

A Burning Question Answered:  
The Manuscript of TC to William Graham,  
22 April 1835

THE MISCELLANIES OF *CARLYLE STUDIES ANNUAL* 30 FEATURES A transcription of Thomas Carlyle to William Graham, 22 April 1835.<sup>1</sup> This astonishing letter included Carlyle's most complete and vivid account of the burning of the manuscript of *The French Revolution*. Brent E. Kinser concluded his introduction with guarded optimism:

If the letter is a forgery, then it is a well-conceived and rendered one. Given that the correspondence between Graham and Carlyle was not published until 1950, it seems possible that this letter is legitimate. If true, then one burning question remains: the location of the manuscript. (160)

In December 2015, Melvin Schuetz of the Armstrong Browning Library sent an email to the editors of *CSA* to inform them of a letter sold on 3 June 1997 by Swann Auction Galleries, New York. The announcement suggested that this letter was in fact TC to William Graham, 22 April 1835.<sup>2</sup> Marco Tomaschett at Swann Galleries offered to contact the current owner to determine that person's willingness to share an image of the letter with the editors, so that it could be transcribed for publication in the *CSA* and ultimately in *The Carlyle Letters Online*. It is published here with the kind permission of that owner, who wishes to remain anonymous.

As for the letter, there are several interesting accidental and

<sup>1</sup> See "The ugliest stroke that I ever got': An Unpublished Account of the Burning of the *French Revolution* Manuscript." *CSA* 30 (2014): 149–60.

<sup>2</sup> See <<http://www.invaluable.com/auction-lot/carlyle,-thomas-37-c-76klr15g1j>>.

substantive differences from the previously published version. Of particular note in North's typescript transcription is the phrase "Fliche von Allen" (CSA 30: 159). The footnote duly observes that the phrase is German, meaning "a side of bacon for all" (159n25). The manuscript of the letter reads "Fluch vor allen" (below, p. 257), German for "curse above all," a quote from Goethe's *Faust I*. During Faust's first conversation with Mephistopheles he curses wine, love, hope, faith, and "above all" patience. The most significant substantive omission follows this phrase at the end of the paragraph. In the North typescript, the paragraph ends "Believe what we will, I must struggle to make it good again, and then we will talk" (CSA 30: 159). The manuscript reads, "Believe what we will, I must struggle to make it good again, in which enterprise the bilious stupidity of this spring weather proves little furthersome. Do not speak of it to any mortal;—till I have it right again, and then we will talk" (below, p. 258). It may be the most poignantly descriptive moment in any of Carlyle's three accounts of the catastrophe.

The editors are deeply grateful to Melvin Schuetz, Marco Tomaschett, and the owner of the letter for their generosity in bringing this letter to the editors' attention, for providing an image of the manuscript, and for allowing its publication. The location of the manuscript may still remain somewhat of a mystery, but the burning question is answered in a most satisfying manner.

*Brent E. Kinser*



**TC to WG, 22 April 1835; ALS, 4 pp. MS: Auctioned by Swann Galleries, 3 June 1997; Privately held.**

[*Editor's Note:* Differences between the MS transcription and the previously published typescript transcription are denoted by bold font text.]

22nd April, 1835

My dear friend,

Thanks for your good kind letter, which was right welcome to

me; welcome and wholesome: like some fresh rural breath, as of new-mown hay, amid the confused artificial **City** vapours,—some of which are not the sweetest. Post obit, we observed, had put certain marks on the sheet, and was taken as it were “with **the** red hand”: clean again law!<sup>3</sup> However, I would not have **quarrelled** with that, had it only subdued your unbelieving humour, and made you write sooner. Think that Annandale is my old rough nursing mother; whom, with all her crabbed ways, I must ever have a son’s love to: poor old Annandale, hard and heathery are her hills, stinted, **rude** her life; but when I forget her, may my right hand forget its cunning!

You are not to take this as an Answer; but as an acknowledgment that an Answer were due. The **seed-corn** once well in the ground, and bright summer calling your thoughts all out of doors, you will write to me again. News are precious; news of yourself and of what is round you: there are some six square miles there, of which Burnswark may stand at the centre, that are more to me than any other six hundred in the Solar System. Thanks, many ways, for the friendliness you testify towards **<you>** me; I feel that you wish me heartily well, heartily and fervently; that the effectual fervent wish of a just man availeth much. It is verily so; in this time, as it was in the old time; as it will ever be.

