Married life had begun; and the first eighteen months of his new existence Carlyle afterwards looked back upon as the happiest that he had ever known. Yet the rest which he had expected did not come immediately. He could not rest without work, and work was yet to be found. Men think to mend their condition by a change of circumstances. They might as well hope to escape from their shadows. His wife was tender, careful, thoughtful, patient, but the spirit which possessed her husband, whether devil or angel he could hardly tell, still left him without peace.

One piece of good fortune the Carlyles had. He had some friends in Edinburgh and she many; and he was thus forced out of himself. He was not allowed after all to treat visitors as “nauseous intrusions.” His wife had a genius for small evening entertainments; little tea parties such as in after days the survivors of us remember in Cheyne Row, over which she presided with a grace all her own, and where wit and humour were to be heard flashing as in no other house we ever found or hoped to find. These began in Edinburgh; and no one who had been once at Comely Bank refused a second invitation. Brewster came and De Quincey, penitent for his article on *Meister*, and Sir William Hamilton and Wilson (though Wilson for some reason was shy of Carlyle), and many more.

Already it seems his power of speech, unequalled so far as my experience goes by that of any other man, had begun to open itself. “Carlyle first, and all the rest nowhere,”
was the description of him by one of the best judges in London, when speaking of the great talkers of the day. His vast reading, his minute observation, his miraculously retentive memory, gave him something valuable to say on every subject which could be raised. What he took into his mind was dissolved and recrystallised into original combinations of his own. His writing, too, was as fluent as his speech. His early letters—even the most exquisitely finished sentences of them—are in an even and beautiful hand without erasure or alteration of a phrase. Words flowed from him with a completeness of form which no effort could improve. When he was excited it was like the eruption of a volcano, thunder and lightning, hot stones and smoke and ashes. He had a natural tendency to exaggeration, and although at such times his extraordinary metaphors and flashes of Titanesque humour made him always worth listening to, he was at his best when talking of history or poetry or biography, or of some contemporary person or incident which had either touched his sympathy or amused his delicate sense of absurdity. His laugh was from his whole nature, voice, eyes, and even his whole body. And there was never any malice in it. His own definition of humour, “a genial sympathy with the under side,” was the definition also of his own feeling about all things and all persons, when it was himself that was speaking, and not what he called the devil that was occasionally in possession. In the long years that I was intimate with him I never heard him tell a malicious story or say a malicious word of any human being. His language was sometimes like the rolling of a great cathedral organ, sometimes like the softest flute-notes, sad or playful as the mood or the subject might be; and you listened—threw in, perhaps, an occasional word to show that you went along with him, but you were simply charmed, and listened on without caring to interrupt. Interruption, indeed, would answer little purpose, for Carlyle did not bear contradiction any better than Johnson. Contradiction would make him angry and unreasonable. He gave you a full picture of what was in his own mind, and you took it away with you and reflected on it.

This singular faculty—which, from Mrs. Carlyle's language, appears to have been shared in some degree by his
sister Jean—had been the spell which had won his wife, as Othello's tales of his adventures won the heart of Desdemona; and it was already brightening the evenings at Comely Bank. She on her side gives an imperfect idea of her own occupations when she describes herself as busy with needlework and books and the piano. They kept but one servant, and neither she nor her husband could endure either dirt or disorder, while Carlyle's sensitive stomach required a more delicate hand in the kitchen than belonged to a maid of all work. The days of the loaf—her first baking adventure, which she watched as Benvenuto Cellini watched his Perseus—were not yet. Edinburgh bread was eatable, and it was not till they were at Craigenputtoch that she took charge of the oven. But Carlyle himself has already described her as making the damaged Scotsbrig eggs into custards and puddings. When they married, Miss Jewsbury says,

she resolved that he should never write for money, only when he wished it, when he had a message in his heart to deliver, [and] . . . she would make whatever money he gave her answer for all needful purposes. . . . She managed so well that comfort was never absent from her house, and no one looking on could have guessed whether they were rich or poor. . . . Whatever she had to do she did it with a peculiar personal grace that gave a charm to the most prosaic details. No one who in later years saw her lying on the sofa in broken health, and languor, would guess the amount of energetic hard work she had done in her life. . . . The first time she tried a pudding, she went into the kitchen and locked the door on herself, having got the servant out of the road. It was to be a suet pudding—not just a common suet pudding but something special—and it was good, being made with care by weight and measure with exactness.¹

