
Thomas Chalmers: 'The chief Scottish Man of his Time'

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1. Introduction

In the New Town in Edinburgh, at the intersection of George Street and Castle Street, there is an imposing statue of Thomas Chalmers.¹ Like most of the extant statues in central Edinburgh, in recent times it must have been mystifying for the vast majority of passers-by. The same could be said of the inclusion of a bust of Chalmers (one of only eighteen men) in 'The Hall of Heroes' at the National Wallace Monument near Stirling. Given Chalmers' status in the nineteenth century after his passing in 1847, it is hard to say just why he is so largely forgotten today. The fact that subsequent generations of liberal protestants or 'liberal evangelicals' in the Scottish Kirk rejected his high view of the authority and inspiration of the Bible, and his evangelical Calvinism, and that some of his social views became *passé*, probably explains in part at least why he is largely forgotten. Yet he was described by one contemporary as 'the chief Scottish man of his Time.' At his burial in the Grange Cemetery after his passing in 1847, it was said that although it was 'the dust of a Presbyterian minister which the coffin contained; and yet they were burying him amid the tears of a nation, and with more than kingly honours.'² Of how many Scotsmen could that remotely be said? It is a sad comment on modern secular Scotland that a profane poet like Robert Burns is a national hero (voted the 'Greatest Scot' in a 2009 TV poll), whereas Thomas Chalmers, a veritable giant in comparison to Burns, is forgotten.

Writing a brief article on this man is a thankless task, given all that could be said of a life so varied in its interests and incidents. All one can do is to give a flavour of the life and influence of this larger-than-life character. We simply cannot go into great detail, either about Chalmers or the Disruption in the Kirk in 1843. In essence, then, this is introductory – and selective. Nevertheless, hopefully it will be both *interesting* as a chapter from Scottish Christian biography, and *challenging* for those who profess to be part of his heritage, but who in truth know so lamentably little of his life and writings.

¹ The statue, by Sir John Steell, had been erected in 1878.

² William Hanna, *Memoirs of Thomas Chalmers, D.D. LL.D.* (2 vols, Edinburgh, 1854), Vol. 2, p. 780.

2. Early life and calling (1780-1808)

In 1908 in a book entitled *Makers of the Scottish Church* the author introduces Chalmers in this way: 'Thomas Chalmers, as all the world knows, was born in the Fifeshire town of Anstruther in the year 1780.'³ As all the world knows? That could scarcely be said more than a hundred years later!

Chalmers' background was a modest one. Anstruther itself was, and is, hardly a hub of a lively social life. The population of the place was about 800 then, and around 3,500 today. Thomas was the sixth (the fourth son) of fourteen children born to John and Elizabeth Chalmers. It was a middle-class family.⁴ We are told that Thomas's parents were people of strong Calvinistic Christian convictions, against the prevailing limp, moderate views of the times in the national church. This is an important point as Thomas himself at first fell into such a moderate mould against the convictions of the home. Moderates might be formally orthodox, but they were non-evangelical. They preached a cold and dry moralism. Generally speaking, they ignored the fall of man and had no place for the necessity of the new birth or, for that matter, the work of Christ or the Holy Spirit. The impression was given that man could accomplish salvation by his own good-enough works. This view became very common in the Scottish Kirk in the eighteenth century. Around the time that Chalmers went to university in 1791, Lachlan Mackenzie was to write of the religion of the day in the Kirk (but not in the Secession Churches which had proliferated in the eighteenth century and had remained staunchly evangelical): 'If people go to perdition in these days it is not for want of ministers. The clergy are likely to become soon as plentiful as the locusts in Egypt, and which of them is the greatest plague of the two, time and the experience of the Church will discover.'⁵ So, the formal religion that Chalmers pursued then was lifeless and moderate. True gospel preaching in the Kirk was the exception rather than the rule; something also true, sadly, of the twenty-first century mainline churches.

At any rate, in the manner of the day Thomas (accompanied by his brother William) went up to St Andrews University (ten miles from Anstruther) in November 1791, 'not yet 12 years of age.'⁶ Three years later he studied divinity in preparation for the ministry, though he was not yet converted. So why did he think of the ministry? Well, no doubt his parents encouraged it; but also perhaps he saw it as the sinecure it was for so many. He could see to the work of ministry a couple of days a week and spend the rest of the week in the pursuit of scientific and pleasant cultural interests, which is not the same as being lazy, which he never was. In due time (1799) he was licensed to preach, though being under twenty-one he was not yet

³ W. Beveridge, *Makers of the Scottish Church* (Edinburgh, 1908), p. 185.

⁴ Chalmers' father was a merchant in a thread and dye works and at one time a magistrate in Anstruther. Hugh Watt in his biography, *Thomas Chalmers and the Disruption* (Edinburgh, 1943) wrote that Thomas was the only one marked for distinction (p. 14). However, Thomas did have an able brother, Charles – 'a brilliant thinker in mathematics and science.' He became first Headmaster of the prestigious Merchiston Castle School in Edinburgh (1833-1850). Watt does not even mention Charles in his book on Chalmers.

⁵ Lachlan Mackenzie, *The Happy Man* (Edinburgh, 1979), p. 45.

⁶ Hanna, *Memoirs of Thomas Chalmers*, Vol. 1, p. 7.

in a position to take a charge – he was, in the terms of the day, ‘a lad o’ pregnant pairts’.⁷

The following winters he attended classes in Maths, Chemistry, Natural and Moral Philosophy, and Political Economy at St Andrews. Briefly he was assistant minister in Cavers near Hawick in 1801, but received a post as Assistant in the Mathematics Department at St Andrews and the promise of the Parish of Kilmany, about nine miles west of St Andrews. He became minister there in 1803, though what he did in the ministry is another question. He felt, when he was there – and he was often away for long stretches – that two days a week was sufficient for religious duties, and even, if necessary, only a Sabbath morning. He even said in one of his early writings that from experience, ‘after the satisfactory discharge of his parish duties, a minister may enjoy five days a week of uninterrupted leisure for the prosecution of any science in which his taste may dispose him to engage.’⁸ Naturally he later deplored such a casual and unspiritual attitude. But at that time his real ambitions lay in scientific, literary and political/economic interests, a broad enough range of academic and practical interests.