For yourself with “dark clouds girdling your horizon,”<sup>4</sup> of which you resolutely **repress** all but the briefest mention, I can only again say that in this brave genial temper of yours lies

<sup>3</sup> “Post obit” is Latin for “after death.” Carlyle and Graham personified the phrase as an entity that sent a letter with postage pre-paid (at the time the recipient was expected to pay). The post obit bond was a loan made to an expectant heir who after coming into the inheritance would be required to repay the obligation at an often usurious rate of interest; see *CLO*: TC to William Graham, 5 Aug. 1834. The “certain marks on the sheet” is the postmark indicating that the postage was paid. As the joke goes, Carlyle would now owe Graham an even longer letter, which is confirmed by the rest of the joke. The “red hand” alludes to Vanda, murdered wife of Baldric, in Walter Scott’s *The Betrothed* (1825). The spirit of Vanda would appear to young girls who spent the night in her chamber and predict a positive future by smiling, or an ill future by showing them her bloody red hand, which had been cut off by her murderers so they could return her wedding ring to Baldric. The phrase “clean again law” refers to blackmail in Walter Scott’s *Rob Roy* (1817); see the 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: James Ballantyne, 1818), 2: 287; see also *CLO*: TC to Margaret Carlyle, 30 May 1834.

<sup>4</sup> See “The ugliest stroke that I ever got,” *CSA* 30: 155.

**assurance** of safety to you. It is (God be thanked for it) purely impossible for mere Fortune to beat down a man: he must always have proved untrue to himself first. Courage, my friend! “Stout heart and cheerful thought” (as the Germans say): **Hope** also forever belongs to us. We will hope, for instance, that much will prove better than it looks in the distance;—that good news from beyond the Ocean will come to cheer you,<sup>5</sup> that my poor Jack too will get safe across the Alps;<sup>6</sup> **then** we shall all three spend yet one sunny day on the sides of Burnswark. It is a dark **grisly** warfare this, but with bright blinks in it: and is not the Everlasting **Star**-dome over all?<sup>7</sup> Not without a Fatherly Eye that notes **us**, with pity; nay, mysteriously, with guidance! It shall one day **all** be well.

Since I turned this leaf, my little Lord Jeffrey has come fiddle-faddling in,<sup>8</sup> and **frittered** away the whole time<,> I had set apart for a better man than he; nay more than the whole time; so that I must now steal for you from other allotments, and give **double-small** measure. He is here, the worthy little man, spending his holidays; and comes tripping down from time to time; grown very **wizzened**, in hoof and mind: what he still wants with me were rather hard to tell, for I thought we had settled our accounts some twelve months ago. The piping of the whirlwind, when Death and Destiny Dance round you, and you must fight again or fare worse, is no element for a light-jigging carpet-**dancer** of that kind: I wish him kindly well; but have **no** leisure to tarry with him. He has gone his way, I must go mine.

Of poor Edward’s followers and **Church** I now hear not the faintest whisper.<sup>9</sup> His widow is a woman who does not like me, whom I do not like: Edward once gone out of that confusion, it is to me nothing but the wretchedest **puddle**, which I rather turn my sight from. There **ran** a report some time since that he had written **Letters** from Glasgow, as good as **abjuring** the **thing**

<sup>5</sup> Graham’s two brothers were in Philadelphia; see “The ugliest stroke that I ever got,” *CSA* 30: 155n14.

<sup>6</sup> Carlyle’s brother John Aitken Carlyle was in Rome serving as the traveling physician for Elizabeth Julia Georgiana, Countess of Clare (1793–1879).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Sartor Resartus*, ed. Rodger L. Tarr (Berkeley, 2000), 194.

<sup>8</sup> Lord Francis Jeffrey (1773–1850); see TC to Alexander Carlyle, 26 Jan. 1820.

<sup>9</sup> Edward Irving (1792–1834), leader of the Catholic Apostolic church, also known as the Irvingites.

himself: however, I learned that it **was** not so. **Letters** he did write; and they were printed, and again speedily withdrawn from circulation; but it seems they did not contain any recantation of the Tongue doctrine; only indicated great or small doubtings about it, and generally much confusion in the poor writer's mind. That scandalous absurdity about "having been an actor,"<sup>10</sup> was contradicted and abolished forthwith. A certain "**Mr Jones**" (I think) is now writing a Life of Irving;<sup>11</sup> which is not likely to be anything but a mere chimera: they can do anything they like with him; he is far out of their reach now,—the foolish, inconstant, faithless inconsiderate **gomerils** that they are. A worse man might have served for **them** to waste; but this man was, to our sorrow, appointed them.

Since you last heard from me there has befallen the ugliest accident I ever underwent; of which I have spoken or speak to no man except to my own kindred,<sup>12</sup> and now also to you, who I know **also** can hold your peace. The first volume of my poor **Book** you heard a good while ago was written: well, it is now **unwritten**, annihilated, and even worse, for instead of it there is mere dispiritment and vexation! I lent it to a worthy friend here, who had great interest in it; who, nevertheless, left it lying in his rooms unlocked, where it went as waste paper. The fruit of five months hard toil, evaporated as a false dream of the night! I was forced to be quiet too; for the poor culprit looked as if he would actually **run** mad. But I think it was the ugliest stroke I ever got, in that humour I was in: no case for your **Fluch vor Allen**,<sup>13</sup> not so! a case where you had to button **your[self]**<sup>14</sup> together, lest you

<sup>10</sup> William Lemen Rede (1802–47), actor and playwright, published the accusation in *New Monthly Magazine* (March 1835). The *Times* reprinted it on 2 March (p. 5); see Barbara Waddington, ed., *The Diary and Letters of Edward Irving* (Eugene, OR, 2012), 54.

