

A Transatlantic Friendship: The Carlyles and Charles Eliot Norton

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The following essay is a substantially revised version of a lecture originally delivered in Philadelphia at the “Carlyle 2000” conference held at Saint Joseph’s University in April 2000.

ON 29 JUNE 1886, readers of the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* were informed of the publication of an important new article about the Carlyle-Froude “scandal”:

It is about five years since Mr. Froude published the first volumes of his memorials of Thomas Carlyle and started that avalanche of misunderstanding and of condemnation which for several years poured pretty steadily upon the memory of the dead Titan. Never, apparently, had gossips so agreeable a theme as the revelations in regard to the intimate life of Carlyle and his wife. Here it was possible for men and women to indulge openly in scandal-mongering, under the pretense of taking an interest in literature; and to express their surprise and horror to discover that—according to Mr. Froude—the man whom more than a generation of thinkers on both sides of the Atlantic had looked up to as a leader, was in reality a morose, ogreish fellow. . . . These earnest persons, who have been perplexed by the strange “friendship” of Mr. Froude for Carlyle, will turn with pleasure to an article in the *New Princeton Review* for July. Its author is Prof. Charles Eliot Norton, whose work as editor of the Carlyle-Emerson correspondence is familiar.

It may still be possible to say something new about the “avalanche of misunderstanding” that threatened to bury TC’s

reputation following the publication of Froude's four-volume biography in 1882 and 1884. Unpublished letters between Norton and TC's niece Mary Aitken Carlyle (MAC), generously loaned by members of the Carlyle family, throw fresh light on the part that the Harvard professor played both as a defender of TC and JWC and as an editor of their correspondence. These letters supplement Sarah Norton and M. A. De Wolfe Howe's edition of Norton's letters, and Norton's own unpublished correspondence in the Houghton Library, Harvard.¹ This archive, which was largely unknown to editors and biographers until the publication of the Oxford World's Classics edition of TC's *Reminiscences* in 1997 and more recently, Kenneth J. Fielding and David R. Sorensen's selection of JWC's letters in 2004, includes the complete run of surviving letters between Norton and TC, TC's nephew Alexander Carlyle, and Mary Aitken, who became Mary Aitken Carlyle when she married Alexander in 1881. Together, Alexander and Mary were to be Froude's most persistent opponents. It is true that many readers would eventually grow weary of their treatment of TC's chosen editor and biographer, and that the debate itself would later reach a point of exhaustion. But these new letters confirm that the attempts of Froude's later apologists to vindicate his reputation at the expense of Norton's are misguided.

The chorus of criticism has been consistent since one of Froude's staunchest defenders, W. H. Dunn, declared in 1930: "Nothing perhaps did more to injure Froude's reputation as editor and biographer than the part taken in the controversy by Charles Eliot Norton." Dunn acknowledges that "Norton had won a reputation for discretion, dignity and integrity", but he does not hesitate to question his integrity: "There is no doubt that Norton took pleasure in doing all within his power to injure Froude" (71). Kermit Vanderbilt is equally certain that Norton's attack was peculiarly vicious: "The savagery of Norton's attack was felt on both sides of the Atlantic, and dealt a severe blow to Froude's reputation" (168). Vanderbilt draws broader conclusions about the consequences of the affair for Norton's outlook: "More important than any personal dislike and jealousy of Froude—and a case for the former can easily be made, though not for the latter—was Norton's enduring resentment toward modern society and its literary sleuths, with their fondness for peeping into the

innermost privacies of a man's personal life" (169). John Lewis Bradley and Ian Ousby, who edited the Norton-Ruskin correspondence in 1987, are less equivocal in their assessment of Norton: "It is obvious that Norton was motivated as much by personal vindictiveness and the competitive desire to stake his own claim in Carlyle scholarship as by scholarly or moral scruple" (483).

Yet Norton's contemporaries would not have recognized the ogre painted by Froude's twentieth-century advocates. Dunn rightly concedes that Norton possessed a sterling reputation and good standing in the field of literature in his time. In 1867 the *Chicago Tribune* held that Norton "undoubtedly should be named first among the younger representatives of New England culture" and added that both his work and character were distinguished by "purity of taste" as well as clarity and force (6 October). Reviewing Alexander Carlyle's edition of the *New Letters* in 1904, the *Daily Chronicle* described Norton as a "sweet-tempered scholar and deeply sympathetic man" (13 April). The *Boston Evening Transcript* went so far as to characterize him as "the living epitome . . . of the thought that that most fragile and glorious heritage of man, personality vibrant and alive, untrammelled by the bonds of convention, may persist beyond the grave. . . . Professor Norton toiled on at tasks that must have seemed many times routine and unprofitable. Editor and teacher then of unreflecting youth, he lives today as the embodiment of the exalted spirit that impinges on its duller companions the perception and appreciation of Beauty" (12 November 1927).

The evidence of Norton's letters suggests that it is possible to distinguish Norton the man from the caricatures developed by both his critics and his admirers. Particular motifs emerge from his correspondence that need to be emphasized. He greatly admired TC, and TC for his part seems to have returned the feeling. He described Norton to William Allingham as "a serious man—he is attached to America, but sees well enough too the dreadful plague of money-worship there, and the manifold evils that are, and are to be, from that" (Allingham 224). Norton was far from being seduced by London's wealth and success, whatever the obvious pleasure he took in the society and intellectual stimulus of a winter spent in the company of writers such as TC. When he returned to the United States from London in 1900, his comments oddly echo TC's earlier ones:

I am glad to be at home again, though England was beautiful in June, friends very kind, and London crowded with interests and far more stately and superb and spectacular than when I saw it last fourteen years ago. The changed aspect of the great town shows how rapid has been the advance of democracy, and how great is the effect of its wide-spread wealth. . . . Its old charm has disappeared. . . . Society too has changed. There is no longer a distinctively literary or intellectual group uniting the fashionable world with the world of ideas. There are plenty of able men, but they are separate figures. (*Letters* 2: 294-95; 23 July 1900)

