

“Blethering Blackie” and Thomas Carlyle

STUART WALLACE

JOHN STUART BLACKIE (1809–95) IS ONE OF THE MANY FIGURES who make a fleeting appearance in *The Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle*, and he will, no doubt, continue to be present in future volumes. His relationship with Carlyle lasted almost a half century—from 1833, when Blackie was putting the finishing touches to his translation of Part One of Goethe’s *Faust*,¹ until the death of Carlyle in 1881. By the latter date, Blackie was approaching retirement from the chair of Greek at the University of Edinburgh, which he held between 1852 and 1882. Thirty years was not an unusual length of tenure for a Scottish professor in the nineteenth century—Blackie’s predecessor had held his chair for over forty-five years—but Blackie was unusual in combining his teaching with a successful literary career as poet, translator, and essayist as he actively promoted the Gaelic language, Highland land reform, and Scottish Home Rule. Carlyle had been one of the first people to whom Blackie had turned when the Edinburgh chair became vacant in December 1851. Carlyle’s “testimonial” gives an accurate estimate of Blackie and hints at some of the reasons why he was appointed by the Town Council of Edinburgh, which until 1858 was “patron” for some two thirds of Edinburgh university professorships:

PROFESSOR BLACKIE is known to me, as to all the world, for a man of lively intellectual faculties, of ardent friendly character, and of wide speculation and acquirement. His tendencies, I have perceived, are thoroughly modern; he is well acquainted with

Continental improvements; in all things he means sincerely; is of hopeful, rapid nature, very fearless, very kindly, without ill humour and without guile. Of his classical and other literary attainments the translation of Aeschylus is good evidence. His skill in practical teaching, too, I believe, has long been known. On the whole, he seems well calculated to do honour to the Edinburgh Chair of Greek. (*CL* 26: 259; 9 December 1851)

Of course, there were important reasons for Blackie's appointment other than his first-hand experience of "modern" university teaching at Göttingen and Berlin (1829–30), and his verse translation *The Lyrical Dramas of Aeschylus* (1850), for which Carlyle had helped to find a publisher.² Since university patronage was part of the sectarian battleground of Edinburgh municipal politics, appointments to Edinburgh chairs were also decided on the basis of the religious affiliations of the candidates. Blackie was fortunate in being hard to place within the context of Scottish Presbyterianism—he was neither Kirkman, Free Churchman, nor Dissenter (or Voluntary). He was elected after three ballots, on the casting vote of the Lord Provost, a Dissenter, who had no desire to see the other remaining candidate, a Free Churchman, in the chair.

Blackie was also an acceptable candidate to the Liberal majority on the Town Council because of his reputation as a university reformer. In 1839 as the foundation Professor of Humanity (Latin) at Marischal College, Aberdeen, he had protested publicly against the statutory requirement that all newly-appointed professors in Scottish universities should "subscribe" to the Westminster Confession, the definitive statement of Church of Scotland doctrine. He had to take his case to the Court of Session in Edinburgh, which, two years later confirmed his right to the new chair even after his open disavowal of subscription. The "Blackie case" was responsible for bringing the issue of the religious "test" for professors (there was none for students) and for schoolmasters to the attention of the public in Scotland where, after the Disruption of 1843, the established church represented a minority of Scots. As a professor at Marischal between 1841 and 1852, Blackie devoted much energy to defending the right of Dissenters, Catholics, and (after 1843) Free Churchmen to be appointed to university

chairs in Scotland. The religious “test” for non-theological chairs at Scottish universities was abolished in 1853 and for burgh and parochial schoolmasters in 1861. Blackie regarded this freedom as a necessary first step towards more fundamental reform, which he set out in numerous articles and pamphlets. One of these, *On the Advancement of Learning in Scotland* (1855), he sent to Carlyle, who responded:

Dear Blackie,

I read your pamphlet last night, with lively entertainment and satisfaction; with perfect assent to all that you advance on the lost and abject state of what is called “University” Education in Scotland. You have told the poor Public there a good few home truths, such as they are not nearly often enough in the habit of hearing,—nay have not heard at all for a couple of generations back; the more is their misfortune, poor potbellied blockheads, drinking “the Cause of Education” at public dinners, and asking all men, “Did you ever know such a country for Education?” In a way disgusting to behold. For what I got in Scotland from my Father and Mother I am grateful, beyond all other gratitude, while the breath of life, or the power of reflexion remains in me: but as to my Scotch Schools and Schoolmasters, from Edinburgh downwards, I deliberately say, If one will avoid denunciation and even execration, there is nothing to be said! A more inconceivable “University” than Edinburgh then was to me I have never heard tell of. *Altum silentium!* Expressive in silence alone can mediate its praise, as I then knew it: enough, enough!