Thus prettily Carlyle's married life began, the kind friends at Scotsbrig sending weekly supplies by the carrier. But even with Mrs. Carlyle to husband them the visible financial resources were ebbing and must soon come to low water; and on this side the prospect resolutely refused to mend. As he grew more composed, Carlyle thought of writing some kind of didactic novel. He could not write a novel, any more than he could write poetry. He had no invention. His genius was for fact: to lay hold on truth, with all his intellect and all his imagination. He could no more invent than he could lie. The novel was a failure and eventually had to be burnt.²
The hope which had vaguely lingered of some regular and salaried appointment faded away. Overtures of various kinds to London publishers had met with no acceptance. *German Romance* was financially a failure also, and the Edinburgh publishers would make no future ventures. Under these conditions it is not wonderful that (resolved as he was never to get into money difficulties) Carlyle's mind reverted before long to his old scheme of settling at Craigenputtoch. He no longer thought of turning farmer himself. His wife's ridicule would have saved him from any rash enterprise of that kind. But his brother Alick was still willing to undertake the farm and to make a rent out of it. For himself he looked to it only as a cheap and quiet residence. His Hoddam experience had taught him the superior economy of a country life. At Craigenputtoch he could have his horse, pure air, milk diet, all really or theoretically essential to his health. Edinburgh society he considered was of no use to him; practical Edinburgh, he was equally sure, would do nothing for him; and away on the moors "he could go on with his literature and with his life-task generally in the absolute solitude and pure silence of nature, with nothing but loving and helpful faces round him under clearly improved omens." To his wife he did recognise that the experiment would be unwelcome. She had told him before her marriage that she could not live a month at Craigenputtoch with an angel, while at Comely Bank she had little to suffer and something to enjoy.

Only one recommendation Craigenputtoch could have had to Mrs. Carlyle—that it was her own ancestral property, and that her father had been born there. Happily her mother, when the scheme was mentioned to her, approved heartily. Templand was but fifteen miles from Craigenputtoch gate, not more than a morning's ride, and frequent meetings could be looked forward to. The present tenant of Craigenputtoch was in arrears with his rent, and was allowing house and fences to go to ruin. Some change or other had become indispensable, and Mrs. Welsh was so anxious to have the Carlyles there that she undertook to put the rooms in repair and to pay the expenses of the move.

After a week or two of consideration Carlyle joined his brother Alick in the middle of April at Dumfries, Mrs.
Welsh paying her daughter a visit during his absence. They drove out together and examined the place, and the result was that the tenant was to go, while Carlyle was to enter into possession at Whitsuntide; the house was to be made habitable, and, unless some unforeseen good luck should befall Carlyle meanwhile, he and his wife were to follow when it was ready to receive them.

Alexander Carlyle, with his sister Mary, went into occupation of Craigenputtoch at Whitsuntide 1827. His brother had intended to join him before the end of the summer, but at this moment affairs in Edinburgh began to brighten and took a turn which seemed at one time likely to lead into an entirely new set of conditions. Carlyle had mentioned that he had a letter of introduction to Jeffrey. He had delayed presenting it, partly, perhaps, on account of the absolute silence with which some years before Jeffrey had received a volunteered contribution from him for the *Edinburgh Review*. Irving had urged the experiment, and it had been made. The manuscript was not only not accepted, but was neither acknowledged nor returned. Carlyle naturally hesitated before making another advance where he had been repulsed so absolutely. He determined, however, shortly after his return from his Craigenputtoch visit, to try the experiment. He called on the great man and was kindly received. Jeffrey was struck with him; did not take particularly to his opinions; but perceived at once, as he frankly said to him, that "you are a man of Genius—and of original character and right heart," and that he would "be proud and happy to know more of you." A day or two after he called with Mrs. Jeffrey at Comely Bank, and was as much—perhaps even more—attracted by the lady whom he found there, and whom he discovered to be some remote Scotch kinswoman. It was the beginning of a close and interesting intimacy, entered upon, on Jeffrey's part, with a genuine recognition of Carlyle's qualities and a desire to be useful to him, which, no doubt, would have assumed a practical form had he found his new friend amenable to influence or inclined to work in harness with the party to which Jeffrey belonged. But Jeffrey was a Benthamite on the surface, and underneath an Epicurean, with a good-humoured contempt for enthusiasm and high aspirations. Between him
FRANCIS JEFFREY. "A beautiful little man . . . and a bright island to me and mine in the sea of things," Carlyle wrote in his Reminiscences. Although surviving correspondence and Froude's narrative indicate utter incompatibility of viewpoint, Carlyle valued Jeffrey's human warmth and Jeffrey Carlyle's intellect. (Oil painting by Colvin Smith, courtesy of the Scottish National Portrait Gallery.)
and a man "so dreadfully in earnest" as Carlyle, there could be little effective communion, and Carlyle soon ceased to hope, what at first he had allowed himself to expect, that Jeffrey might be the means of assisting him into some independent situation.