With TC, in earlier years, it was different. In his diary Norton recalled: “He gave me a pipe and we sat for an hour by the fireside and then went for a walk to the Park. He was in a most pleasant mood;—as I grow familiar with him, and a certain intimacy unites us, his character becomes more and more open and delightful, and I feel a real affection for him. . . . He is one of the most sympathetic of men” (*Letters* 1: 458; 17 January 1873). Norton predicted in 1872 that when TC dies, “there will be a bigger gap than the death of any other man could make” (*Letters* 1: 420). And TC, for his part, confided to his notebook in March 1873 his memories of “[a]n amiable, very friendly, sincere and cultivated Charles Norton, from Boston, [who] is here all winter and much a favourite for me” (qtd. in *Letters* 1: 420). They were frank with one another. TC was usually careful not to offend in his discussions of Emerson (about whose ideas he had strong personal reservations) but to Norton he felt confident enough to offer a firm judgment:

There’s a great contrast between Emerson and myself. He seems verra content with life, and takes much satisfaction in the world, especially in your country. One would suppose to hear him that ye had no troubles there, and no share in the darkness that hangs over these old lands. It’s a verra strikin’ and curious spectacle to behold a man so confidently cheerful as Emerson in these days. (qtd. in *Letters* 1: 484; April 1873)

On 16 December 1874 Norton writes with equal frankness from Cambridge to Chelsea about Emerson, who had just failed

in a rectorial bid at Glasgow University: "I have not seen Emerson since his Glasgow defeat. I don't think it surprised or hurt him. Indeed it was a very satisfactory battle, & its result better than if he had been made Lord Rector. For, though he retains all the beauty & excellence of his soul,—he has grown, even within the last year, less sure of his memory, & less confident in the meeting of word with thought than in younger days, & it would have been a pain to him and a regret to those who love him, to have him show himself to his young Scotch admirers an angel with his wings clipped, or a single plume fallen" (Private Letters). In his report to TC, 6 May 1875, Norton notes: "Emerson took part in the commemoration in this town, and it was pleasant to see with what common, national accord he was recognized as the chief figure and most characteristic product of the new, American order of things. His invincible optimism is still the creed of the vast majority of us, and he will not live to lose one jot of his faith. He rebukes me for my doubts. I have seen him once since the anniversary, and he was in the happiest humour, full of cheerfulness & kindness. But he strikes me always now as *emeritus*,—happy alike in the past and in the present, but not likely to do any more work for his generation" (*Letters* 2: 52).

Emerson did, however, have the good sense to foresee the demand for biography and editing after he had gone, and he made a gesture which showed his foresight. Norton writes to TC, 22 December 1873:

Four or five weeks ago I had a note from Emerson in the course of which he said,—“Another impulse of my three-score-&-ten-ship was to say that I shall like to know that I may confide to you the entire file of Carlyle's letters to me from 1835 to 1872, nearly a hundred, I believe; that you may hereafter make what disposition or destruction of them you shall find fit;—to which I might add, I believe, some manuscript notes of him taken in 1848.”

This is the essential part of his note. I answered,—that I was deeply touched by the confidence he put in me, and that though at first suggestion I shrank from accepting such a charge, yet on reflection I was willing to do so, for I knew no one to whom it could be more sacred, or who through affection & respect for you & for him, would be more

desirous to fulfil the charge in a manner, whatever the needful fulfilment might prove to be, such as you would approve. (*Letters* 2: 26–27)

Norton felt the responsibility he had been given, and recognized the potential difficulties which might ensue: “I do not like to have this trust in my hands, and in my heart, without your knowledge of it, and your concurrence in it. Emerson may not write you of what he has done,—and yet, I feel that you should know it, and that your leave should be asked. I shall feel the easier about it” (*Letters* 2: 27; 22 December 1873). For Norton, it was easier to write to TC than to find someone of such comparable stature, even at Harvard:

I have had no one to talk with this year, for though there are many good men here, they are either too busy, or too devoted to special interests, or too provincial to talk well, or they have wives and are too happy, or they have creeds and are too dogmatic. Lowell [James Russell Lowell (1819–91), editor and critic], upon whose friendship and companionship I greatly depend, has been in Europe for nearly two years past. (*Private Letters*, 7 May 1874)

He admired his students, but informed TC that they too often fell short of intellectually stimulating company: “[There are] some forty young men in the College here, whom I am trying to make less ignorant than I am myself. They are a pleasant and hopeful set to work for; handsome cheerful, promising fellows, better, it seems to me, that the world in which they must live. I mean that they would be equal to much better circumstances than they will find” (*Private Letters*, 16 December 1874). He imagined his friend in the same predicament: “How do you make out for companions on your walks now, with Froude away, & Allingham married, and FitzJames more pugnacious than ever? I wish I were within reach of Cheyne Row. I hear from Ruskin not infrequently. In a letter that came yesterday he speaks cheerfully of himself,—‘not going to pieces’ he says, ‘yet at all, not even aground,’—but lecturing to great audiences of pretty young ladies & the Bishop of Natal!” (*Private Letters*, 16 December 1874). The correspondence with a still-living TC was vital to Norton.

Slowly, as TC weakened, Mary Aitken began to figure more prominently in Norton's correspondence. On 6 May 1875 for the first time Norton thanks TC for a letter "for which Miss Aitken served kindly as amanuensis," though the letter itself is still about the old man himself, and "how I could not but wish that I were able to join you on some of your walks along the Chelsea embankment,—walks in which, whatever the talk, unspoken thoughts would be deeper than the uttered words, and presences, unrecognized by sound or sight, would be our companions.—To me, as to you, the afterlife seems near, and by no means fearful, however dark" (Private Letters, 6 May 1875). Still, the present could hold its pleasures, such as the joyful letter of 30 June 1875, in which Norton announces the proposal to confer on TC "the degree of LL.D, honoris causa":

[I]t would have pleased you to hear the warm applause with which the announcement was greeted, especially by the youths who were just closing their academic life. It is the best "Order of Merit" that America can offer you. I do not know that it carries any special privileges, though probably under cover of the parchment diploma, which will reach you in good time, you may be authorized to "profess" any science and to lecture upon any topic of human knowledge within the broad regions known as the United States. At any rate such honour & dignity as it may confer is ratified to you by a voice mightier even than that of the University. The University represents in this all that is best in the Nation. (Private Letters, 30 June 1875)

