

Scotland, America and Tom Paine

*Ideas of liberty and
the making of three Americans -*

*John Witherspoon (1723-1794), Robert Aitken
(1735-1802) and Alexander Wilson (1766-1813)*

A study in bibliographical history

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Declaration

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Signed:

[Ronald L. Crawford]

Date:

“Man was born free, and he is everywhere in chains.”

Jean-Jacques Rousseau - *The Social Contract* (1762), translated by Maurice Cranston, London, Penguin Classics, 1968, p. 2.

“The English are a justice-loving people, according to charter and statute, the Scotch are a wrong-resenting race, according to right and feeling, and the character of liberty among them takes its aspect from that peculiarity.”

John Galt - *Ringan Gilhaize, or The Covenanters*, Edinburgh edition, 1984, p. 324 (cited by James D. Young in *The Very Bastards of Creation*, privately printed, n.d., p. 63).

“The essence of liberty has always lain in the ability to choose as you wish to choose, because you wish so to choose, uncoerced, unbullied, not swallowed up in some vast system; and in the right to resist, to be unpopular, to stand up for your convictions merely because they are your convictions. That is true freedom, and without it there is neither freedom of any kind, nor even the illusion of it.”

Sir Isaiah Berlin (1909-97), *Freedom and its Betrayal*, London and Princeton, 2002, pp. 103-4. [N.B. The lectures that make up this title were delivered in 1952. Berlin uses the words *liberty* and *freedom* interchangeably, as if they were synonyms.]

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Abstract

This study explores ideas of liberty in the later eighteenth century with particular reference to the books and pamphlets that helped make that period so intriguingly rewarding for modern Enlightenment historians and political theorists alike. After an introductory chapter that sets the scene for what follows by examining the major strands of the liberty theme (e.g. natural rights and the state of nature, the pursuit of happiness, the issue of property, democratic republicanism etc.), the contribution of key Scottish Enlightenment writers (especially Hutcheson, Hume and Smith) is discussed and evaluated. The rest of Part One takes the form of successive chapters concerning, respectively, the radical politics of the town of Paisley in the light of its industrial and religious background in the later eighteenth century, and the key theme of liberty of the press, with special attention paid to the importance of bibliographical aspects of the Scottish sedition trials of the 1790s. This is the first study to have concentrated on this dimension of the trials. Again, the importance of Paisley as a radical hotspot throughout this time is seen to be significant in this context, not least on account of the Paisley *Declaration* and *Address* having been key exhibits in the indictment of Thomas Muir at his trial in 1793.

Part Two concerns three individuals, all Paisley emigrants to America, whose lives reveal in various meaningful ways different aspects of the liberty theme. The American careers of all three are seen to have touched on the life of Thomas Paine, one of the greatest figures of the radical Enlightenment; this is particularly true of Witherspoon and Aitken. Further, in the case of all three, important new light is presented, supporting the view that, severally and individually, they represent significant figures in the context of the Scottish diaspora in the thirty year period, 1769 to 1799. Again, however, it is the bibliographical context that is emphasised, most obviously in the case of the émigré bookseller, printer and publisher, Robert Aitken. Special emphasis is placed, however, on the Scottish and American career of John Witherspoon, whose relatively recent emergence from scholarly neglect (in both Scotland and America) is welcomed and explained. It is indeed primarily in relation to Witherspoon – who, it is argued, should properly be regarded as a towering figure in this period, *in spite of* his essentially derivative contribution to Enlightenment political thought – that this study can be said to be grounded.

The study concludes with an assessment of the Paisley radical weaver poet, Alexander Wilson, and discusses his relationship to the extreme radical, James Kennedy, the extent of whose political activism is here examined (from both a bibliographical and historical viewpoint) for the first time in any academic presentation.

Preface

In one sense this study is the ‘end of an auld sang’. What was for long just a vague idea in my mind was the notion of preparing a Ph.D dissertation, really to satisfy an old frustration of mine, deriving in part, I suppose, from the inability of my *alma mater*, the University of Glasgow - when I applied to become a research student a couple of years after the completion of my first degree there - to concede that someone like myself in full-time employment *could* register for doctoral studies. As a young honours graduate in 1963, I was politely told by the Clerk of Senate at Gilmorehill that the regulations then in force applying to the degree of Ph.D of any Scottish university (there were only four at the time) precluded anyone registering for the degree who was unable to devote a minimum of three *full-time* years to the task.

Two years earlier, I had been offered, but turned down, an opportunity to carry out graduate work at Oxford on Old English (Anglo-Saxon) texts. Instead of Balliol, I preferred employment with a firm of educational book publishers in Glasgow, and although my foray into the world of publishing turned out to be ephemeral, it was a decision I have never regretted. At the same time, I had always harboured aspirations to academic research even though I balked at the idea of becoming a career academic specialist.