3. He becomes a new man – his conversion (1810)

In the early days of his ministry Thomas was unconverted. However, things changed around 1808 when death visited the family. First, there was the passing of his favourite sister in Anstruther, then the following year an uncle suddenly passed into eternity, found kneeling in an attitude of prayer. And illness overtook Thomas himself in the winter of 1809-10, when his life hung in the balance. It was then that a great personal spiritual revolution began in his life. He began to think and speak with a different tone altogether. It is clear that there was a transformation in his life. On 17th March 1810 he was to write in his *Journal*:

I have this day completed my thirtieth year; and upon a review of the last fifteen years of my life, I am obliged to acknowledge, that at least two-thirds of that time have been uselessly or idly spent, and that there has all along been a miserable want of system and perseverance in the business of adding to my intellectual attainments. For by far the greater part of that time, too, there has been a total estrangement of my mind from religious principle; and my whole conduct has been dictated by the rambling impulse of the moment, without any direction from a sense of duty, or any reference to that eternity which should be the end and the motive of all our actions. My prayer to heaven is, that this record of my errors and deviations may be the happy mean of recalling me from folly and wickedness; that my temper, and my passions, and my conversation may be brought under the habitual regulation of principle; that the labours of my mind may be subservient to the interests of the gospel; that from this moment I may shake off caprice and indolence, and the mischief of ill-regulated passions; and that, with the blessing of the Divine assistance, I may be enabled to soar above the littleness of time, and give all for eternity.⁹

⁷ *ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 19.

⁸ *ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 66.

⁹ *ibid.*, Vol. 1, pp. 116-7.

He was later to confess that he had hitherto been blind to the realities:

‘What, sir, is the object of mathematical science?’

His answer?

‘Magnitude and the proportions of magnitude. But then, sir, I had forgotten two magnitudes. I thought not of the littleness of time – I recklessly thought not of the greatness of eternity.’¹⁰

Smitten by his sin he prayed:

‘O God, fit a poor, dark, ignorant and wandering creature for being a minister of Thy Word!’¹¹

Thus did things change fundamentally in his relationship with God, his service and dependence upon the Saviour, and the manner of his thinking and ministry: ‘Oh God, make me to feel the firmness of the ground I tread upon, and enable me to give all my mind to Thy Word,’ he prayed. ‘Above all, may I never recede a single inch from my Saviour; and may I have a dependence on that within the veil which will sustain me in every trial of human opposition.’¹² He never did. What an immediate impact this had on his ministry at Kilmany, and, needless to say, the whole course of his life and usefulness in the service of Christ. In the spring of 1812 after a sermon of Chalmers’ in Kilmany on John 3:16 one man said to his companion, ‘I never felt myself to be a lost sinner till today, when I was listening to that sermon.’ His companion agreed. ‘It was just the same with me,’ he replied.¹³

4. Cometh the hour, cometh the man

Thomas Chalmers’ conversion turned out to be a turning point both for his life and work, and for the evangelical cause in the Church of Scotland. Not that he was the only prominent evangelical in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Another minister of immense stature as an evangelical and preacher was Andrew M. Thomson (1779-1831). Thomson came to fill the prestigious pulpit of St George’s in Charlotte Square, Edinburgh.¹⁴ He, too, had wide interests and talents. He was an outstanding evangelical preacher and orthodox theologian, with literary flair, and musical ability. He composed the psalm tune ‘St George’s, Edinburgh’ – a grand but complex and even pretentious tune which conservative or untrained preceptors will usually avoid. In addition, he founded a day-school in Edinburgh. Sadly, he passed away in his fifty-second year in 1831, Thomas Chalmers preaching one of the funeral sermons. But Thomas Chalmers was God’s man for the evangelical cause in these eventful days in the first half of the nineteenth century.

¹⁰ Iain H. Murray, ‘Thomas Chalmers’, *The Banner of Truth*, Issue 198 (March 1980), p. 7. Murray’s article was included as an introduction to the Banner of Truth reprint of William Hanna’s edition of the *Letters of Thomas Chalmers* in 2007, one of the few re-publications of any of Chalmers’ works.

¹¹ Hanna, *Memoirs*, Vol. 1, p. 312.

¹² *ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 169.

¹³ *ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 324.

¹⁴ Now West Register House, Charlotte Square, Edinburgh.

Those early decades of the century saw an ecclesiastical and spiritual struggle between the Moderate party and the evangelical or popular party. The evangelical party was 'more orthodox, more doctrine-centred and [abode] by the standards of the Westminster Confession of Faith.' It 'reaffirmed the overarching authority of the Bible over the doctrine and the Confession.'¹⁵ A prime influence in Chalmers' conversion had been his reading of William Wilberforce's *Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians* (1797).¹⁶ This clear exposition of evangelical Christianity appealed to Chalmers, coming as it did from a man active in politics and protest, not least against slavery, something also close to Andrew Thomson's heart. Thomas Chalmers' biographer and son-in-law, William Hanna, was to identify one great consequence of his conversion: 'His regular and earnest study of the Bible was one of the first and most noticeable effects of Mr. Chalmers' conversion.'¹⁷

It was not long before he was prominent as an outstanding evangelical gospel preacher and writer, something he never lost. After his recovery from illness his life-force was directed towards the revival and spiritual prosperity of the Church. A convinced Calvinist in theology, albeit with a charitable frame of mind in which he had friendly associations across a broad spectrum of ecclesiastical opinion, he conscientiously sought to bring every area of life into captivity to Christ under the sovereignty of God. Chalmers became especially fond of the writings of eighteenth-century divines Jonathan Edwards, Thomas Boston, and Thomas Halyburton.¹⁸ He also had a love for the Puritans, not least Joseph Alleine, John Owen, and John Howe. In a letter written in 1819 he was to write that 'I have just been reading [Joseph] Alleine, I hope with profit. There is a closeness and a pertinency [relevance], and a power in the writings of the good old Puritan, of which we fall greatly short in these days of feebleness and degeneracy.'¹⁹ In December 1834 he wrote to his sister Jane: 'Have you read Owen on the 130th Psalm? This is my last great work; and I would strongly recommend it as eminently conducive to our establishment in that way, which is at once a way of peace and holiness.'²⁰ To his younger brother, Patrick, he had clearly recommended the reading of the great evangelical divines Richard Baxter and Philip Doddridge: 'I look upon Baxter and Doddridge as two most impressive writers; and from them you are most likely to carry away the impression, that a preparation for eternity should

¹⁵ Claire Puglisi Kaczmarek, 'Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847) and the 1843 Disruption: from Theological to Political Clash', *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology*, Vol. 24:1 (Spring 2006), p. 25.

¹⁶ Hanna, *Memoirs*, Vol. 1, p. 138.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 197.

¹⁸ See the volume of Chalmers on *Introductory Essays to Select Christian Authors* (Glasgow, 1836). This contains various recommendatory introductions that Chalmers supplied for seventeenth and eighteenth-century Christian writers such as the Puritans John Owen and John Howe, the Scottish divine William Guthrie, and the English evangelical divines Richard Baxter and William Romaine, among others. The volume clearly shows Chalmers' love and respect for the Puritans.