For himself, as he wrote to Mary Aitken on 25 September 1875, "The ancestral inheritance is strong in my blood, and I am always at home in England, at least in *old* England. *New* England is better on this side of the world than on yours. Many things in the old country are more native to me than most things here. We Americans inherit a good part of an old civilization in a new country; the two are not yet in accord, and it is not surprising that there should be portions of our natures even yet more in tune with the land of our forefathers, than with the rude country that has not yet been tamed to our temper & our taste" (Private Letters, 25 September 1875). Norton understood that correspondence with TC himself was now physically difficult:

If postal cards were not quite such ugly objects, they might have great use as means of brief cordial communication. Suppose instead of a walk with each other through the Park this winter, once a week we send each other a postal card,—on a Tuesday or Wednesday, with two words of remembrance. For my part, I will do it, and I will take your part for granted if you prefer,—but there would be to me a certain happiness in the mere expression in this poor way of the part that the thought of you, and affection for you holds in my daily life. (Private Letters, 31 October 1875)

But by the time of TC's much-celebrated 80th birthday, Norton was writing directly to Mary Aitken:

Dear Miss Aitken

I have to thank you for two very welcome, and, at this distance, I am sure you will allow me to add, very charming letters. And I must thank you also for your part in Mr. Carlyle's letter than which none could be more prized by me. And my thanks do not end here. . . . I could hardly hope better for Mr. Carlyle than that he should be as you tell me he is, and as his letter shows him to be. I am glad the birthday was transacted so successfully, and that you were able to bear its fatigues without breaking down under the accumulation. I do not wonder that your Uncle trusted to you to relieve him from them. The very expression of so much affection & respect for him, whether it gave him much satisfaction, could not but be deeply pathetic & could not but call up many tender & solemn thoughts and memories. The contrasts of beginning and close, of intention and fulfilment, of joy and of sorrow could hardly have been brought more sharply home. It is well if they leave it possible still to get something worth having out of life. (Private Letters, 28 December 1875)

Her letters, bringing news of the old man, were especially welcome to Norton: "Do not think it needful to write letters to me, but please from time to time let me have a few words to tell me of Mr. Carlyle. I know how burdensome your correspondence must be. Suppose you send me every now & then a postal card with your

initials only on its reverse. I shall understand them to mean that the days go in their ordinary courses" (Private Letters, 22 July 1878).

With the mention of Froude, the letters from 15 April 1881 take a different direction. The series starts with what might be a simple misunderstanding, but the tone in which Norton refers to Froude can hardly be mistaken. Writing to the recently wedded MAC, Norton instructs her to destroy his letters to TC:

My sister-in-law Mrs. Darwin has sent me your note to her from The Hill, Dumfries, in which you speak of your intention of sending to me my letters to your Uncle, and say that you have a notion that it was Mr. Froude who told you that I wished to have the letters back. I cannot let you remain under that error. I have not had, and do not expect to have any communication with Mr. Froude. I have no wish to have my letters again; let them be burned. Had I wanted them I should have written to you to ask for them. So pray give yourself no trouble about them, but get rid of them in any way easiest to yourself. (Private Letters, 15 April 1881)

In his letter to MAC of 5 July 1882, Norton's distaste for Froude's biography is palpable. A passage omitted from the original letter by Sara Norton and Howe is here italicized:

I felt much for you, and, I trust, with you, in reading Froude's two volumes of the Life. I have never read a book that gave me more pain, or that seemed to me more artfully malignant. I could not have believed, even of Froude bad as I thought him, a capacity for such falseness, for such betrayal of a most sacred trust, for such cynical treachery to the memory of one who had put faith in him. I am at a loss to discover a sufficient motive for this deed. *I can but conjecture that, mortified by your publication of your Uncle's injunction against the printing of his Reminiscences, and irritated at the effect of this publication upon the public estimate of himself, he determined to present such a picture of Mr. Carlyle as should serve to warrant the most unpleasant inferences concerning his character that were to be drawn from the Reminiscences, and thus to secure an indirect justification for himself in giving the Reminiscences to the public. But if this were his motive, he has overshot his mark.* No unbiassed

person can, I believe read the Life without a conviction that the original text,—the letters—does not support Mr. Froude's comment; that he has throughout glossed the letters in a false and evil spirit, that he has distorted their plain significance, and misinterpreted them with perverse ingenuity. The process is too open; he has revealed his own nature, and he has not succeeded in obscuring, for more than a brief moment, the real character of those to whom he has done wrong. His blows are vain, malicious mockery.

This misrepresentation of his is, indeed, not so much a sin against those whom he called friends, as a crime against human nature itself. To attempt to pervert the image and to degrade the character of a man like Mr. Carlyle, is to do an injury to mankind.

It is impossible to forgive him for the gross indelicacy of publishing the most private, sacred, and tender expressions of the love of two such lovers as those whose lovely letters he has ventured to print. (Private Letters; see also *Letters* 2: 135–37)²

The flow of letters between Norton and MAC now becomes steady, dense, and businesslike, as Norton accepts the challenge of editing the Carlyle papers and takes a position against Froude. Editing Carlyle was not something to be taken lightly or unadvisedly, as he soon found. On 11 September 1882, for instance, he acknowledges the difficulties of retrieving and organizing the Carlyle-Emerson papers:

Your letter was very interesting. You will be glad to know that since it came to me I have had a note from the Editor of the Athenaeum promising to send the missing letters of Mr. Emerson which he had bought. He says that he supposed they had been given to Joseph Neuberger, and bought them on that supposition. I wonder a little that he did not recognize that they would be desired by Mr. Emerson's family, and that they had a legal right to them. He does not tell me whether he obtained all, but I hope that this may be the case. So far as I can judge from the drafts & notes of them which were found in Mr. Emerson's papers there should be between fifteen & twenty. Since I wrote to you I have been occupied with getting the

correspondence into order for publication, and, as soon as the missing letters arrive, it will go into the printers' hands. It has needed very little editing. I have thought it best that it should make its own impression, for that impression cannot but be very deep and distinct, needing no words of mine to define or strengthen it, and of a nature to correct many of the false conceptions which Froude has done so much to create. Even you will be surprised at the interest of the correspondence. (Private Letters)