So far I go with you; and thank you with all my heart for the useful, unpleasant, and (I warn you!) even dangerous service you have done. Of which I *will*, by and by, hope some results. The thickest coat of whale-blubber does yield at last to harpooning long continued in that style, and the point at last brings blood;—I leave you to think, with what humour on the whale’s part! Take care of the whale withal; that is needful for you withal.

For the rest, I own to you, Germany, with its abstruse Hermeneutics, mountains of classical marine stores,

and high-towered Edifices built of metaphysical bladders, is by no means the result I want to rival in matters of education. Oh Heavens, no, *nimmermehr*. A more entirely worthless flaccid specimen of the genus “Solemnly Ineffective Blockhead” is not to be met with than in common German Universities. Oh, their Books, their Histories, that I have had to read by the cartload in past years: *Chaos* and *Limbus Patrium*, that is the home of such Books, and such Intellects, and ways of looking at God’s universe!—

Nay, deeper still, and almost fearful to contemplate, I have often asked myself, Whether the *next* set of really good Schoolmasters the world got *wd* not perhaps be altogether *silent* ones,—of the rhadamanthine drill-serjeant nature?— But I will not speak of this. I will with all my heart wish you *speed* in this charge upon the enemy (who is mine and all men’s), and thank you very much for what you have done.

Yours sincerely from of old

T. Carlyle

P.S. I wish you would not say “ripe” “unripe” &c, or at least not *often*, in reference to boys and men. “A scholar and a ripe one”: I could hardly quite pardon that when I first heard it; and now it has been so handed about among the street populace, and flung in one’s face, it smells of rotten apples & worse. That is really my unfortunate feeling. *Verbum Sapienti[ae]*. (CL 30: 110–11; 11 November 1855)

This last point was in reference to Blackie’s view that allowing “unripe boys of fifteen or sixteen” to matriculate was the root cause of “the low state of learning” in Scottish universities. In the absence of adequate secondary schooling, the age of entry to university had always been low—thirteen for Carlyle at Edinburgh in 1809, and just over twelve for Blackie at Marischal in 1821. Scottish professors did the work of schoolmasters, with the large “junior” classes, and the universities lacked the resources to offer education at a more advanced level. Over the next forty years, Blackie worked to change the utilitarian approach to education north of the Border which had perpetuated this state of affairs.

Blackie was part of a generation much influenced by Carlyle, though the latter described him in a letter to Ralph

Waldo Emerson as “a frothy, semi-confused disciple of mine and other men’s . . . [who] carries more sail than ballast” (*CL* 10: 213; 7 November 1838). It has been suggested by A. H. Millar that Carlyle’s letter complimenting Blackie on the publication of his first book, *Faust: A Tragedy By J. W. Goethe Translated Into English Verse With Notes, And Preliminary Remarks* (1834), when “read between the lines (as all Carlyle letters should be),” was in fact “a sardonic sneer . . . of which the victim was blissfully unconscious” (22).³ Perhaps it was. Carlyle’s letter to Blackie complimented him on his notes, but said little about the translation—a task which Carlyle had earlier considered but then dropped. Their relations throughout the 1840s and 1850s, however, were apparently cordial, with disagreement limited to subjects such as the proper use of verse in translation (*CL* 25: 96–97),⁴ the advantages of the latest craze in alternative medicine, hydrotherapy (*CL* 24: 156–57), and the merits of Martin Luther or John Wesley. Carlyle was reported as saying that Blackie had “something of the old scholar about him” (Espinasse 198–200), and there was an invitation to call at Cheyne Row whenever Blackie was in London during the summer (*CL* 26: 228). On 25 October 1854, Carlyle wrote in his journal: “Blackie is a cheerful hopeful, loose-flowing, loud-talking soul, whom in many points I could rather like: but he has no *true* seriousness; and he is one of those too who are ‘at ease in Zion’” (*CL* 29: 174n6).⁵ Blackie, for his part, found the visits to Cheyne Row a little trying. On 3 June 1848, he wrote to his sister-in-law:

I took tea with Thomas Carlyle who is really a notable monster, and to be respected for the many noble thoughts he has elaborated and the words of wisdom which he has flung abroad to bear divine seed among foolish-hearted men: but I can’t help thinking face to face in a small parlour he is rather a *bore*: and I fancy all prophets (or many) are best exhibited in the pulpit or in the wilderness. . . . Really I never heard in so short a space of time so much awful sweeping denunciation against this poor world lying in wickedness, as I did last night from Teufelsdröckh’s prophetic parlour, No. 5 Cheyne Row Chelsea. Scottish and English Universities, British Houses of Parliament, orthodox theologies, Mrs Fry, Railroads, and Free Trade were all shaken out

and sifted under the category of SHAM or CANT—while Oliver Cromwell and his Ironsides, and the Old Covenanters who sang psalms and handled pikes on Dunse Moor were held up to admiration, as the only *heroes* that had been born in this country for the last two hundred years. (NLS MS: 2622 f. 88)⁶

While Blackie found Carlyle's Cromwell a little too authoritarian for his taste (*Letters* 117; 11 August 1845),⁷ he shared Carlyle's admiration for the Covenanters, whom he placed amongst the founding fathers of modern Scottish nationality (Blackie, *Christianity* 185).

In some respects, Blackie seemed a younger Carlyle in a minor key. As a young man he made his name with a translation from Goethe, and over the next fifteen to twenty years he wrote extensively on German literature in the literary reviews. Blackie probably regarded himself as the successor to Carlyle in this field, though there were many competitors, including Carlyle's friends John Sterling and John Rutter Chorley.⁸ Carlyle had been largely responsible for a new surge of interest in Goethe in Britain, and there were at least ten translations of *Faust* (including Blackie's) in the decade following the poet's death in 1832.⁹ For Blackie, as for Carlyle, Goethe was "the model of a perfectly wise and virtuous man" (*Wisdom* lxxxiii),¹⁰ an ethical rather than literary reading which was popular with a British audience assailed by religious uncertainty and rapid material change. Blackie and Carlyle had both commenced, and then abandoned, training for the Church of Scotland ministry. Blackie, however, did not lose his faith in Christianity, but managed to carve out a non-sectarian place for himself within the tradition of Scottish Presbyterianism. He eventually became quite attached to its external forms, including church establishment. After Divinity, both men tried Law, though Blackie went further, and was admitted to the Faculty of Advocates in Edinburgh in 1834. The £200 fee would have been beyond the means of a "lad of parts" like Carlyle. Blackie's father was an Aberdeen bank agent who had the means to send his son to study in Germany and Italy, and to subsidize his legal training and short career as a briefless advocate. His friendship with the Aberdeen MP Alexander Bannerman (whose wife, Margaret Gordon, was Carlyle's first love) was the means by which a Liberal Home Secretary was

persuaded to appoint Blackie in 1839 to the Regius Chair of Humanity at Marischal College. All of this was very far from Carlyle's earlier experience as a schoolmaster, though in the 1830s Blackie also, like Carlyle, tried to earn a living as a literary reviewer. He certainly shared the older man's restless energy, and his belief in work ethic. In a later essay on "The Dignity of Labour" Blackie wrote, "the meaning of life is WORK," and described "the notion that there is any absolute bliss in rest [as] a sickly idea[,] . . . more like the lazy dream of a water-lily in a slimy pool at mid-day than the thought of a human being" (*Lay Sermons* 225). He periodically wore himself out by overwork ("flogging" was a favorite term), and suffered the inevitable nervous ailments (eczema rather than dyspepsia). His early years were marked by bouts of despondency, provoked by a sense of inadequacy in the face of an unyielding Presbyterian culture, but marriage in 1841 provided the emotional ballast that he had earlier lacked. The combative Blackie came to be known as "the Happy Warrior," a label that no one was likely to apply to Carlyle. When Carlyle called on the Blackies during a visit to Edinburgh in August 1865, he described them to his wife as "good souls really; the wife especially and very fond of one another" (NLS MS: 617.724; 11 August). Eliza Blackie sometimes accompanied Blackie on his Sunday evening visits to Cheyne Row, and later in life would recount the story of how, on a very hot day, after making her own call on Jane Welsh, she asked to see "the great man": "Mrs Carlyle took me down some dark kitchen stairs, and there, in a corner, with his trousers drawn up to his knees, sat Carlyle on a chair, with his feet and legs in a great tub of cold water" (How 235–36).¹¹