¹⁹ William Hanna, *A Selection from the Correspondence of the late Thomas Chalmers* (Edinburgh, 1853), p. 179.

²⁰ *ibid.*, (1834), p. 220.

be the main business and anxiety of time. But, after all, the Bible should be the daily exercise of those who have decidedly embarked in this great business...'. That was the 'rub.' For Chalmers, the teaching of the Bible was at the heart of real Christianity:

if read with the earnest sense and feeling of its being God's message – if perused with the same awe, and veneration, and confidence, as if the words were actually coming out of His mouth – if, while you do read, you read with the prayer and the desire that it might be with understanding and profit, – you are in a far more direct road to 'becoming wise unto salvation', than any other that can possibly be recommended to you. There is no subject on which people are readier to form rash opinions than religion. The Bible is the best corrective to these. A man should sit down to it with the determination of taking his lesson just as he finds it; of founding his creed upon the sole principle of 'Thus saith the Lord'; and deriving his every idea and his every impression of religious truth from the authentic record of his will and of his doctrine.²¹

It is perhaps no surprise that one of his great concerns was personal holiness. In 1825 he wrote in his *Journal*: 'My desire is to prosecute with all diligence the work of sanctification, to make an hourly business of it, and to work for the light and manifestation of the gospel.'²² That this concern did not falter is clear from a letter to his sister, Jane, dated October 1835: 'I am thankful to say that no reading occupies and engages me as the biography of those who have made it most their business to prosecute the sanctification of their souls...'²³ 'Rabbi' Duncan was to say of him that '...as a practical thinker and teacher of the heart he was unrivalled...Chalmers was not a speculative thinker; but he was especially great in all questions where the heart aids the intellect.' Further, he was to say that, 'as a man of erudition he might have been better. As a heaven-taught man he needed little.'²⁴ This gives us an indication of his spiritual and doctrinal commitment, though more modern historians have suggested, inaccurately in our view, that he was a bit 'liberal' or an 'evangelical Moderate' in his outlook.²⁵ No, – came the hour, came the man...

5. Ministries in Glasgow (1815-1823)

In 1815 the scene of Chalmers' ministry changed radically. In his last sermon in Kilmany he pled with his congregation: 'Choose Him, then, my brethren, choose Him as the Captain of your salvation. Let Him enter into your hearts by faith, and let Him dwell continually there. Cultivate a daily intercourse and a growing acquaintance with Him. O, you are in safe company, indeed, when your fellowship is with Him!'²⁶

²¹ *ibid.*, (1812), p. 183.

²² Hanna, *Memoirs*, Vol. 2, pp. 76-7.

²³ Hanna, *Correspondence*, (1835), p. 220.

²⁴ William Knight, *Colloquia Peripatetica* (Edinburgh, 1907), pp. 27-8.

²⁵ See, for example, John Roxborough, 'Chalmers' Theology of Mission', in A.C. Cheyne (ed.), *The Practical and the Pious* (Saint Andrew Press, 1985), pp. 174-185. Roxborough's essay is, in our estimation, open to criticism, not least in reading back into Chalmers' position broader attitudes that developed in the Churches later in the century, as expressed in the Declaratory Acts of 1879 (United Presbyterian Church) and 1892 (Free Church).

²⁶ Thomas Chalmers, *Posthumous Works* (9 vols., Edinburgh, 1847-1849), Vol. 6, pp. 238-9.

So, in 1815 Chalmers removed to Glasgow, then a city of around 120,000 people. Through the growth of industry, by 1821 it overtook Edinburgh in size. The Magistrates and Town Council of Glasgow had invited Chalmers to take charge of the Tron Church. What would he do there? His preaching attracted huge crowds from within and outwith the parish. He undertook house-to-house visitation in the parish. This took two years to complete. He appointed elders and deacons and put them to the work of oversight and administration. He commenced a Sabbath evening school (in those days Church services were invariably in the morning and the afternoon). This grew from thirteen to 1,200 in two years. He applied himself to seeking a remedy for the illiteracy and poverty that he was confronted with in Glasgow. Besides this, he lectured on sciences and Christianity; his series on *Astronomical Discourses* (1817) on Thursday afternoons every two months were delivered through 1816. As a published book it went through nine editions amounting to 20,000 copies in the first year.

With the fast-growing population of Glasgow, it was quite clear that additional parishes and parish ministers and congregations were required. After negotiations with the local authorities, Chalmers created a new parish of St John's to which he transferred from the Tron in 1819, though a place of worship was not yet completed. This gave him considerable scope for his energies and ideas. Eventually the Church was completed, seating 1,700. It was invariably packed out. He was also involved in various social concerns, not only in encouraging public worship, obviously, but also (as in the Tron) mobilising office-bearers, developing Sabbath Schools, and, in addition, providing for the needs of the poor administered by the Church (through the diaconate). No class of people was untouched. By his labours, many were restored to the Church, with many being converted to Christ and Christian usefulness. One writer has stated that 'his whole discourse was...a boiling, foaming current, a mingled stream of exposition, illustration, and application, directed to the one great object of moving his audience to action. His soul was so penetrated with his subject, his whole nature was so roused and electrified by it, that others could not but be roused and electrified too.'²⁷

Besides thousands of visits in the parish, and calls for preaching and lecturing further afield, it is reckoned that he wrote fifty letters a week on average to acquaintances and enquirers. He was, in the best sense, an evangelical reformer. But even his great success in reviving the cause in Glasgow was relatively short-lived, as the attraction of what he considered to be greater usefulness arose in 1823.