In addition to wrestling with editorial difficulties, Norton finds time too to put his memories of TC on paper:

[W]riting out my own reminiscences of your Uncle, but whether I shall print them I am as yet uncertain. In these I have had occasion to refer to Froude, but I have done it briefly, with no attempt at an elaborate traversing of his falsehoods,—(suppressiones veri et suggestiones falsi,)—but with a strong expression of my sense of the wrong which he has done. I shall be truly grateful to you if you will send me a corrected copy of the "Reminiscences." It will be a piece of documentary evidence which I shall greatly value. I think your idea of printing your Uncle's letters by themselves, with such comment as you would naturally supply, a most excellent one. It had already occurred to me that this should be done. They are far too precious to be left immersed in such a flood of malignant mendacities as that in which they are now weltering. (Private Letters, undated)

Here are Norton's essential commitments for the next few years—organizing his memories, putting the letters in order, involving Mary (and later Alexander) in the process, and above all rescuing TC and JWC from Froude's unjust and inaccurate portrait of them.

By 2 February 1883 he has a corrected copy of the *Reminiscences* in his possession, given to him by Mary and presumably Alexander. He informs her that his work on the correspondence has been completed, which has given him time to respond to Froude:

[T]he last proof of the Correspondence of your Uncle and Mr. Emerson left my hands last week, and since then I have been busy on a paper which I have called "A Statement concerning Mr. Froude's editing of Carlyle's 'Reminiscences'." I have endeavored to set forth the facts in such a way that they should compel the drawing of a certain conclusion. I have expressed as little as possible any personal feeling, and I have used none but strictly "Parliamentary" terms in speaking of Mr. Froude. But the case is so strong that there is no need of pleading or of rhetoric to secure conviction. (Private Letters)

It is plain from the tone of the letter that Norton's feelings were strongly engaged. He had seen the Emerson volume safely into print, and he was now ready to take on the larger tasks of producing a volume of letters and later, saving the *Reminiscences* from unworthy editing. In an important letter, dated 2 April 1883, Norton commits himself to the project of editing TC's letters:

My dear Mrs. Carlyle

I have delayed for some days to thank you for your two kind letters, because the suggestion in the later one that you would like to have me undertake the editing of your Uncle's letters needed serious and deliberate consideration. That you should make the suggestion gives me great pleasure. The work would be of the deepest interest to me, and I should have especial satisfaction in it, if by means of it I could do something to correct the false impressions which have become prevalent regarding your Uncle's character. I feel moreover that your request, if I may so call it, is in itself of the nature of an obligation upon me, and I cannot but recall some words from the note in which in 1873 Mr. Emerson confided to me the charge of your Uncle's letters to him. "He will be sure" he said, "to be reported and injured by unskilful persons . . . and I please myself with believing that you will take care hereafter that his memory suffers no detriment on this side the sea." If I were master of time and circumstance I would say, I gladly accept the charge you propose, as a sacred and delightful duty. But my time is in large part pledged to occupations that cannot be put aside, my health is not

vigorous, and my pecuniary conditions are such that I am compelled every year to do something by which I may add to my regular income. In view of all this I have come to this conclusion,—that if, upon further reflection, you still hold to the wish that I should undertake the editing, I will do so, giving to it what time I can take for it without neglecting other duties, and also on condition (a condition which I reluctantly am forced to make) that a portion of the proceeds of the copyright of the book should be mine. I write with this frankness to you because it is right that you should understand exactly my position, and because I want you to feel absolutely free in your consideration of the matter before you come to a final determination. If you should think best to entrust the work to me the arrangements in regard to putting the letters in my hands can be easily made. I should in that case want to have them in the early summer, for the summer months are my period of leisure. It would of course be most pleasant if you could bring them,—but I do not think it necessary, and I confess to feeling a great doubt whether it would be happy for you to come to America with the intention of living on this side of the ocean. Whether you are in England or in America communication is easy, and there would be unquestionably many points on which I should be obliged to consult you, and to seek for knowledge and advice from you. My impression is that the chief task of editing would be that of selection from the mass of letters those which had best be published, and in arranging them in such wise that they should form, so far as possible, a connected record of life that would require, for the most part, but simple and brief commentary. I should not wish to attempt a connected narrative in which the letters should be interwoven. The work should be the Correspondence simply, and my own share in the publication should be as inconspicuous as possible, consistent with proper presentation of the letters. It gives me the heartiest pleasure that you are pleased with the “Carlyle-Emerson Correspondence.” The book is certainly doing much to promote a fairer judgment of your Uncle. But there is much still to be done to set right the public opinion which has been so harmfully perverted. I am a little in doubt whether to print

anything over my own name in regard to Froude's editing of the *Reminiscences*; especially if I am to have the editing of the bulk of your Uncle's *Correspondence*. I am inclined to think that the better judgment, as well as the better taste, is not to appear in a controversial attitude toward him,—but to weaken the effect of his work without direct criticism of it. I shall, however, take pains that some of the facts concerning his manner of discharging his trust become publicly known. (Private Letters)

But this stance was modified by the publication of *Letters and Memorials* several days later, which drew an outraged response from Norton:

My dear Mrs. Carlyle

I must write to you a word of sympathy and of encouragement. The climax has been reached; we know the worst; Froude has delivered his heaviest and unfairest blow; the whole pack of yelpers has been once more let loose, the howls and the mud are hateful but are transient. It is as certain as the coming of the long-delaying Spring that a reaction will set in; that the progress of time will establish the right perspective, and that in the end the essential quality of your Uncle's life and character will be recognized and honored, not perhaps by the world at large, but by all whom Heaven has blessed with souls capable of discrimination and of understanding those scores with which the Angel of the Last Judgment marks out page after page of the minor records of the lives of the best and greatest of our poor human race. Indignant beyond words as I am at the wrong which Froude has done to your Uncle's memory, at even the graver wrong he has done to your Aunt, my indignation waxes warmer still at the evil he has wrought for the multitude whose vision he has distorted and perverted. It is as if some great mountain, the glory of the land, were shown to us through a false glass twisting its solemn outlines into crabbed forms, displaying the ugly seams in its sides, and the bareness of its windy rocks, blotting out the splendor of its lights and the depths of its glooms, till it stood before us a mere pile of grey against a greyer sky. But the mountain

stands unchanged, and the glass shall be broken, and the mountain shall be seen again as it is forever. I shall be glad to know that you have not been made ill by this new outrage. Always most sincerely Yours C. E. Norton.
(Private Letters, 15 April 1883)

By November 16, Norton had received from MAC in Chelsea the originals of a great deal of correspondence to begin his own editorial work, though of course Froude still had possession of some material:

Dear Mrs. Carlyle

Your letter of Oct. 29, and the box of papers have arrived safely,—and I thank you for both. I presume you have kept a copy of your list of the contents of the box, and I have only to say that the contents are according to the list you sent me, and that I promise to return all the letters, & notebooks etc. etc. to you so soon as I shall have made use of them for the publication of such part of them as may seem desirable, or at any earlier period should you wish for them. In case any publication should be made by me, according to the desire you have expressed to me, and the trust you have reposed in me,—I propose that the copyright of the work should be yours both in America and England, but that the publisher should be instructed to pay to me, from time to time, as payments may become due, for a term of years to be fixed by you, one half of the net profits. As I said, when I had the pleasure of seeing you, I think it will be best to wait as regards the publication of any part of the Correspondence (except perhaps the Goethe letters) till Mr. Froude has completed his work. This cannot be a very long delay. He will then, assuredly, return to you Mr. Carlyle's letters to his wife, and we shall have the whole body of his more important letters up to 1834. Meanwhile I will, so far as I am able to do so, make the selection for publication of the letters now in my hands, and get them into order for the printers. I have not had opportunity as yet to look over the letters you have sent me, to determine how large a part should be printed. My general judgment on such matters would lead me to avoid printing too much. At the same time, he was able to publish a

supplementary edition of the Emerson letters, “in which thirteen missing letters of your Uncle’s will appear, (missing, I mean, when the Correspondence was printed last year), and one newly found letter of Emerson’s.” These additions will make the Correspondence very nearly complete. (Private Letters)

The next important step came on 5 January 1884:

It has lately occurred to me that it would be well to publish on this side of the ocean a corrected edition of the *Reminiscences*; to which I should propose to prefix a short preface, containing the closing passage omitted by Mr. Froude. It is unjust to the public as well as to your Uncle’s memory to leave the book in its present state. You seem to be precluded from making a new edition in England; but one published here would undoubtedly get to England, and compel, perhaps, a new, revised edition there. Will you tell me what you think of this? If you approve I will try to have the book out in the spring. (Private Letters)

Norton prepared the new edition of the *Reminiscences* at the same time as he worked on an edition of the Goethe correspondence. There was a real give and take between MAC and Norton as the letters make clear: not only does he constantly consult her about the surviving MSS, but he also inquires about the Scottish language and items he cannot conveniently annotate in Cambridge. Occasionally his remarks reveal his insularity and cultural remoteness:

Your Uncle’s letters to his friend [Robert] Mitchell are full of interest, and quite worth publication, the main part of them. They illustrate his character during the years to which they belong in a very vivid and instructive manner. Can you tell me why the correspondence ceased? and who Mitchell was by origin, and what became of him? There is much in his letters that excited one’s respect— Which is not the case by any means with Irving’s. They are surely expressions of a poor, selfish character; and there is a snivelling, canting tone in his letters to Mrs. Carlyle which disgusts me, and makes it hard to understand how she failed to see

through them. Your Uncle too was plainly blinded by his affection for the man,—and such a tone as Irving's was more natural & less offensive in those days (& in Scotland) than now. (Private Letters, undated)

MAC was apparently happy to let such judgments lie. Norton actively consulted her on matters that concerned the family: "It seems plain that it will not be best to print all the domestic letters. When I have made the selection, I will send to you those which I should propose to omit,—in order that you may be the final judge" (Private Letters, undated). He was shrewd in his decisions, urging caution in the purchase of manuscripts and in the publicizing of TC:

The letters to [James] Johnstone should I think be secured if they can be had at a moderate price. Your offer of £45.- was enough. I do not suppose they would all be worth publishing, but they would add variety and value to the record of the years over which the Correspondence with Mitchell extends. I shrink from printing too much. I want to be sure that we do nothing to weary the public with your Uncle's name. I feel we must guard against being misled by our own interest in all that concerns him. Froude's volumes have had such a high flavor that at present at least the public taste is spoiled, and is not in a state to appreciate the quality of interest that attaches to the letters to Mitchell & Johnstone. (Private Letters, undated)

In March 1884, he had an offer to publish a new edition of the *Reminiscences*, "provided the continued sale of the old edition can be stopped in England." He adds sensibly, "This seems to me reasonable enough, but I do not know how far the matter is in your control. The market for the book here in America is supplied by three editions the sale of which cannot be stopped. The demand for the new edition published at a higher price as it would be than either of the others, would not be very large, though it would probably be constant" (Private Letters, 2 March 1884). The royalty offered was "10% on the first thousand copies, of 15% on the second thousand and of 20% on all further copies. These terms seem to me to be liberal,—as publishers' bargains go." By 19 December 1884, he expresses relief that MAC has "the

papers in your possession at last, and I trust that Froude has kept back nothing” (Private Letters, 19 December 1884).