The immediate effect of the acquaintance, however, was Carlyle’s admission, freely offered by the editor, into the *Edinburgh Review*, a matter just then of infinite benefit to him, drawing him off from didactic novels into writing the series of Essays, now so well known as the *Miscellanies*, in which he tried his wings for his higher flights, and which in themselves contain some of his finest thoughts and most brilliant pictures. His first contribution was to be for the number immediately to appear, and Jeffrey was eager to receive it.

"Jean Paul" was decided on, to be followed in the autumn by a more elaborate article on the general state of German literature. It was written at once, and forms the first of the *Miscellaneous Essays* in the collected edition of Carlyle’s works. Carlyle’s “style,” which has been a rock of offence to so many people, has been attributed to his study of Jean Paul. No criticism could be worse founded. His style shaped itself as he gathered confidence in his own powers, and had its origin in his father’s house in Annandale. His mode of expressing himself remained undistinguished by its special characteristics till he had ceased to occupy himself with the German poets.

Edward Irving and his admiration of the Old Puritans & Elizabethans (whom, at heart, I never could entirely adore, tho’ trying hard), his and everybody’s doctrine on that head, played a much more important part than Jean Paul on my poor “style”;—& the most important part by far was that of Nature, you would perhaps say, had you ever heard my Father speak, or very often heard my Mother & her inborn melodies of heart and of voice!

Carlyle’s acquaintance with Wilson—“Christopher North”—had been slight, Wilson, perhaps, dreading his radicalism. In the course of the summer, however, accident threw them more closely together, and one of their meetings is thus described.

Last night I supped with John Wilson, Professor of Moral Philosophy here, author of the “Isle of Palms,” &c., a man of the
most fervid temperament, fond of all stimulating things, from tragic poetry down to whisky punch. He snuffed and smoked cigars and drank liquors, and talked in the most indescribable style. . . . Daylight came on us before we parted; indeed, it was towards three o'clock as the Professor and I walked home, smoking as we went. . . . But I expect to see Wilson in a more philosophic key ere long; he has promised to call on me, and is, on the whole, a man I should like to know better. Geniuses of any sort, especially of so kindly a sort, are so very rare in this world.8

Another and yet brighter episode of this summer was a second and far more remarkable letter from Goethe. Carlyle had sent the Life of Schiller to Weimar, and afterwards the volumes of German Romance. They were acknowledged with a gracious interest which went infinitely beyond his warmest hopes. There was not a letter only, but little remembrances for himself and his wife; and better even than the presents, a few lines of verse addressed to each of them.9

A still more charming, because unintended, compliment was to follow from the same quarter. When the purposed removal to Craigenputtoch came to be talked of among Carlyle's Edinburgh friends, it seemed to them "considerably fantastic and unreasonable."