6. Chalmers becomes a university professor (1823-1843)

Towards the end of 1823 there was a change of direction in Chalmers' life and work. In a sense this was a turning point. It was the beginning of 'his most important work' (thus, Iain Murray). This perhaps was not obvious as he was exchanging a busy pastorate in Glasgow for a chair in Moral Philosophy at his old university of St Andrews. By this time Chalmers, married in 1812 to Grace Pratt, in the course of time had six daughters (no sons). He gave an

²⁷ W.G. Blaikie, *The Preachers of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1888), pp. 281-2.

account of one amusing incident in his wedding to Grace. 'Dr. Greenlaw was the clergyman, in his 90th year. He made a most laughable mistake, which converted a business that is often accompanied with tears, into a perfect frolic. It made me burst out, and set all the ladies a-tittering. In laying the vows on Grace, what he required of her was that she should be a loving and affectionate husband, to which she courtesied.'²⁸

Chalmers was persuaded that this would increase his usefulness in the cause of Christ. At any rate, in November 1823 Chalmers was installed as Professor of Moral Philosophy at St Andrews. 'Moral Philosophy', he wrote, 'stands to Christianity in the relation that Law does to Gospel; that the preaching of John the Baptist did to the preaching of the Saviour.'²⁹ 'Moral philosophy is with me the philosophy of morals – the philosophy of duty. My course is purely an ethical one...' He divided the course into two: firstly 'the moralities which reciprocate between man and man on earth;' and, secondly, 'the moralities which connect earth with heaven.'³⁰ It was a fairly wide-ranging course related to supernatural revelation as the basis for all true morality. But he found St Andrews spiritually cold: 'Perhaps there is no town in Scotland more cold, and meagre, and moderate in its theology,' he was to write. 'I do feel the Sabbaths to be very heartless in regard to public services.' He adds: 'Mrs Chalmers half-threatens to be a Seceder upon our hands.'³¹

This, however, turned out to be a preparation for his most important work because he was burdened by the need there was for a future ministry driven by a concern to maintain the authority of Scripture and the authority of Christ as the Church's Head and the sinner's only Saviour. In other words, he was driven by a desire for an effective evangelical gospel ministry. This all became clearer in the purpose of God in November 1828 when he was elected Professor of Divinity at Edinburgh University. In some ways the impact Chalmers made by this Professoriate was summed up by William Cunningham who attended his very first lecture and who was struck most of all by 'the deep, vital consciousness of the glory of the divine presence. It is impossible not to indulge the hope that the time to favour our Zion, yea, the set time, is come.'³²

There are some wonderful descriptions of his lecturing style and content. The most vivid is that described by David Masson. Firstly, he deals with the *manner* of Chalmers' lecturing:

Punctually a few minutes before the hour the Doctor would arrive among the gathered groups expecting him. His manner on arriving was generally hurried and absent, and he disappeared at once into his vestry or ante-room, there to put on his gown, and his little white Geneva bands, a pair of which he usually kept in an odd brown-covered old volume of Leibnitz that lay handy for the

²⁸ Hanna, *Memoirs*, Vol. 1, p. 223.

²⁹ Hanna, *Correspondence*, (1828), p. 104.

³⁰ Hanna, *Memoirs*, Vol. 2, p. 44.

³¹ Hanna, *Correspondence*, (1824), p. 189. The Seceder successors of the eighteenth-century Secession Churches tended to keep the reformed and evangelical flame glowing more brightly than the Established Church. In St Andrews and elsewhere people sat 'under the destitution of evangelical truth in our established pulpits'.

³² Murray, 'Introduction' to the *Letters of Thomas Chalmers*, p. xvi.

purpose on a side-table. Sometimes one or two of the strangers would follow the Doctor into the vestry to bid him good morning before lecture, but he did not like the intrusion. Meanwhile, the doors of the Hall having been opened, the audience had entered and filled it. It was more like a dingy ill-contrived little chapel than a class-room, having a gallery raised on iron pillars over the back rows of seats so as to darken them, and a pulpit opposite this gallery rising to a level with it. The students, properly so called, the number of whom was from 100 to 130, occupied the seats below, clear of and under the gallery; and in the comparatively empty gallery, not much noticed by the Doctor, who generally looked downwards to his students, sat the strangers of distinction and the military veterans.

Emerging from the vestry by its private entrance into the Hall, the Doctor, now in his gown and bands, still rather hurried and absent-looking, mounted the pulpit, a sight for any physiognomist to see. Then generally, after a very brief prayer, which he read from a slip of paper, but in such a way that you could hardly detect he was reading, the business of the hour began. Not unfrequently, however, it would turn out that he had forgotten something, and, muttering some hasty intimation to that effect instead of the expected first words of his prayer — once, I am told, it was this surprising communication, delivered with both his thumbs up to his mouth, “My artificial teeth have gone wrong” — he would descend again from the pulpit and go back to his vestry. On such occasions it was a chance if he did not come upon one or two late-comers availing themselves of that quiet means of entrance, engaged while they did so in the interesting process of measuring their heads with his by furtively examining and trying on his vast hat.

Suppose all right, however, and the lecture begun. It was a perfectly unique performance — every lecture a revelation, though within so small and dingy a chapel, of all that the world at large had come to wonder at in Chalmers. For the most part he sat and read, either from his manuscript or from some of his printed books, from which he had a most dexterous art of helping himself to relevant passages — sat and read, however, with such a growing excitement of voice and manner that whether he was reading or not reading was never thought of. But every now and then he would interrupt his reading, and, standing up, and catching off his spectacles so that they hung from his little finger, he would interject, with much gesticulation, and sometimes with a flushing of the face, and an audible stamping of the foot, some little passage of extempore exposition or outburst. No one lecture passed in which the class was not again and again agitated by one of those nervous shocks which came from Chalmers’s oratory whenever and about whatsoever he spoke in other public places. Clamours of applause had, indeed, become habitual in the class-room; and as, in spite of their apparent indecorousness in such a place, they were justifiable by the audience on the plain principle, ‘If you lecture like that, then we must listen like this’, he had been obliged to let them occur. Only at the natural moments, however, would he tolerate such interruptions. He was sensitive to even a whisper at other times, and kept all imperiously hushed by an authority that did not need to assert itself.

Masson goes on to outline the *content* of the lectures:

To describe the matter of his lectures would be more difficult than to give an idea of their form. It was called Theology, and there certainly was a due attempt to go over the topics of a theological course, with frequent references

to Butler, Paley, Jonathan Edwards, the *Theologicæ Elencticæ* of Turretin, and, by way of general text-book, to Dr George Hill's Lectures in Divinity. But really it was a course of Chalmers himself, and of Chalmers in all his characters. Within two or three consecutive sessions, if not in one, every listener was sure to be led so completely and with so much commotion through the whole round of Chalmers's favourite ideas, that, if he remained ignorant of any one of them or unsaturated with some tincture of them all, it could only be because he was a miracle of impassiveness. But through all and over all was the influence of a nature morally so great that by no array and exposition of its ideas, repeated never so often, could it be exhausted, and by no inventory of them represented. Merely to look at him day after day was a liberal education.³³

Incidentally, the same was true of his preaching. It appears that his sermons were written out in shorthand and only later some were transcribed in longhand. Incidentally, he was left-handed. In this method of preaching he was not alone among acclaimed evangelical preachers (notably Jonathan Edwards, R.S. Candlish, and others). There has, admittedly been a strong concern for preaching to be in a freer or even *extempore* manner rather than 'reading.' But whatever one thinks of this method, there is no question of the powerful *effect* of his lectures and sermons. He influenced a generation of men who became superb evangelical preachers and pastors. In his theology, as mentioned above, Chalmers followed Francis Turretin's *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae* (3 parts, 1679-1685) and George Hill's *Lectures in Divinity* (1821), as well as Jonathan Edwards and now dated texts of Bishop Butler and William Paley on 'Natural Theology' (Apologetics). His own course was reproduced, posthumously, in his 2-volume *Institutes of Theology* (1849). There is an interesting comment by Rabbi Duncan, a colleague of Chalmers at the Free Church College after 1843:

'How did you and Dr. Chalmers get on?'