Norton is frequently critical of Froude in his 1885 letters, partly for his mis-editing of the *Reminiscences*, and partly for publishing confidential letters between TC and JWC. Norton himself was not inclined to republish these: “[U]se of the early letters was shocking to every feeling of delicacy and due respect for the dead; and it is better to leave them, garbled and misinterpreted as they are by him, than to violate still further a confidence that should have been sacred” (Private Letters, 22 March 1885). The manuscript of the *Reminiscences*, most of which is now held by the National Library of Scotland, also crossed the Atlantic on this date:

The box of papers reached me safely two days ago. I have not yet had opportunity to examine the contents, except superficially. I see that many of them must be of great interest

Did I write to you, some weeks ago, (I hope I did) that the Jewsbury Note book had come safe? The conclusion of it does not match with the beginning of the Red Note Book. There is a gap between them of pp. 101 to 148 of the second volume of the *Reminiscences*. I hope you may be able to supply it. And I wish that you could send me also the mss. of the Irving and Jeffrey portions of the *Reminiscences*, and of the Appendix. It would be much better that the whole of the new edition of the book should be printed from the original manuscript.

I hope that you will succeed in getting from Browning the letters he offered to Mr. Froude,—and I wish that you would be so good as to ask Miss Helen Taylor for any letters of your Uncle to [John Stuart] Mill which she may have, and for permission to print such letters, or portions of letters, of Mill to him as may seem worth printing. (Private Letters, 22 March 1885)

Having obtained so much, Norton wanted more. His objective was to be clear in his view of his predecessor’s editing:

The publishers have thought best to delay the issue of the new edition of the Carlyle-Emerson Corres-

pondence, but it will appear before long, and be speedily followed by the "Reminiscences", & those in turn by a volume or volumes of Correspondence. The "Reminiscences" will go to press in a few weeks, so that I should be glad to have the manuscript of that portion of them not now in my hands, as soon as possible. I propose to prefix a preface containing Mr. Froude's account in his own words of the trust committed to him & of his discharge of it, followed by various extracts, including the most impressive injunction at the end of the Red Note Book, showing your Uncle's intention that the Reminiscences of Mrs. Carlyle should not be published. (Private Letters, 22 March 1885)

Norton's nervousness is apparent in these letters. He writes in agitation saying a part of the MS of the *Reminiscences* is missing, but then has to correct himself:

My dear Mrs. Carlyle

I hope I have not given you trouble! I wrote too hastily the other day. The manuscript of the Jeffrey and Irving portion of the Reminiscences is in my hands; I had put it carefully away, but overlooked it when I last looked for it. I have no excuse to make for such oblivion & carelessness. And the missing part of the "Jane Welsh Carlyle" I find in a later portion of the Red Note Book, whence, in printing the manuscript Mr. Froude apparently shifted it into the position it holds in the published book. May this letter reach you not long after the other! I really am very sorry to have given you the uneasiness which the fear of the loss or mislaying of the manuscript may have caused you. I trust to your forgiveness, and am Sincerely Yours C. E. Norton. (Private Letters, 26 March 1885)

On 8 June 1885 the edition was ready, but the printers Osgood & Co. were bankrupt. Demonstrating his usual resourcefulness, Norton went to Macmillan, the eventual publishers of his volumes on both side of the Atlantic. His letter to MAC of 8 June gives his impression of the project, which began as eight volumes but later became seven:

It has occurred to me that Macmillan & Co might be asked to assume the publication of the *Reminiscences & Letters*. A branch of their house is in New York, and they thus have access to the market here as well as in London. Do you approve of my making the proposal to them? or have you other wishes? I should propose to whomever the books might be offered; the publication, in such sequence and at such intervals as they might think best, of “*Reminiscences*”, two volumes; *Letters to Early Friends*, (Mitchell, [Thomas] Murray, [Henry] Inglis etc.), one volume; *Letters to your Grd Mother & other members of the Family*, two volumes; *Letters to Sterling, Browning, & perhaps some others*, one volume; *Letters from Goethe*, (& if we can obtain them to Goethe,) one volume; and, if Miss Taylor’s permission be obtained, & Carlyle’s letters to Mill be forthcoming, *Correspondence between Mill & Carlyle*, one volume.—Eight volumes in all,—and I should hope that all might appear in the course of three years at longest. The letters between Mr. & Mrs. Carlyle I do not wish to publish. Froude’s violation of their privacy does not in my mind justify farther violation. It is not worthwhile to try to repair the wrong he has done, by what would be practically a farther wrong. In truth I regard these letters as so sacred, and the violation of their privacy seems to me so wrong, that I shall not even open the packages containing them which you have sent me, and shall return them to you, exactly as they came to me, unread. It would please me to know that you thought well to burn them all. (Private Letters, 8 June 1885)

Norton took care to keep her informed of the exact ways he had changed Froude’s scheme in the *Reminiscences*:

The “*Reminiscences*” and the *Letters to Mitchell*³ etc. are now ready for the press, with the exception of a preface to the “*Reminiscences*” in which I propose to set forth clearly Froude’s manner of dealing with the papers entrusted to him. This I shall write in the course of a few days. The preparation of the “*Reminiscences*” was a slow, but not a wearisome task; the minute corrections are innumerable. I shall alter the arrangement of the volumes, printing the *Rems* of your Grandfather

and of Mrs. Carlyle in the first volume, and the rest in the second. I think it will be well to reserve the portrait of your Grandmother for the volume of Family Letters. (Private Letters, 8 June 1885)

In July, Norton was having second thoughts, offering the letters to Harper (“led by my wish to have the volumes printed under my own eye in America”), but this offer did not materialize. The preface to the *Reminiscences* was giving him trouble: “I had to leave Cambridge before completing my Preface to the *Reminiscences*. I wrote one which did not please me in its tone. It came out too controversial,—and that tone I mean to avoid. I do not wish to write as an advocate, but as a Judge summing up a case for a Jury to consider. You shall see the preface as soon as it is ready” (Private Letters, 17 July 1885). He took particular care of the MSS that he had earlier suggested be burnt:

The box containing your Uncle’s letters to his wife, and hers to him, the Geraldine Note-book etc. etc. I have had placed in security in one of the College buildings, where it will remain during my absence from Cambridge. I shall return to you in the autumn all that I can spare of the original mss.; I am always solicitous about their safety so long as I am responsible for them. Still if a chance fire were to consume those sacred letters of husband and wife I, personally, should not mourn their being resolved into ashes & the elements. (Private Letters, 17 July 1885)

On 22 September, Macmillan agreed to publish. Browning sent some of his correspondence to Norton (some fifteen letters, “three or four of which are of great interest”), who was keen that MAC should “follow up Miss Taylor, and to obtain from her your Uncle’s letters to Mill, and her permission to print Mr. Mill’s letters to him. I am very desirous of this, for Mill’s letters are interesting & by no means all ‘hide bound’” (Private Letters, 22 September 1885).