It was clear, then, that it would have to be a B.Litt or nothing. At the time, this impasse didn’t really faze me. In 1965 the B.Litt was a fairly recent innovation at Glasgow and, both within academe and in the outside world, seemed to carry in its own right some kind of special prestige in the sense that it was a genuine research degree (unlike its ugly sister, the B.Phil), was awarded fairly infrequently and, consequently, actually meant something. Of course, a doctorate was, and remains, a doctorate but I can’t say that being denied access to Ph.D registration marked the end of the world as far as I was concerned, though I remained unimpressed by the strange logic of the Clerk of Senate’s ruling.

As background information to this present Ph.D submission, it is important for me to state that early on in my part-time Glasgow research all those years ago I had suggested to my supervisor (the delightful Tom Livingstone)* that part of my B.Litt work might consist of an investigation into printing in Paisley. As things turned out, that was a good idea since it introduced me to an inspiring academic at Glasgow who led me down a road

I could scarcely have anticipated at the outset of my research programme. Dr. Philip Gaskell was then attached to the Eng. Lit. department as an honorary lecturer and, among other interests, had set up and demonstrated a working full-size replica of the kind of Elizabethan printing press that would have produced the First Folio of Shakespeare. More significantly from my own point of view, Gaskell was also immersed in putting the finishing touches to his *magnum opus*, his outstanding bibliography of the Foulis Press (which Rupert Hart-Davies published as one of their Soho Bibliographies series in 1964). It was Gaskell who introduced me to the world of bibliographical scholarship and the part it could play in assisting interpretation of literary history. I have maintained a lifelong interest in (mainly Scottish) bibliography and at one time served as a Council member of the Glasgow Bibliographical Society alongside such as Wilfred Black, Dr. Robert Donaldson and Dr. (later Professor) Ernst A. J. Honigmann. I clarify the nature of that earlier bibliographical work in the prefatory note to Appendix A of the present study.

A couple of years or so ago I came across Richard B. Sher's *The Enlightenment and the Book*. I was inspired by it. It seemed to me that Sher was my kind of historian – a scholar who used bibliography, book production and an intimate knowledge of printers, booksellers and publishers as a tool in assisting a more complete understanding and, in certain contexts, even reassessment, of a particular historical and/or literary movement. If some aspects of this study seem familiar, therefore, it is simply explained by my effort in unashamedly trying, in my amateurish way, to plod along in Sher's thoroughly professional footsteps.

By way of postscript, ironically I have still in my possession a letter from Professor Peter Butter (Butter had succeeded Peter Alexander in the Regius Chair of English at Glasgow in the course of my period as a research student) who, after congratulating me on my award, explained that my external examiner, Professor John Lothian from Aberdeen, had commented that it was a pity I could not have put up for a Ph.D. This was really no comfort at all. For the time being, at least, I was content with my B.Litt. Anyway, by that time, I had been appointed to an administrative post in the Royal College of Science and Technology which, just a year after I joined the staff, was granted full autonomous status as the University of Strathclyde. At Strathclyde I eventually rose through the ranks to become Secretary to Court and, later, Academic Registrar. The latter post entailed responsibility for all student registration and for the work of Senate – the academic

parliament - which had no hesitation in opening the Ph.D to part-time candidates, the first Scottish university to do so. This submission is the outcome of work wholly undertaken as a retired university administrator and part-time academic. Nothing changes.

Ronald Crawford

* “Wee Tommy” of *Tommy’s War - A First World War Diary*, written by his father, Thomas Cairns Livingstone, London, 2008.

Acknowledgments

To state the obvious, any project such as this, that involves a patient ingathering of knowledge prior to a fairly lengthy process of sifting, assessing and interpreting, before even the hesitant commitment of draft text on to a blank sheet, (or, as in this case, a laptop pc), necessarily depends on the help and advice of many individuals. I have taken advice and sought help whenever and wherever I felt I could get it. So many people, for their part, have freely rendered that help and advice, to an extent that still amazes me when I contemplate it. It is now my duty to acknowledge that support and this I gladly do.

I decided to begin work on this thesis at the tender age of 70, and I am putting the finishing touches to it as my 72nd birthday draws near. Within that demanding time frame I set myself, I have visited more libraries and research repositories than I would have believed possible - both in the U.K. and the United States. Without a single exception, everyone everywhere has been astonishingly kind and supportive to me, to the extent that it is simply impossible for me to name every name here. At the same time, however, there are some special individuals who have gone out of their way to assist me and, in their case, it is a genuine pleasure to record my debt to them here.