Blackie was very much involved in the campaign in November 1865 to get Carlyle elected as Rector of the University of Edinburgh, though he managed to restrain himself from making a speech to the cheering students when the result was announced (Fielding 10). His offer of hospitality to Carlyle when he came to Edinburgh for his installation as Rector was politely declined on the grounds that Blackie's house in Hill Street was "too much exposed to noises that might hinder him from getting sleep,"¹² though Blackie's well-known habit of chanting Greek verse when at home must have been a source of

apprehension as much as the sound of railway whistles. Carlyle thought Blackie “good but *garrish*” (TC to JAC, 17 November 1865, NLS MS: 518.17), while Blackie found Carlyle’s “gigantic one-sidedness” hard to bear, but he continued to visit him when in London.¹³ In fact, Blackie himself had something of Carlyle’s “one-sidedness.” He attacked Utilitarianism and political economy with vigor, though his invitation to Carlyle to hear him lecture on this topic at the Royal Institution in April–May 1870 was probably unsuccessful.¹⁴ He shared Carlyle’s distaste for democracy, and vigorously opposed Disraeli’s Reform Act of 1867. Blackie’s debate in January of that year with the Chartist Ernest Jones in Edinburgh¹⁵ was inevitably less of a literary event than Carlyle’s article “Shooting Niagara: and after?” in *Macmillan’s Magazine* in August, but it brought his name before a wider audience. Both men were strongly pro-German during the Franco-Prussian War. In December 1870 Blackie sent Carlyle his *War Songs of the Germans; with Historical Illustrations of the Liberation War and the Rhine Boundary Question*, with a dedication to “my old and esteemed friend.” As with *Faust*, Carlyle responded with words of praise more for Blackie’s notes (the “historical summary”) than for his verse.¹⁶ The latter, Carlyle described to his brother as “blustering translations of German war-songs” (TC to JAC, 10 December 1870, NLS MS: 527 f. 34). In June 1871 Blackie traveled to Berlin to attend the victory parade, which he later described as “one of the three most elevating and inspiring popular demonstrations” he had witnessed—the other two were the celebration of Queen Victoria’s Jubilee (1887) and the 575th anniversary of the battle of Bannockburn (1889).¹⁷

Blackie continued to call on Carlyle on his London visits. In May 1872 he “spent two agreeable hours with the grey old prophet and his brother.” Carlyle “laid about him all round with a bland sweeping intolerance,” he told Eliza, “However, we managed to get on, as he was willing to take all the talk to himself, and I little solicitous to controvert. On departure he gave me a nice present of the two big volumes of his Wilhelm Meister, with an affectionate inscription” (*Letters* 211–12; Stoddart 274). It was probably at this time that Carlyle sent a note rejecting Blackie’s invitation to attend a spiritualist session with the words, “No, a thousand times no! Spiritualism

= Ultra Brutalism and Liturgy of Apes by the Dead Sea! Let not such things be once named among you” (Stoddart 274).¹⁸ The arrival at Cheyne Row of letters from “*blethering Blackie*” had by now become something of a standing joke between the Carlyle brothers and occasionally a matter of real annoyance.¹⁹ In November 1873 Blackie wrote encouraging Carlyle to “project a thunderbolt” into the *Kulturkampf*, the campaign Bismarck was waging against the Catholic Church in Prussia: “The Pope is a foolish old gentleman; not for his benefit, but for the benefit of those who believe in him. A stick or two of good flailing, in your style, will be seasonable” (Blackie to TC, 21 November 1873, NLS MS: 1775E f. 273).²⁰ After the death of his wife, Carlyle was in no mood to get involved in public controversy. Although he complained to his brother about “Blackie’s indistinct empty bow-wow” (TC to JAC, 22 November 1873, NLS MS: 527 f. 101), a reference as much to the professor’s notorious scrawl as to his tendency to stir things up, he also wrote to Blackie:

There is not, nor ever was, the slightest vestige of foundation for that foolish rumour of my writing about Kaiser Wilhelm and the Pope. At no moment in the last half century has the Pope appeared to me other than a scandalous Phantasm, altogether despicable and altogether damnable, awakening in every earnest man only the question, how long, Oh Lord, how long, till this Father of Hypocrisies is thrown out of thy earnest world?