Prospects in Edinburgh had begun to brighten economically and otherwise; the main origin of this was our acquaintance with the brilliant Jeffrey, a happy accident rather than a matter of forethought on either side. My poor article on Jean Paul, willingly enough admitted into his "Review," excited a considerable, though questionable, sensation in Edinburgh, as did the next still weightier discharge of "[State of] German Literature" in that unexpected vehicle, and at all events denoted me as a fit head for that kind of adventure.10

The article on German literature reached Weimar. It was of course anonymous. Goethe read it, and, curious to know the authorship of such an unexpected appearance, wrote to Carlyle for information. "Can you tell me in confidence," he said, "who wrote the article in the Edinburgh Review, No. XCII., October 1827, on the State of German Literature? Here, people believe it was Mr. Lockhart, Sir W. Scott's son-in-law. Its earnestness and good feeling are alike admirable."11 Goethe could not be suspected of insincere politeness, and every sentence of the previous letter was a genuine expression of true feeling; but this indirect
praise was so clearly undesigned that it was doubly encouraging.

Carlyle was still determined on Craigenputtoch, but various causes continued to detain him in Edinburgh. The acquaintance with Jeffrey ripened into a warm intimacy. Jeffrey was a frequent visitor in Comely Bank; the Carlyles were as often his guests at Craigcrook. They met interesting persons there, whose society was pleasant and valuable. Jeffrey was himself influential in the great world of politics, and hopes revived—never, perhaps, very ardently in Carlyle himself, but distinctly in his wife and among his friends—that he would be rescued by some fitting appointment from banishment to the Dumfriesshire moors. Carlyle was now famous in a limited circle, and might reasonably be selected for a professorship or other similar situation; while other possibilities opened on various sides to which it was at least his duty to attend. Meanwhile demands came in thick for fresh articles: Jeffrey wanted one on Tasso; the *Foreign Quarterly* wanted anything that he pleased to send, with liberal offers of pay. He could not afford at such a moment to be out of the reach of libraries, and therefore for the present he left his brother alone in the moorland home.

In the summer he and his wife ran down for a short holiday at Scotsbrig, giving a few brief days to Templand, and a glance at Craigenputtoch. By August they were again settled in Comely Bank. The Carlyles, as he said long before, were a clannish set, and clung tenaciously together. The partings after even so brief a visit were always sorrowful.

With reputation growing, and economics looking less gloomy, Carlyle's spirits were evidently rising. We hear no more of pain and sickness and bilious lamentations, and he looked about him in hope and comfort. The London University was getting itself established, offering opportunities for Nonconformist genius such as England had never before provided. Professors were wanted there in various departments of knowledge. He was advised to offer himself to be one of them, and he wrote to Irving to inquire, with no particular result.

In appointments to the London University, the great
Brougham, not yet Chancellor or peer, but member for Yorkshire, and greatest orator in the House of Commons, was likely to be omnipotent. Jeffrey, it was equally probable, would carry weight with Brougham; and Jeffrey, when Carlyle consulted him, expressed the utmost personal willingness to be of use to Carlyle. But his reply illustrates what Goethe had observed about Schiller, that genius rarely finds recognition from contemporaries as long as it can possibly be withheld. At all times, Jeffrey said, he would be willing to recommend Carlyle as a man of genius and learning; he did not conceal, however, that difficulties would lie in the way of his success in this especial enterprise. Carlyle, he said, was a sectary in taste and literature, and was inspired with the zeal by which sectaries were distinguished. He was inclined to magnify the special doctrines of his sect, and rather to aggravate than reconcile the differences which divided them from others. He confessed, therefore, that he doubted whether the patrons either would or ought to appoint such a person to such a charge. The sincerity and frankness of Carlyle’s character increased the objection, for such a person would insist the more peremptorily on the articles of his philosophic creed—a creed which no one of the patrons adopted, and most of them regarded as damnable heresy. It was therefore but too likely that this would prove an insuperable obstacle. In all other respects Jeffrey considered Carlyle fully qualified, and likely, if appointed, to do great credit to the establishment. But he was afraid that Carlyle would not wish to disguise those singularities of opinion from which he foresaw the obstructions to his success; and as a further difficulty he added that the chair at which Carlyle was aiming had long been designed for Thomas Campbell, and would probably be given to him.