In November, there were still two questions: whether Macmillan’s terms were agreeable, and whether Norton was free to go ahead with his own edition of the *Reminiscences* so long as Froude’s was in the market. Norton clearly foresaw the storms that lay ahead:

Should Macmillan & Co. decide not to go on with the work, I shall be entirely content to proceed with Chapman & Hall; and it may be well for you in that case to arrange with Chapman & Hall at once for the publication, that there may be no further delay. As to the Reminiscences if C. & H. will get possession of the legal rights to the book and will publish a correct edition, the copy is ready for them; but if not, then I propose, after some volumes of the Correspondence are printed, to issue an edition here at my own risk. I say "after some volumes of the Letters are printed", because my introduction, although absolutely without personality or any direct attack on Froude, will be damaging to him, and will probably make him angry; and it will be best to have the Letters advanced beyond his power of interference. (Private Letters, early November 1885)

His main difficulty was selecting the letters for the two collections he intended to publish from the wealth of available matter. In a long account of 9 November, he provides MAC with some indication of the sheer riches at his disposal:

I am having all the "originals" which you sent me carefully copied, and before the winter is out I hope to send you back a good parcel of the papers you sent over to me. I shall not be sorry to be relieved from the responsibility of having them in possession. As fast as the originals are copied I deposit them for safe-keeping in our College Library. (Private Letters, 9 November 1885)

One significant change in Norton's views, as the editing went on, concerned the question of whether the intimate correspondence between TC and JWC, much of which Froude had already published, should be included. His strongest inclination was to exclude this material. Yet on 9 November he writes, "I shrink as much as ever from violating their sanctity; but I will open the parcel, and I will look at some of them in order to see if there are any that, in my judgment, can be properly used for setting right the opinion held concerning their relations. It is very probable that some of the first written may be rightly published,—but the

later ones must be too intimate. I believe that they will not be needed as correctives of Froude's misstatements & mis-interpretations" (Private Letters). And of course they were to be published. At the end of the letter, he thanks MAC "for your gift to me of the original of the 'Reminiscences'. Perhaps it will not be necessary for me to accept it. We can determine this better at a later time." Clearly, whatever they decided, the manuscript returned to British shores, and most of it to Scotland. In 1886 a prolonged correspondence occurred about the proofing and final arrangement of the volumes. Norton worried again that too much detail would bore the public: "If so, the *causa causans* is Mr. Froude" (Private Letters, 10 January 1886). He then mentions what would become his 1898 Grolier Club edition of TC's *Two Note Books*: "Should you object to my printing your Uncle's Note Books in one of the Magazines? I incline to think that this would be the best way of using them, at least at first. They might afterwards be printed in a volume, if it seemed desirable" (Private Letters, 10 January 1886).

But at the moment, he had to postpone such schemes while he tried to identify the loose parts of the *Reminiscences* manuscript that Froude had flagrantly mis-attributed. He was also seeking to determine through lawyers, whom MAC was consulting in London, whether he could publish his own edition of the *Reminiscences* in opposition to Froude:

If his proposal of a new edition falls through, I think it will be well, as I wrote to you I believe, in my last letter, for me to proceed at once with a new edition, and to add to the *Reminiscences*, the *Note Books*. Your judgment as to the printing of the *Note Books* in a Magazine I accept readily. I had not thought of that publication of them as the final one, but only as a means for getting them before a wide circle of readers,—& as preliminary to their appearance in a more permanent form. (Private Letters, 11 March 1886)

Proofreading was beset with complications. Norton laments the fact that the "the first batch went down alas! on the 'Oregon'. I have written to Macmillan to send another set to you, for as you now have the originals it is best for you to compare the proof with

them. The sheets seem to me printed with a sort of stupid accuracy. I trust that you will approve as you read” (Private Letters, undated; the *Oregon* sank off New York, 14 March 1886). Norton was returning the originals of the TC and JWC letters on 3 April by the hand of Lowell, who was crossing the Atlantic by steamer:

I have corrected all of the letters to Miss Welsh, by the originals, and I shall now revise the other letters, but I hope you will also look them over by the originals which you have.

I write in haste, for I have been correcting proof all day, and the steamer sails early tomorrow mornng.

Have I told you that the copies of the letters to Goethe, have come safely to me. Froude had applied for them, but was refused! (Private Letters, 2 April 1886)

Certain portions of manuscript still bothered him:

I have found the injunction against printing the letters of early date, concerning which I enquired. It is in a loose sheet of reminiscences (part of a series) which you sent me by itself just a year ago. It was plainly a portion of an introduction intended for the letters of J.W.C. If there is more of it, I should like much to see the rest.

The command not to print these letters leads me to desire to add some words to my Preface. I have not a copy of the Preface, and I cannot be sure that what I have written, and now enclose to you will fit in exactly anywhere. Will you be good enough to adjust it properly? I have kept a copy of it, however, so that if a proof of the Preface is sent to me I can fit it in myself. (Private Letters, 6 April 1886)

A detailed letter of 19 April makes clear MAC’s involvement in the final form of the *Early Letters*. She read and corrected the preface, discussed the title, suggested a running date at the top of the page, and supplied some extra material for the preface, which Norton did not use: “I fear, too, that I did not make plain why I struck out the last pages which you had prepared. It seemed to me that it would be best to leave the Preface a plain and simple

statement of facts concerning the Letters, and to omit all reflections suggested by them. I hope that in this your judgment will coincide with mine.” (Private Letters)

