary year. Bravely she went through it all; and she would have gone through it cheerfully if she had been rewarded with ordinary gratitude. But if things were done rightly, Carlyle did not inquire who did them. Partly he was occupied, partly he was naturally undemonstrative, and partly she in generosity concealed from him the worst which she had to bear. The hardest part of all was that he did not see that there was occasion for any special acknowledgment. Poor men’s wives had to work. She was a poor man’s wife, and it was fit and natural that she should work. He had seen his mother and his sisters doing the drudgery of his father’s household without expecting to be admired for doing it. Mrs. Carlyle’s life was entirely lonely, save so far as she had other friends. He consulted her judgement about his writings, for he knew the value of it, but in his conceptions and elaborations he chose to be always by himself. He said truly that he was a Bedouin. When he was at work he could bear no one in the room; and, at least through middle life, he rode and walked alone, not choosing to have his thoughts interrupted. The slightest noise or movement at night shuttered his nervous system; therefore he required a bedroom to himself; thus from the first she saw little of him, and as time went on less and less; and she, too, was human and irritable. Carlyle proved, as his mother had known him, “ill to deal wi’.” Generous and kind as he was at heart, and as he always showed himself when he had leisure to reflect, “the Devil,” as he had said, “continued to speak out of him in distempered sentences,” and the bitter arrow was occasionally shot back.

Miss Welsh, it is probable, would have passed through life more pleasantly had she married someone in her own
rank of life; Carlyle might have gone through it successfully with his mother or a sister to look after him. But, after all is said, trials and sufferings are only to be regretted when they have proved too severe to be borne. Though the lives of the Carlyles were not happy, yet if we look at them from the beginning to the end they were grandly beautiful. Neither of them probably under other conditions would have risen to as high an excellence as in fact they each achieved; and the main question is not how happy men and women have been in this world, but what they have made of themselves. I well remember the bright assenting laugh with which she once responded to some words of mine when the propriety was being discussed of relaxing the marriage laws. I had said that the true way to look at marriage was as a discipline of character.