In Bismarck I firmly trust, and indeed have never doubted but this Blasphemous Humbug had found his fit man for dealing with him: so that *speech* about such a matter was not needful. Let the dead bury their dead. (TC to Blackie, 24 November 1873, NLS MS: 2631 f. 74)

The following summer “*blethering Blackie*” called several times on the philosopher of silence. In May 1874 Blackie reported an afternoon visit to “the shaggy old prophet exceedingly cheerful in his chronic despotism. . . . He kept me two or three hours, rattling and dashing and splashing on in a perfect whirlpool of denunciations and negations. At last I jumped up, and shaking him by the shoulders cried, ‘You are the incarnation of the everlasting No!’” (*Letters* 225; 16 May 1874).²¹ Later in

life, Blackie liked to recount the afternoon he tried to out-talk Carlyle but found that he could not get “an assenting reply” to any of the dozen topics he expounded. He also claimed that he was once so exasperated by Carlyle’s refusal to let Jane speak that “I got up, took hold of him, and giving him a good shaking, cried, ‘Let your wife speak, you monster!’; but for all that he wouldn’t.” According to Blackie, “they remained good friends for all that” (How 235). Even if one allows for his tendency to exaggerate, the story rings true. Blackie was no respecter of convention and was as likely to shake his friends as to embrace them. His brother-in-law recorded that he kissed “all women, old and young, plain or beautiful, who received his remarks with approval” and “men who expressed opinions he approved of.” What he did with women “who expressed opinions” we are not told, but we know that the painter Millais received Blackie’s embrace “with the composure of a superior Englishman” (Wyld 18–19). Carlyle seems to have taken his manfully as well (*Letters* 192, 3 June 1870).

From the early 1870s onwards, Blackie was a tireless advocate for Gaelic language and culture. His *Language and Literature of the Scottish Highlands* (1876) was one of the first serious studies, and for a decade he worked almost single-handedly to raise funds for a Chair of Celtic at the University of Edinburgh. Like many Lowland Scots, Carlyle did not share Blackie’s enthusiasm, as he complained to his brother John, 30 March 1876:

Blackie has sent me this morning the enclosed *blash* of a letter, which is worth nothing at all, & may be burnt immediately. It was accompanied by a number of papers about the “Celtic professorship” which Blackie is endeavouring to found. I send you his list of subscribers, which amounts he says to £8000 the only one of said papers which can be of the least interest as throwing light on the posture of the matter. The subscriptions are nearly altogether from Highland Lairds & dignitaries; & I have not for the moment opened my purse on the affair at all; but perhaps shall; if people take it up. There came also in a Scotsman (of Tuesday last) which probably you have seen a loose *blether* of a letter about the cultivation of Scotch Music in schools, which is a subject that I wish I could find a better advocate than *blethering* Blackie, to whom I mean no answer at all for the present. (NLS MS: 528 f.57)

There is no record that Carlyle gave any money for the Chair (established in 1881), his reluctance being matched by, amongst others, the Scottish-born Archbishop of Canterbury (A. C. Tait) and the Prince of Wales (though his mother gave £200). Blackie's last visit to Carlyle, or at least the last that is mentioned in his letters to his wife, was made in the Spring 1877: "On Saturday I took a cast down to Chelsea to see the old prophet. I did see him, but he was in a very grumpy humour, and said little either to please or edify,—his old negative dogmatism, without the agreeable flavour of good humour,—but no doubt, as his niece said, he had been rather below par for two days" (*Letters* 277, 20 May 1877). In the spring of the next two years, Blackie was abroad and did not visit London—in 1878 he was in Egypt, in 1879 in Italy. He was an inveterate traveler, to most parts of Britain and Ireland, to Germany regularly from 1851 onwards, to Greece (1853), to Russia (1871), and, a few months short of his eighty-second birthday, to Athens and Constantinople (1891). Travel was a way of accumulating information for whichever intellectual bee happened to be buzzing in his bonnet, and an opportunity to write yet another article. In the 1870s, Ireland, Russia, Italy, and Jersey all provided comparative material for the campaign for which Blackie is still remembered, Highland land reform. In prose and verse Blackie took up the cause of the Scottish crofter, and became as controversial a figure as he had been over the religious test almost forty years earlier.²²

After Carlyle's death, Blackie became a member of the Edinburgh Committee for the Carlyle Memorial, in May 1881, at which time he delivered this verdict on the great man in a letter to Mary Gladstone:

The Edinburgh Review is in the main right; C. was mighty to rouse, but useless to guide; he saw great truth with an instinctive glance of spiritual perspicacity but no sooner had he seen *this* than by a fevered habit of exaggeration his sublime became ridiculous, and his great truth half or more than half a lie. *Ruskin* is another unsound genius of that same kind; only Carlyle is a giant and wields a club, Ruskin a nimble mortal with a bright rapier the gleaming of whose *flash* is more potent than the weight of its stroke. With all his faults Carlyle will stand (1) because he is the most

picturesque of historical portrait painters (2) because he is a hard worker and never built his architecture with slight materials. (BL Add. MS: 46251 f. 64)²³

Another of his judgments was that “Carlyle was too Scotch, not cosmopolitan enough. Had he been, he would have been greater still” (“Two G.O.M.s” 9). This is a little odd, given Blackie’s reputation as a “perfervid Scot” (his own description), always ready to remind the English “that strong, deep-mouthed, shaggy-breasted Titan, Thomas Carlyle, . . . generally known as ‘the Chelsea Prophet’, is literally a sturdy Dumfries peasant, and has no more to do with Chelsea than I have to do with Cheltenham” (Wylie 200 n1). Nevertheless, even before Carlyle’s death, Blackie was accorded the title “the greatest living Scotsman,” a recognition of his fame south of the Border, and of Carlyle’s as “the Sage of Chelsea.” Unlike Carlyle, he had always written easily (or at least without anguish)—over forty books and pamphlets, including the four-volume *Homer and the Iliad* (1866) and eight books of verse, but also hundreds of articles, many of them “popular journalism.” He was constantly before the public eye with letters to the newspapers, and appearances on public platforms. The latter were notable for Blackie’s extravagant turn of phrase, which frequently got him into trouble, though he always blamed the inaccuracy of newspaper reporters. He had something to say on most “big” subjects—Greek and Latin pronunciation, the authorship of *The Poems of Ossian* or *The Iliad*, German culture, the philosophy of art, evolution, religion and morals, Robert Burns, Scottish song, Irish and Scottish Home Rule²⁴—but also on more “homely” topics. “An idle man is like a housekeeper who keeps the doors open for any burglar” (68) is one of the many gems to be culled from Blackie’s *Self-Culture: Intellectual, Physical, and Moral: A Vade Mecum for Young men and Students* (1874). It was his best-selling book, translated into at least ten languages, and was still in print in its 37th edition when war broke out in 1914.

Blackie and Carlyle suffered in the general reevaluation of the Victorians which followed the First World War. Blackie’s “sunny” optimism seemed particularly out of place, and he gradually faded from public memory. Outside the Gaelic-speaking Highlands and Islands, where Blackie was remembered as “the

crofters' friend," his ideas seemed to belong to an age which had passed. What remained was Blackie the performer²⁵—perhaps the one aspect which most set him apart from Carlyle. After Blackie's death in March 1895, a former student remembered seeing him:

[He was] walking down Princes Street, with firm step and alert carriage; the figure straight as an arrow; the close black surtout falling down to the knees of his wide shepherd tartan trousers; the dark plaid loosely crossed over his shoulder, carelessly held with his left hand, while the right grasped the famous "kail runt;" the clear-cut Grecian face overshadowed by the broad-brimmed soft felt hat, from beneath which his silver hair escaped in a flood over his shoulders; and as he passed along [he was] swinging his stick, and crooning like a bagpipe. (Duncan 107)²⁶

A fellow-Scot remembered Blackie as the passenger on a night train from Waverley Station to King's Cross who "took out of his pocket a Greek book, and read it with great gesticulation, in a loud voice, perfectly regardless of my presence in the carriage." After a sleepless night, "pretty well convinced that the old gentleman was insane," he was taken aback to meet him again dining at High Table in Trinity College, Cambridge (Stuart 193). The Marquis of Dufferin rather more fondly remembered a smart gathering at Argyll Lodge in London, where "there suddenly arose at the far end of the room a quavering voice that chanted aloud a kind of dirge in a minor key. This was dear old Blackie who was trying to illustrate in what fashion the 'Iliad' and the 'Odyssey' originally reached Grecian ears" (Lyll 2: 287). Of such stuff the Blackie legend was made, and Blackie, always a self-conscious eccentric, spent much of his adult life ensuring its wide currency.²⁷ "*Blethering* Blackie" he may have been, but he provided a welcome and always interesting dash of color to nineteenth-century Scotland.