At the same time, he informs her, “I have been rewriting some of my recollections of your Uncle, and adding to them some reflections, and exhibiting Mr. Froude’s method of dealing with the ‘Reminiscences’ etc., intending the paper for a Review (The new Princeton Review) which is edited by a friend of mine. I shall send you the proof of what I have written, in the course of a few weeks” (Private Letters, 19 April 1886). He is eager to get on with the Goethe correspondence, while not forgetting about the Mill letters. It is clear that, scanty leisure or not, Norton flung himself into the editing with gusto: it is also clear that the correspondence with MAC is no formality. On 7 June 1886, with progress on the Goethe letters well under way, he tells her that “I will write a sketch of a Preface, which you shall amend and fill out as you see fit” (Private Letters). In the *Early Letters*, some of the notes are supplied by MAC, and credited to her by her initials. Indeed the preface makes clear that Norton and members of the family are acting together. Norton privately explains to her:

The view of Mr Carlyle’s character presented in [Froude’s] biography has not approved itself to many of those who knew Carlyle best. It may be a striking picture, but it is not a good portrait. For the present, at least, it appears impracticable to prepare another formal biography. The peculiar style of Mr. Froude’s performance, already in possession of the field, might perhaps put a portrait of Carlyle drawn by a hand more faithful to nature, and less skilled in fine artifices than his own, at a temporary disadvantage with the bulk of readers. But it has seemed right to print some of Carlyle’s letters in suchwise that with his *Reminiscences* they might serve as a partial autobiography, and illustrate his character by unquestionable evidence. (Private Letters, 15 July 1886)

On 28 July 1886, thirteen letters of Ruskin to TC arrive; Norton’s article on Froude’s editorial practice has appeared, and he confidently remarks that “my paper in the ‘New Princeton’ is doing its work here. The result promises to be as good as we could wish” (Private Letters). In August, the Goethe translations are

almost complete, and the *Reminiscences* are well advanced. MAC was actively involved in editing at the London end, and Norton was grateful for her help: “All you are doing, too, for the *Reminiscences* is good, & is certain to give the book a new interest. I am truly glad that you found the other Note-book. I felt sure that some such book, or some manuscript leaves must exist,—for there were one or two passages in the volumes of which I could not find the source in the materials in my hands” (Private Letters, 31 August 1886). William Allingham was also assisting her, which relieved Norton:

[A] great satisfaction that you have so ready and sympathetic an adviser as Allingham. I am not conscious of any but the kindest feeling toward him;—the worst I ever felt or thought of him is expressed in your Uncle’s phrase to me one day, and in the half-tender tone in which it was uttered, “Poor, little Allingham!”,—the feeling one has for a worthy man who has not been quite strong enough to master his world. I have a real respect for his manly effort to do so. (Private Letters, 31 August 1886)

A final letter shows the two editors working together on 21 September. This last letter (by Norton’s admission “not a letter; mere fragmenta disjecta”) hands over responsibility to MAC for layout and binding as publication of the *Reminiscences* on both sides of the Atlantic approaches: “All your arrangements with Macmillan are entirely satisfactory & right. The ‘*Reminiscences*’ will become a new book under your hands. It is a great thing to have the J.W.C. part set in proper order, and properly filled out. The style of the ‘American’ edition of the ‘*Letters*’ is all one could desire. Pray suit yourself as to the binding of the volumes; your taste will be right” (Private Letters, 21 September 1886)

And so appeared the “Norton *Reminiscences*” from Macmillan and Co. in London and New York, two versions of the edition, both dated 1887, one in two volumes and one in a single volume. Each was “edited by Charles Eliot Norton”—as was the Goethe correspondence, the *Early Letters* and the *Letters*, and *Two Note Books*. Each was dedicated to making TC’s memory a little clearer to a generation which either had already forgotten the “Sage of Chelsea” or had accepted Froude’s picture as definitive. Each was

the product of a desire to supplant Froude and each, as these letters have shown, was motivated by very mixed feelings—a personal dislike of Froude, a reverence for TC, a sincere regard for his family, and a desire to prove that as an editor, he could make something of the great mass of papers that survived TC's death in 1881. Norton did not attempt to write his own biography of TC or to demolish Froude's achievement as a biographer. Instead, his aim was to expose Froude's shortcomings as an editor.

In his preface to the *Letters* Norton writes with barely disguised disdain: "Many interesting letters of these years appear in Mr. Froude's *Life of Carlyle*; but they are printed with what in the work of any other editor would be surprising indifference to correctness, while the inferences drawn from them in Mr. Froude's narrative are sometimes open to question, sometimes unwarranted" (*Letters of TC* vii–viii). Norton's own letters to MAC reveal a wide range of new insights: the extent of the Carlyle family's involvement in the production of his volumes, the details of how the originals crossed and re-crossed the Atlantic, his gradual involvement with the project, his business acumen, his slow, thorough, but undeviating determination, and his voracious appetite for work when the project gripped him. Was the *Daily Chronicle* journalist correct in 1904 to describe him as a "sweet-tempered scholar and deeply sympathetic man"? Hardly. But the Charles Eliot Norton who emerges from these letters for the first time is all the more interesting for having eluded this caricature. His friendship with the Carlyle family made possible a remarkable run of books, published while memories were fresh and materials were in danger of being dispersed. The magnificent Carlyle archive that has been left, without which the *Collected Letters* and the Strouse edition would not be possible, is in part the memorial of this transatlantic friendship.

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NOTES

1. This article was made possible by the work of the late Kenneth J. Fielding, and thanks are due to him and to fellow editors of the *Collected Letters*, as well as to members of the Carlyle family, for bringing this valuable new material into the public eye. Fielding devoted many years to the study of the Froude biographies and his treatment of the Carlyle MSS and published widely on the topic. Some of the Norton MSS recorded in this paper are published in part in Sara Norton and Howe's edition of Norton's letters (herein referred to as *Letters*); others are hitherto unpublished. Further details of the Froude-Carlyle controversy are included in the introduction to Fielding and Campbell's edition of the *Reminiscences*, Fielding and Sorensen's selection of JWC's letters, and the various essays by Fielding and Campbell listed in the Works Cited.
2. Letters quoted that are held by the Carlyle family in this essay are designated as "Private Letters."
3. Letters between JWC and her maid Helen Mitchell. See Fielding and Campbell, *Reminiscences* 62–65.

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