'Oh, nobly. Though very inferior, I took the liberty of differing from him sometimes about doctrine. One day when he came down to my house for a little refreshment, I found fault with his definition of Faith. He said to Mrs. Duncan when he went out, "You should get him to write." Ah! my doctrine about faith was better than his – but he went to prayer, and his faith was better than mine.'³⁴

Chalmers's greatest legacy in his time as Professor of Divinity in the University, and afterwards the fledgling Free Church Divinity Hall, was the motivation of men to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. There are several principles he pressed upon his students:³⁵

- (1) *Seek first the approval of God.* The plaudits of men will not do as a motive in the ministry. Chalmers observed that 'by far the most effective ingredient of good preaching...is the personal piety of

³³ David Masson, *Memories of Two Cities* (Edinburgh and London, 1911), pp. 77-81.

³⁴ David Brown, *Life of the late John Duncan, LL.D.* (Edinburgh, 21872), p. 484.

³⁵ This and the following points have been suggested, rightly in our view, by Iain Murray's 'Introduction' to the *Letters of Thomas Chalmers*.

the preacher himself.³⁶ Further, ‘How little must the presence of God be felt in that place, where the high functions of the pulpit are degraded into a stipulated exchange of entertainment, on the one side, and of admiration, on the other! And surely it were a sight to make angels weep when a weak and vapouring mortal, surrounded by his fellow-sinners, and hastening to the grave and the judgment along with them, finds it a dearer object to his bosom to regale his hearers by the exhibition of himself, than to do, in plain earnest, the work of his Master.’³⁷ What a challenge for the Scottish pulpit in the twenty-first century!

- (2) *‘Ministers should never rest satisfied without growth in personal holiness.’* Said Chalmers: ‘Pray unceasingly for the progress of His work in your heart.’ In one of his letters he wrote: ‘I am quite sensible that talent is but secondary to piety – that gifts are but secondary to graces in a minister of the gospel, and I therefore am all the more thankful that, besides being men of power and high scholarship, very many of our young preachers are men of faith and prayer...and have been the instruments of great and promising revivals in various parts of Scotland.’³⁸ It may be argued that the decline of the Free Church in the course of the nineteenth century can be related to the loss of this perspective. Chalmers himself did not wane in concern for increasing prayerfulness and holiness. It was a secret of his effectiveness in his public work.
- (3) *‘Ministers should give themselves diligently to the work of ministry.’* Chalmers saw this as a prerequisite to revival – undivided attention to ‘the peculiar work of the Christian minister.’ This does not refer just to preparations for the pulpit but also pastoral diligence.³⁹ There may be a substitution of extraneous work, even Church work, committees, etc., which can cause distractions from the main business of the ministry. He described this as ‘The Christian Ministry Secularized.’⁴⁰ William Hanna commented that ‘After his settlement in Glasgow, Dr Chalmers was excessively annoyed by the accumulation of all kinds of secular business which was laid upon the city ministers.’⁴¹
- (4) *Chalmers also stressed the need for ministers/preachers to aim for the salvation of souls.* In one place he said: ‘A single human being called out of darkness, though he lived in some putrid lane or unheard-of obscurity, is a brighter testimony than all the applause of the fashionable.’ Iain Murray comments: ‘Commending [Joseph]

³⁶ Hanna, *Memoirs*, Vol. 1, p. 627.

³⁷ Quoted in Murray, ‘Introduction’ to the *Letters of Thomas Chalmers*, pp. xiv-xv.

³⁸ Hanna, *Correspondence*, (1842), p. 237.

³⁹ Chalmers is reputed to have visited 11,000 homes in two years during his Glasgow ministry, though perhaps not all personally.

⁴⁰ See his sermon of that title on Acts 6:2, in Chalmers, *Posthumous Works*, Vol. 6, pp. 330-347.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 330.

Alleine's *Alarm* he warned against the "diseased touchiness" of the age which disliked the urgent preaching of repentance.' Chalmers said to students for the ministry that their principal concern should be that their hearers be won 'by entering into the chambers of their consciences and telling them of that sin which is their ruin and of that Saviour who can alone hush the alarms of nature.'⁴²

- (5) *Chalmers clearly placed great emphasis on the freeness of the gospel offers to all.* This is crystal clear in a lecture at Edinburgh University on 'Freeness of the Gospel' reprinted in a collection of Chalmers' *Select Sermons* in 1881 (in a 'New Edition'). 'We hope you understand,' said Chalmers, 'there is nothing in predestination to limit the universality of the Gospel. It is the stepping-stone of the transition from condemnation to safety.' 'It is not from the secret counsels of heaven, of which all are ignorant, but from the open communications of heaven, to which all have access, that they extract hope...It is not in the capacity of an *elect* sinner, but of a *sinner*; not as being one of the children of *election*, but as being one of the children of *humanity*, that he receives and accepts the overtures of reconciliation.'⁴³

Such teaching made a profound impression on a generation of preachers in the second quarter of the nineteenth century: to name a few – Andrew and Horatius Bonar, Robert Murray M'Cheyne, George Smeaton, and many, many others, lesser-known. It was said of Alexander Duff, the first missionary to be sent by the Church of Scotland in 1830, and who was influenced by Chalmers's enthusiasm for mission in St Andrews: 'the man to whom he was most indebted for the development of his intellect and the formation of his character was Dr Chalmers, who joined the university in November 1823 as Professor of Moral Philosophy...But for Thomas Chalmers, Alexander Duff, in all human probability, would never have become a missionary.'⁴⁴ Duff, indeed, himself was to say of Chalmers that, 'the Lord was graciously pleased to remember St Andrews for the fathers' sake...and...sent his chosen servant, Dr Chalmers, to be the honoured instrument of a great revival which should redound to His own praise and glory.'⁴⁵ When one thinks of some of those whose writings we now have in print, we are not surprised by that comment of Chalmers' about 'great and promising revivals in various parts of Scotland.' The first-fruits of this occurred in 1838-42. Though by no means confined to the Church of Scotland, nor to Chalmers's influence, revival was experienced in many places through the instrumentality of ministers of the Church of Scotland. This affected congregations in Kilsyth, Dundee, Perth, Kelso and elsewhere.⁴⁶

⁴² Murray, 'Introduction' to the *Letters of Thomas Chalmers*, p. xvi.