Florence, Italy

Notes

1. See Anna M. Stoddart (102–03) and J. A. Bell to Blackie, 5 May 1833, NLS MS: 2621 f. 63.

2. See Carlyle (TC) to Blackie, 16 April 1849, *CL* 23–24, and Stoddart 165–66.

3. Cf. TC to Blackie, 28 April 1834, *CL* 7: 135–37. The 1880 Macmillan edition of *Faust* is a much improved translation.

4. See also John Aitken Carlyle (JAC) to Blackie, 23 January [1850], NLS MS: 2622 f. 140.

5. Blackie knew this phrase of Carlyle's, but not that it had been applied to him. See his *The Wisdom of Goethe* lxxxiii, n1.

6. Cf. the letter of 25 May 1848 in *Letters* 125–26.

7. Cf. also the unsigned *Tait's Magazine* review "Mr. Carlyle's *Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches*", which was probably by Blackie.

8. Sterling died in 1844, Chorley (who supervised the construction of the soundproof room at Cheyne Row) in 1867.

9. Abraham Hayward's 1833 *Faust: Part One* was followed by another three translations in 1834 (including Blackie's), one in 1835, one in 1838, three in 1839, and one in 1840, with translations of Part Two in 1838 and 1839. Many were reprinted several times in revised editions.

10. Blackie's introductory "Estimate of the Character of Goethe" is a detailed defence of Goethe's love affairs, though he found it hard to excuse Goethe's "Roman Elegies" with their heroine, "a pretty Roman girl, lightly picked up in a . . . osteria" (*Wisdom* lxiii).

11. Eliza Blackie's maternal uncle was John Riddle Stodart, the suitor rejected by Jane Welsh in 1818.

12. See TC to Blackie, 13 November 1865, and JAC to Blackie, 18 November 1865 (NLS MS: 2626 ff. 283–84). See also JAC to TC, 19 and 23 November 1865 (NLS MS: 1775C ff. 13, 18) and TC to JAC, 22 November 1865, NLS MS: 518.

13. See John Hunter to Blackie, 10 July 1858 (NLS MS: 2625 f. 62) and *Letters* 177 (18 May 1869).

14. See TC to JAC, 14 May 1870 (*New Letters* 266–67). Blackie's lectures were published as *Four Phases of Morals* (1871).

15. The Edinburgh lecture was published as *On Democracy* (1867), and one in Manchester in April as *On Forms of Government* (1867). In the "political tract" *On Government* (1868), Blackie made a similar anti-democratic case.

16. See TC to Blackie, 6 December 1870 (NLS MS: 2629 f. 291).
17. See his letter to *The Scotsman*, 26 June 1889.
18. The séance was probably with Blackie's friend Lisette Makdougall, widow of Dr. William Gregory (Professor of Chemistry at Edinburgh 1844–1858) and also a believer in animal magnetism and mesmerism.
19. See TC to JAC, 12 and 26 April 1873, NLS MS: 527 ff. 91–92.
20. *Kulturkampf* was the term used in January 1873 in the Prussian Diet by the Liberal anti-clerical Rudolf Virchow.
21. Cf. *Letters* 224 and Kennedy 289.
22. See, for example, *Lays of the Highlands and Islands* (1872), *Altavona* (1882), *The Scottish Highlanders and the Land Laws* (1885).
23. Cf. *Letters* 192 n1. For further comparison of Carlyle and Ruskin by Blackie, see "Ruskin," NLS MS: Acc. 9333.
24. See, for example, *The Pronunciation of Greek* (1852), *On the Rhythmical Declamation of the Ancients* (1852), *On the Living Language of the Greeks* (1853), *On Beauty* (1858), *Horae Hellenicae* (1874), *The Natural History of Atheism* (1877), *Lay Sermons* (1881), *What Does History Teach?* (1886), *Life of Robert Burns* (1888), *Scottish Song* (1889), *Essays on Subjects of Moral and Social Interest* (1890), and *Christianity and the Ideal of Humanity* (1893).
25. Donald Carswell's *Brother Scots* (1927), for example, was much influenced by Lytton Strachey and debunked Blackie and others.
26. A "kail runt" is a walking-stick made from a kale stump.
27. Blackie began writing his autobiography in 1869, when he was sixty. It remained unfinished at his death and was published by his nephew as *Notes of a Life* (1910).

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