<sup>11</sup> William Jones (1762–1846), author of *Biographical Sketch of the Rev. Edward Irving with Extracts from and Remarks on His Principal Publications* (London: John Bennett, 1835).

<sup>12</sup> See *CLO*: TC to John A. Carlyle, 23 March 1835, and TC to Margaret A. Carlyle, 25 March 1835.

<sup>13</sup> German for "curse above all"; compare Goethe's *Faust* 1.1.252–55. Here, during his first conversation with Mephistopheles, Faust curses the balm-juice of grapes, the delights of love, hope, faith, and above all patience.

<sup>14</sup> MS torn.

too went mad! So I had to begin again; and for these weary six weeks have I been sitting and toiling, at the unthankfullest task, which nevertheless must and shall be done, for I will not give up that dirty **whippersnapper** of a **Book** (it often seems to me quite hateful now) till I can say: "**Finis! There**, go, thou dirty **whippersnapper**, creature of pain and toil; **I am rid of thee!**" So you will get no printed French Revolution this **season**, but must wait till the next. On the whole I do struggle to believe (for there is some faith in me) that this too will turn out for the **best**, but it seemed sharp upon me at the time. Believe what we will, I must struggle to make it good again; **in which enterprise the bilious stupidity of this spring weather proves little furthersome. Do not speak of it to any mortal;—till I have it right again**, and then we will talk.

On the whole I get rather hefted to this place; and could grow to do tolerably enough with it. I am already much more at home than I ever became in Dunscore. There is a certain fractional sprinkling of good among these millions; one finds it possible to attain this and that.— I have seen Southey and Wordsworth;<sup>15</sup> with little disappointment, **for I hoped little**. Southey is a ready, active, straitlaced, well-meaning individual; the **irasciblest** man, I should fancy, or one of the irasciblest now living. Wordsworth is greater, without being great; a long-winded, prosy, in fact quite wearisome, but very natural clear and genuine man. Such are the two main luminaries for the time being. The fact is, "**distinguished men**," above all things, "**distinguished women**," are a class of persons whom I (taught by frequent experience) rather shun than seek.<sup>16</sup> I know some Annandale goodwives whom for real sagacity pure bravery you might beat each into three or four "**distinguished (Cockney) females**."

We had Allan Cunningham last night; with his Brother, **Dr** Cunningham,<sup>17</sup> known for a very amusing book on New South Wales. Allan is full of rough vigour as of old; brings a piece of old Scotland home to you.— Will you go down and see

<sup>15</sup> William Wordsworth (1770–1850) and Robert Southey (1774–1843), poets laureate, 1813–50.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. TC to John A. Carlyle, 12 Jan. 1835.

<sup>17</sup> Allan Cunningham (1784–1842), miscellaneous writer (see TC to Alexander Carlyle, 25 June 1824), and Peter Cunningham (1789–1864), naval surgeon and Australian pioneer, returned to England in 1830.

my Mother, and speak a good word to her. If Miss Grahame or Mrs. Howatton would go,<sup>18</sup> it would do her still more good. I get no sufficiently minute tidings about her; tho' she writes me bravely too, it is always with pious assurance that everything is well—which indeed it ought to be, and I hope is.— O what a hurry! hurry! Adieu my worthy Friend! Write to me when you have an hour, and “**N’oubliez**” as your snuff-box says. My wife sends her kind salutations. Be diligent and fervent, be well and happy! **Yours most truly—T. Carlyle**

Thomas Carlyle  
22 April 1835  
Chelsea<sup>19</sup>

**W. Grahame**, Esq.,  
Burnswark.



### ‘A Trustworthy Gentleman’: Carlyle and Admiral Nesham

IN THE 2-VOLUME UNIFORM EDITION OF *THE FRENCH REVOLUTION*, published by Chapman and Hall in 1857, TC added a footnote to his statement in the text, “Nor is England without her missionaries. She has her life-saving Needham; to whom was solemnly presented a ‘civic sword,’—long since rusted into nothingness.” In the note he asserted that a “trustworthy gentlemen writes to me, three years ago, with a feeling which I cannot but respect, that his Father, ‘the late Admiral Nesham’ (not Needham, as the French Journalists give it) is the Englishmen meant; and furthermore that the sword is ‘not rusted at all,’ but still lies, with the due

<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth Graham and Jane Graham Howatson (d. 1841), Graham’s sisters; see TC to William Graham, 5 Aug. 1834.

<sup>19</sup> Carlyle’s name, the date, and Chelsea are written in another hand, possibly Graham’s, directly under the black wax used to seal the letter, which is written on the front and back of two sheets.