⁴³ Thomas Chalmers, *Select Sermons* (Edinburgh, 1881), pp. 222-233.

⁴⁴ Lal Behari Day, *Recollections of Alexander Duff, D.D., LL.D.* (London, 1879), pp. 12-13.

⁴⁵ Cited in W. M. Mackay, *Thomas Chalmers* (Edinburgh, 1980), p. 21.

⁴⁶ One can read an account of this in Tom Lennie's *Land of Many Revivals* (Christian Focus, 2015), Chapter 7. See also *The Revival of Religion* first published in 1840 and reprinted by the Banner of Truth Trust in 1984.

Chalmers in one place expressed what should be the desire of every gospel preacher when he wrote: 'O that the same God who sent forth His mighty Spirit to convert three thousand at the utterance of one sermon, would so arm me with arguments, and so press them home with efficiency upon the hearts of a people made willing and obedient in the day of His power, that the...months...might witness the accession of many sons and daughters to righteousness.'⁴⁷ However, concurrent with this were many tensions and controversies, within the Church and from outside factors, with which the evangelical or 'popular' party, were to become embroiled.

7. Controversy and Disruption (1834-1843)

Any consideration of the life and work of Thomas Chalmers takes us on to the whole matter of the controversy in which the Church of Scotland was embroiled between 1834 and 1843 when, dramatically, 481 ministers – one third of the ministry of the Church – besides 21 overseas missionaries and around 300,000 people left the Established Church to form the Free Church of Scotland. We cannot enter here into the varied reasons proposed as to why and how the Disruption came about in 1843 – that would require a separate article, as would a discussion of the detail of the issues arising at that time. Among the main reason for what happened in 1843, the following may be suggested, briefly:

(1) *The fact of a revival* in the Church of Scotland with the consequent upsurge of the evangelical party under the dynamic leadership of Thomas Chalmers. As one student of Chalmers was to put it: 'The whole movement sprang from a revival of religion... A revival accompanied the Disruption as well as preceded it. Thousands were impressed and awakened to divine things who were indifferent before. The testimony to Christ as a real Prince and Head awoke many; the self-denial of the demitting pastors led others to enquiry; the new message that arrested and solemnized the congregations everywhere, and especially in long shut-up parishes where moderate doctrine had blinded the eyes of men, were all-important elements. But above all the Spirit of God accompanied the Word.'⁴⁸ It goes without saying that this created tensions between the evangelicals and the Moderates, who basically had conflicting views on the nature of the gospel, though it is to be recognised that not all who sided with the Free Church were truly evangelicals, and some who sided with those who did not leave the Church in 1843 were evangelicals (the 'Middle party'). However, the catalyst in this was not *directly* the nature of the gospel.

(2) *The direct issue was patronage*. The question of patronage had plagued the Church in Scotland from time to time since the Reformation. The issue was: who has the authority in the choice and appointment of ministers over congregations. Is it the call of the members of the local congregation? Or is it the heritors or landowners in the localities of the congregations? From time to time 'patrons' had had that right. Such 'patronage' had been abolished at the Revolution settlement of 1690 when the power of election of ministers was returned to the Christian people in a congregation. However, in 1712, in

⁴⁷ Hanna, *Correspondence*, (1814), p. 87.

⁴⁸ George Smeaton, *Memoir of Alexander Thomson of Banchory* (Edinburgh, 1869), pp. 290-1.

clear violation of the *Treaty of Union* of 1707, patronage was restored, leading to frequent and ongoing conflict between the Church and the State. It was behind the secessions of the eighteenth century (1733 and 1761) and it intensified with the rise of the evangelical party in the early part of the nineteenth century. The evangelicals in particular took issue with the matter of what was seen to be the intrusion of ministers on congregations against their will. They were 'non-intrusionists' in that matter and conflict was inevitable. Though the Church had protested against the Patronage Act (1712) year after year through most of the eighteenth century, there was still no abolition of it as standing law. Not that there were conflicts in every case – by no means. Wise heritors/landowners often sought or acquiesced with the perceived wishes of the elders and members of congregations. Besides this the Moderates who had prevailed through the eighteenth century as the dominant party were happy to go along with what after all the state authorities had decreed. However, things changed in the 1830s with a series of high-profile Court of Session cases which brought the whole matter to the surface. It was essentially triggered by an Act passed by the General Assembly of the Kirk in 1834, after the evangelicals had come to a majority in the Assembly. This was the *Veto Act* which gave members (heads of families only at that time) the right to veto a patron's preferred candidate for the charge. Cases came up in the civil courts with regularity and the *Veto Act* was considered by the civil courts to be unlawful as long as the *Patronage Act* of 1712 was still on the statute books. This became an ecclesiastical struggle within the Church and a political struggle between the Church and the State over the principle of spiritual independence and non-intrusion of ministers in congregations against the wishes of the members. The issue was not, whether the *Establishment principle* was right – i.e., the responsibility of the state to support the Christian Church as a matter of affirming national Christianity – but the rights of the Church to exercise *spiritual independence* within its bounds.

In this issue Thomas Chalmers was very much to the fore, as he was in so much of the positive witness and outreach/mission of the Church, particularly after he moved to Glasgow in 1815. In the end, the State authorities were recalcitrant. They would not allow the application of the Church's *Veto Act* to overturn the outworking of the *Patronage Act*. In 1842 the Assembly agreed to send a *Claim of Right* to Parliament. This constituted a protest against the intrusion of civil authorities into the domain of the Church in the matter of the settlement of ministers in congregations. The full name was *Claim, Declaration and Protest anent the Encroachments of the Court of Session*. This was the Church's response to numerous cases that came before the Court between 1834 and 1842, the decisions of which were seen to impinge upon the rights and spiritual jurisdiction of the Church. This *Claim*, essentially calling for the abolition of patronage, was refused by the Government. This refusal set the Church and State on a collision course.⁴⁹ Things happened next at some pace. Chalmers and the supportive evangelicals found the situation intolerable and prepared for what seemed to be an inevitable separation. The same year (1842) the non-intrusion party held a Convocation, called

⁴⁹ I. Hamilton, 'Claim of Right (1842)', in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History & Theology*, (Edinburgh, 1993), p. 188.

by Chalmers, in Edinburgh in November. At this, 354 ministers (including Robert Murray M'Cheyne, who did not, however, live to see the Disruption) pledged themselves to quit the Established Church on account of the issue. The Crown Rights of the Lord Jesus Christ to rule His Church were not to be sacrificed at any cost. It was at this Convocation that Chalmers unveiled his plans for the organisation and funding of a Free Church separate from the Established Church.⁵⁰ It was the point of no return.