Jeffrey did what he could, perhaps not with very great ardour, but with vigour enough to save him from the charge of neglecting his friend. He went on a visit to Brougham in the autumn. He mentioned Carlyle, and in high terms of praise. He found Brougham, however, “singularly shy on the subject,” and though the subject was introduced “half a dozen times” during Jeffrey’s stay, Brougham was careful
“to evade it in a way that shewed” that he “did not wish to be pressed for an explicit answer even by an intimate friend.”

He came to know Brougham better in after years. There was probably no person in England less likely to recognise Carlyle’s qualities; and the more distinguished Carlyle became, the more Brougham was sure to have congratulated himself on having kept his new University clear of such an influence. It must be admitted that the “disesteem” was equally marked on both sides.

Carlyle meanwhile did not rest on the vain imagination of help from others. He worked with all his might on the new line which had been opened to him, and here I have to mention one of those peculiarly honourable characteristics which meet us suddenly at all turns of his career. He had paid his brother’s expenses at the University out of his salary as the Bullers’ tutor. He was now poor himself with increased demands upon him, but the first use which he made of his slightly improved finances was to send John Carlyle to complete his education in the medical schools in Germany. He estimated John’s talents with a brother’s affection, and he was resolved to give him the best chances of distinguishing himself. The cost was greater than he had calculated on, but he was not discouraged.

While Carlyle was taking care of his brother, an active interest was rising in Edinburgh about himself. Scotch people were beginning to see that a remarkable man had appeared among them, and that they ought not to let him slip through their hands. A new opening presented itself which he thus describes to his father: “there has been a fresh enterprize started for me: no less than the attempt to be successor to Dr Chalmers in the St. Andrews University!”

Among those who encouraged Carlyle in this ambition, and lent active help, Jeffrey was now the first, and, besides general recommendations, wrote most strongly in his favour to Dr. Nicol, the Principal of the University. Equal testimonials, viewed by the intrinsic quality of the givers, to those which were collected or spontaneously offered on this occasion, were perhaps never presented by any candidate for a Scotch professorship. Goethe himself wrote one, which in
these times might have carried the day; but Goethe was then only known in Scotland as a German dreamer. Carlyle, though again personally pretending indifference, exerted himself to the utmost, and was, perhaps, more anxious than he was aware of being.

There is a certain humour in the claims of Thomas Carlyle, supported by the most famous man of letters in Europe, being submitted to be tried in the scales by such a person as this. But so it was, and is, and perhaps must be, in constitutional countries, where high office may fall on the worthy, but rarely or never on the most worthy. It is difficult everywhere for the highest order of merit to find recognition. Under a system of popular election it is almost impossible.

After a few weeks the suspense was over. Carlyle was not appointed; someone else was; and someone else's church was made over to another someone else whom it was desirable to oblige; "and so the whole thing be rounded off in the neatest manner possible."¹⁵ Such at least was Carlyle’s account of what he understood to be the arrangement. Perhaps the "someone else" was a fitter person after all. Education in countries so jealous of novelty as Great Britain is, or at least was sixty years ago, follows naturally upon lines traced out by custom, and the conduct of it falls as a matter of course to persons who have never deviated from those lines. New truths are the nutriment of the world's progress. Men of genius discover them, insist upon them, prove them in the face of opposition, and if the genius is not merely a phosphorescent glitter, but an abiding light, their teaching enters in time into the University curriculum. But out of new ideas time alone can distinguish the sound and real from the illusive and imaginary; and it was enough that Carlyle was described as a man of original and extraordinary gifts to make college patrons shrink from contact with him.

Carlyle himself dimly felt that St. Andrew's might not be the best place for him. It seemed hard to refuse promotion to a man because he was too good for it, and no doubt he would have been pleased to be appointed. But for the work which Carlyle had to do a position of intellectual independence was indispensable, and his apprenticeship to poverty and hardship had to be prolonged still further to harden his
nerves and perhaps to test his sincerity. The loss of this professorship may be regretted for Mrs. Carlyle’s sake, who did not need the trials which lay before her. Carlyle himself in a University chair would have been famous in his day, and have risen to wealth and consequence, but he might not have been the Carlyle who has conquered a place for himself among the Immortals.

So ended the only fair prospect which ever was opened to him of entering any of the beaten roads of life; and fate having thus decided in spite of the loud remonstrance of all friends, of Jeffrey especially, Carlyle became once more bent on removing to Craigenputtoch. The repairs in the old house were hastened forward, that it might be ready for them in the spring.