The General Assembly of 1843, in St Andrew's Church, George Street, Edinburgh, was awaited with bated breath. By any measure what unfolded was one of the most dramatic events in Scottish Church history. On 18th May the retiring Moderator, David Welsh (Professor of Ecclesiastical History at Edinburgh University) placed a document on the table. It was a protest against proceeding further on account of the actions of the Government infringing the Headship of Christ in His Church. The Protest incorporated the claimed lawfulness of orderly withdrawal of all commissioners and such as should adhere to them to a separate place of meeting to adopt such measures, 'in dependence upon God's grace and the aid of the Holy Spirit,' for the advancement of the glory of Christ and extension of the Gospel. He then, with Thomas Chalmers and 200 other commissioners who had signed the Protest took their leave of the Established Church and made their way a little way along George Street and then right to the north down Hanover Street towards Canonmills and the previously prepared Tanfield Hall along a route lined with cheering spectators, and perhaps not a few who shook their heads in disbelief, to constitute the first General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, Free.⁵¹ In all 3,000 people crammed into that Hall. It was a momentous event, which had the aroma of Revival about it. A *Deed of Demission* and *Act of Separation* was signed by those present and finally adhered to by 481 ministers and twenty-one foreign missionaries, about 38 per cent of the total ministry of the Church.⁵² It was costly for these men, for they forsook manses and stipends for their principles. Thus began the promising life of a Church self-consciously evangelical and Calvinistic. Thomas Chalmers was elected its first Moderator.

It was a historic day. In his closing address to that first Assembly Chalmers cautioned: 'A signal discomfiture awaits us if we attempt this special work of the Lord, yet seek not the Lord for both direction to guide, and for courage to uphold us. "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it." Our labour will be vain, and the fruit of it a melancholy abortion, if we labour without prayer.'⁵³

Chalmers himself later challenged the Church at large: 'The framework of our church,' he was to say, 'may be better moulded, and its parts

⁵⁰ K. R. Ross, 'Convocation', in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History & Theology*, pp. 209-210.

⁵¹ Watt, *Thomas Chalmers and the Disruption*, p. 298.

⁵² John Roxborough, *Thomas Chalmers: Enthusiast for Mission* (Edinburgh, 1999), p. 144. Roxborough refers to 451 ministers leaving the Established Church, though that is some thirty less than those listed by Thomas Brown in the 'official' *Annals of the Disruption* (Edinburgh, 1893 edition), p. 812; not to speak, additionally, of twenty-one Scottish overseas missionaries who left the Establishment at that time (see *ibid.*, p. 813).

⁵³ *Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1843), p. 183.

put into goodlier adjustment than before; but, like the dry bones in the vision of Ezekiel, even when reassembled into the perfect skeleton, and invested by a covering of flesh and skin, with the perfect semblance and beauty of a man – so our Church, even when moulded into legal and external perfection by human hands, may have all the inertness of a statue, and with the monumental coldness of death upon it, till the Spirit of God shall blow into it that it may live.⁵⁴

8. Thomas Chalmers – How shall we assess him?

Thomas Chalmers was, under God, a phenomenon. His interests were broad, and he broke a lance on all sorts of theological, scientific, mathematical, political, economic, psychological, and ecclesiastical issues. That is not to say he is to be followed in everything he wrote or said or did – no more than Church leaders in any age. He was arguably off-beam in some of his detailed positions. His political economy may be considered somewhat dated. So, too, his scientific reflections. As, for example, his promotion of the 'gap' theory to allow aeons of time to account for the appearance of age in nature and the universe. This idea posited a 'gap' of indeterminate time between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2. He accepted the ordinary days of creation in Genesis 1, but this theory of his was unhelpful. We cannot, however, go into details on such issues in his scientific or philosophical reflections. He lived in a different day from ours, a less secular age and one with less obvious distractions than TV, internet, and mobile phones, with their 24/7 'entertainments'.

But let us end on a positive note, as we stare at his statue in George Street (Edinburgh) and ask: What was he all about? Let me summarise:

(1) *He was a man of phenomenal industry.* Consider:

1. The *written output* of this man was phenomenal. If we say that his collected written works across a wide range of subjects amount to *at least* 35 large volumes, that indicates to us that he was a man of exceptional discipline in study. And remember – quill pens, horses and carriages, etc. No computers then, no domestic gas or electric lighting.
2. The fact of *his incessant preaching and lecturing*, and his letter-writing (fifty a week on average), and frequent journeys in all directions, and you wonder where he got the time.
3. The *visitations* that he made, especially when he was conducting his parish ministries. Reputedly 11,000 in a couple of years in Glasgow, as we have mentioned.
4. His *care for the good of the Church*. Witness the visitations of course, but also his obvious devotion to the whole parish. And in the pursuit of this he was not a 'one man band'; no, he involved elders and deacons and put them to work organising visitations, oversight of the people, outreach, and practical works of mercy.

⁵⁴ Cited in Mackay, *Thomas Chalmers*, p. 46.

5. He was massively involved in *Church extension/planting work*. He was an organisation man, but passionate, especially about the outreach of the gospel. This comes strongly into focus in his pre-Disruption and post-Disruption organisation and encouragement of Church planting, and not just through relevant Committees but practically, as in St John's in Glasgow before the Disruption, and Edinburgh's West Port after it.
6. His *tireless involvement also in Church affairs* – Presbyteries, Assemblies and Committees – often fraught with trials and stressfulness.
7. His *teaching and motivating of a generation of divinity students*. Where did he find all the time? Where are men like this to be found today? Pray for them. Pray for them in earnest!

Something that Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) said of Chalmers is so characteristic of a man full of practical passion for Christ and his Church: 'What a wonderful old man Chalmers is! Or rather, he has all the buoyancy of youth. When so many of us are wringing our hands in hopeless despair over the vileness and wretchedness of the large towns, there goes the old man, shovel in hand, down into the dirtiest puddles of the West Port of Edinburgh, cleans them out, and fills the sewers with living waters. It is a beautiful sight.'⁵⁵ But not only was he a man of phenomenal industry.

(2) *He was a man of exemplary piety*. True, some of his opponents, and even friends, thought of him as a 'difficult' man. Perhaps he was 'bullish' and did not suffer fools gladly. That is often said of men of action like Chalmers. He was certainly not beyond criticism on some crucial points, such as his apologetic method, his scientific speculations as well as his political and economic ruminations. These, however, would deserve to be addressed separately and carefully. In such respects he was a man of his times. No doubt it is in his letters that we possess the most revealing source of his spiritual life. Consider:

1. In the spring of 1843, he wrote to his sister, Jane: 'It should be very solemnising when one reflects on the nearing of death and eternity. I am as old now as my father was when I was ordained the minister of Kilmany. Let us be awake to the realities before us and above us. I feel more and more the fundamental and all-pervading importance of faith. Let us take God at His word, and we shall believe that Christ's blood washeth us from all sin; and that He hath made Him sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. With confidence in these sayings we shall not only have peace and joy, but all the principles within us of new obedience. The benefit of the sacrifice and the gift of the Spirit are inseparable.'⁵⁶
2. From his early ministry he had this desire: 'I long to realise the joys and the exercises and the habits of experimental religion, to love

⁵⁵ Quoted in Mackay, *Thomas Chalmers*, p. 25.

⁵⁶ Hanna, *Correspondence*, (1843), p. 241.

Christ as fervently as good Samuel Rutherford – whose letters I am now reading – seems to have done, to have more devoutness, and more spirituality, and more of the real feeling and desire of one who is crucified to the world, and alive only unto God.⁵⁷

3. Later in life, as he saw eternity ever nearer, he was to write to one correspondent simply: 'I hope we shall meet in heaven; but let us never forget, that without holiness no man can see God.'⁵⁸ A year earlier he had written in similar vein to a correspondent in Hawick: 'I pray that we may meet in Heaven, after a life of faith and holiness upon earth. – Ever believe me, my dear Mr Kedie, yours very affectionately, THOMAS CHALMERS.'⁵⁹
4. In his *Journal* he wrote on one occasion: 'It is my prayer that self may be denied, that the cross may be taken up daily, that I may live a devoted servant of Him by whose blood I am purchased. I desire increased faith in its efficacy.'⁶⁰ In the end of the day for him – and us – what counts is having Christ as Saviour and Lord, as our life and hope for eternity.

(3) *He was faithful to the end.* Chalmers retained a passion for the Gospel to the end. In a letter to one correspondent, written in 1845, he was to plead: 'I entreat you not to make a resting place of that earth which passeth speedily away, but to aspire Godward and Heavenward, and be [among the] followers of those who through faith and patience are now inheriting the promises.'⁶¹ It is said that one of his 'most favourite sermons' was one on 'Fury not in God' (on Isaiah 27:3-5).⁶² He preached it for the first time at Kilmany in 1814 and also as late as April 1846. You can feel the vibrance of his preaching: 'Surely when I am busy at my delegated employment of holding out the language of entreaty, and of sounding in your ears the tidings of gladness, and of inviting you to enter into the vineyard of God – surely at the time when the messenger of the gospel is thus executing the commission wherewith he is charged and warranted, he may well say – that there is no fury in God. Surely at the time when the Son of God is inviting you to kiss Him and to enter into reconciliation, there is neither the feeling nor the exercise of fury. It is only if you refuse, and if you persist in refusing, and if you suffer all these calls and entreaties to be lost upon you – it is only then that God will execute His fury, and put forth the power of His anger. And therefore He says to us, "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little."⁶³ 'It makes one shudder seriously,' he has already said, 'to think that there may be some

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, (1817), pp. 76-77.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, (1845), p. 258.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, (1844), p. 57.

⁶⁰ Hanna, *Memoirs*, Vol. 2, p. 68.

⁶¹ Hanna, *Correspondence*, (1845), p. 262.

⁶² In the *Posthumous Works* volume in which this sermon appears there is a typographical mistake. The text is given as 7:3-5 and not 27:3-5 (Vol. 6, p. 422).

⁶³ Chalmers, *Posthumous Works*, Vol. 6, p. 426.

here present whom this devouring torrent of wrath shall sweep away; some here present who will be drawn into the whirl of destruction, and forced to take their descending way through the mouth of that pit where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched; some here present who so far from experiencing in their own persons that there is no fury in God, will find that throughout the dreary extent of one hopeless and endless and unmitigated eternity, it is the only attribute of His they have to do with.⁶⁴ There then follows an outpouring of impassioned pleading.

9. His passing – Sabbath 30th May 1847

Just four years after the Disruption, Thomas Chalmers' course came to an end in this world. The 1847 General Assembly was convened on Thursday, 20th May. Chalmers was away on Church business in London and only returned to his home at Church Hill, Morningside, on Friday, 28th May. He spent the Saturday on a Report for the Assembly. He was not up for breakfast on the Sabbath (30th May) and complained of being a bit tired. Later in the day William Cunningham (1805-1861) called and they attended the afternoon service at the Free Church in Morningside. In conversing with the Rev. John Gemmel (Fairlie, Ayrshire) (1807-1884) who was staying with them as a guest, he was to say, 'I am fond of the Sabbath, "Hail, sacred Sabbath morn!"' After worship, Chalmers withdrew for the night, waved his hand 'A general good-night.' The next morning he was found still in bed, asleep in Christ. As William Hanna, his son-in-law and biographer, put it, simply: 'very shortly after that parting salute to his family he had entered the eternal world.'⁶⁵

News of Chalmers' passing was announced at the start of the Assembly business on the Monday (11am, 31st May), whereupon the Assembly sang a portion of the 53rd Paraphrase and promptly adjourned the sitting.

The funeral of this great and godly man took place the following Friday (4th June). The city stopped for a time that day out of respect and his mortal remains were laid to rest in the Grange Cemetery, the first burial in that cemetery in which the mortal remains of so many of the Free Church divines of those early post-Disruption days lie, awaiting the resurrection of the last day.

We close with the words of Thomas Carlyle, a man not given to hyperbole nor flattery, in a letter to William Hanna in 1852:

It is not often that the world has seen men like Thomas Chalmers; nor can the world afford to forget them, or in its most careless mood be willing to do it...Probably the time is coming when it will be more apparent than it now is to everyone that *here* intrinsically was the chief Scottish man of his Time: a man possessed of such massive geniality of intellect and temper as belonged to no other man. What a grand simplicity, broad humour blent so kindly with enthusiasm, ardour and blazing insight: a man of such mild noble valour, strength and piety; above all things, of such perfect *veracity*, I have not met with in these times. Honour to him; – honour belongs to him; and to the essential *work* he did, an everlasting continuance among the possessions of this world.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p. 425.

⁶⁵ Hanna, *Memoirs*, Vol. 2, pp. 772-6.

⁶⁶ Letter of Thomas Carlyle to William Hanna, from Chelsea, 7th June 1852.