The domestic scene in Comely Bank had been meantime brightened by the long-talked-of event of the visit of old Mrs. Carlyle to Edinburgh. In all her long life she had never yet been beyond Annandale, had never seen the interior of any better residence than a Scottish farmhouse. To the infinite heaven spread above the narrow circle of her horizon she had perhaps risen as near on wings of prayer and piety as any human being who was upon the earth beside her; but of the earth itself, of her own Scotland, she knew no more than could be descried from Burnswark Hill. She was to spend Christmas week at Comely Bank. She arrived at the beginning of December [and stayed about four weeks, seeing the sights of Edinburgh, yet anxious to return home to her work].

Eager as Carlyle was to be gone from Edinburgh, he confessed that in his wife’s manner he had detected an unwillingness to bury herself in the moors. The evident weakness of her health alarmed him, and he could scarcely have forgotten the aversion with which she had received his first suggestion of making Craigenputtoch their home. For himself his mind was made up; and usually when Carlyle wished anything he was not easily impressed with objections to it. In this instance, however, he was evidently hesitating. Craigenputtoch, sixteen miles from the nearest town and the nearest doctor, cut off from the outer world through the winter months by snow and flood, in itself gaunt, grim, comfortless, and utterly solitary, was not a spot exactly suited to a
delicate and daintily nurtured woman. In the counter scale was her mother, living a few miles below in Nithsdale. But for this attraction Mrs. Carlyle would have declined the adventure altogether; as it was she trembled at the thought of it.

The house in Comely Bank was held only by the year. They were called on to determine whether they would take it for another twelve months or not. Before deciding they resolved to see Craigenputtoch together once more. Little Jean was left in charge at Edinburgh, and Carlyle and Mrs. Carlyle went down to Dumfriesshire. "My two nights at Craigenputtoch . . . I vividly enough recollect: Proofsheets of Goethe's Helena in my pocket; & Dumfries 'architects' to confer with! Scene grim enough, outlook too rather ditto; but resolution fixed enough."

On a blusterous March day Craigenputtoch could not look to advantage. They left it still irresolute, and perhaps inclining to remain among their friends. But the question had been settled for them in their absence; on returning to Comely Bank they found that their landlord, not caring to wait longer till they had made up their minds, had let the house to another tenant, and that at all events they would have to leave it at Whitsuntide. This ended the uncertainty.

So ended the life at 21 Comely Bank—the first married home of the Carlyles; which began ominously, as a vessel rolls when first launched, threatening an overturn, and closed with improved health and spirits on Carlyle's part, and prospects which, if not brilliant, were encouraging and improving. He had been fairly introduced into the higher walks of his profession, and was noticed and talked about. Besides the two articles on Jean Paul and on German literature, he had written the paper on Werner, the essay on Goethe's "Helena," and the more elaborate and remarkable essay on Goethe himself, which now stand among the Miscellaneies. Goethe personally remained kind and attentive. He had studied Carlyle's intellectual temperament, and had used an expression about him in the St. Andrews testimonial which showed how clear an insight he had gained into the character of it. Carlyle was resting, he said, "on an original foundation," and was so happily constituted that he could "develop in himself the essentials of what is good and
beautiful”\textsuperscript{18}—in himself, not out of contact with others. The work could be done, therefore, as well, or perhaps better, in solitude. Along with the testimonial had come a fresh set of presents, with more cards and verses and books, and with a remembrance of himself which Carlyle was to deliver to Sir Walter Scott.

This was the last of Comely Bank. A few days later the Carlyles were gone to the Dumfriesshire moorland where for seven years was now to be their dwelling-place.\textsuperscript{19} Carlyle never spoke to Scott, as he hoped to do; nor did Sir Walter even acknowledge his letter. It seems that the medals and the letter to Scott from Goethe were entrusted to Wilson, by whom, or by Jeffrey, they were delivered to Scott on the arrival of the latter soon after in Edinburgh. Carlyle’s letter, of which Wilson had also taken charge, was perhaps forgotten by him.\textsuperscript{20}