I suppose the best way of approaching my task is to begin with the chronology. For first encouraging me, in a general way, to proceed with my ambitious task at my advanced age I have to thank my good friend, Professor Jim McDonald, now Principal and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Strathclyde. It was around this same time also that, partly as a result of my interest in Franklin's links with John Anderson, Professor Richard Finlay, then Head of the History department at Strathclyde (who was to become my Ph.D supervisor and mentor), generously decided to offer me an Honorary Research Fellowship at Strathclyde. I could not have continued with my research without Richard's unfailing encouragement and scholarly guidance. Professor Finlay's help, in turn, prompted me to apply, successfully, - and not for the first time in my life - for a Research Grant from the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland, whose Secretary and Treasurer, Professor Andrew Miller and his deputy, Ms. Jackie Gray, could not have been more supportive.

The Carnegie Grant enabled me to spend a memorable, albeit all too brief, two to three weeks in the United States, where I divided my time between Princeton University and

various libraries and academic institutions in Philadelphia. I could not have completed this thesis without my American ‘sojourn’, in the course of which – like the three individuals whose careers I document in the pages that follow – I almost *became* an American, so steeped in my subject I willingly immersed myself whilst toiling in the Firestone, the Library Company of Philadelphia, the Van Pelt or the APS. It was an unforgettable experience for me. Not only did I learn a great deal; I made some lasting friendships in the noble cause of learning. The people who *really* went out of their way to assist me in a manner that, in retrospect, I find frankly breathtaking include Emeritus Professor John Murrin in the Department of History at Princeton, and Mary George, Don Kremer and Stephen Ferguson at the Firestone Library of the same university; Jim Green of the Library Company of Philadelphia; David W. Maxey (who first drew my attention to the Aitken material in the Presbyterian Historical Society of Philadelphia); and Roy Goodman of the peerless American Philosophical Society. At the very top of my American list, however, is Kate Mearns Ohno, Associate Editor, the Franklin Papers at Yale. Although we have never met face to face, Kate has become a good friend, a veritable mine of information, posing conundrums for me to try to solve and biographical and literary mysteries for me to unravel. I shall always be grateful to her for her wise words and her unfailing encouragement.

Finally, and nearer home, it is a pleasure to record my thanks to the staff of all the numerous Scottish libraries and archives who, again, have been unstinting in their help, both professionally and in all kinds of more mundane practical ways too: David Roberts of Paisley Museum, who was kind enough to lend me his extensive notes on Paisley radicals, and the staff of Paisley Central Library, the Mitchell, the libraries of the Universities of Glasgow (Rare Books Department), Strathclyde and the West of Scotland, the National Library of Scotland and the National Archives (West Register House). The ladies of the Strathclyde University Archives have been unusually patient and supportive, especially Carol Stewart and Anne Cameron.

Last of all, though by no means least, I have to thank my dear wife, Evelyn, who for the second time in our long married life together, has had to put up with my academic ‘obsession’ – her own word – to an extent that ate up what might otherwise have been pleasant summer days, winter evenings and most weekends, spent on the kind of leisure activities that more conventionally retired couples perhaps take for granted. She rarely

complained, except to chide me for my compulsive habit of logging-on at ridiculous times of the night and early morning. But as I approach the end of my project, I now realise that I should never be writing this without her constant and ungrudging loving support. It is with sincere thanks, and great affection, therefore, that I dedicate the fruits of my labour to Evelyn.

PART ONE

Ideas of Liberty in the later Eighteenth Century

Chapter One

Introductory: What is liberty?

“Is it because liberty in the abstract may be classed amongst the blessings of mankind, that I am seriously to felicitate a madman, who has escaped from the protecting restraint and wholesome darkness of his cell, on his restoration to the enjoyment of light and liberty?”

Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France, and on the Proceedings in Certain Societies in London relative to that Event.* (1790)¹

“Mr Burke will not, I presume, deny the position I have already advanced; namely, that governments arise, either out of the people, or over the people. The English government is one of those which arose out of a conquest, and not out of society, and, consequently it arose over the people; and though it has been much modified from the opportunity of circumstances since the time of William the Conqueror, the country has never yet regenerated itself, and is therefore without a constitution.”

Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man* [Part One], (1791)²

1 Liberty, society and ‘the people’

If the concept of liberty has become synonymous with the eighteenth century tide of ideas we have, perhaps a little misleadingly, come to acknowledge and label as the Enlightenment (or the ‘Age of Reason’), it is equally the case that the idea of liberty in the sense intended by this study can be said to have been anticipated by the writings of some of the great European thinkers of the *seventeenth* century, in the aftermath of the devastating continental Thirty Years War and later, in England, of the Civil War and the Glorious Revolution. There is, however, another way of looking at it. It is argued by some modern political philosophers and historians that it is more sensible to trace the footprints of the Enlightenment backwards in time, almost as if what we, they say, misleadingly call the Enlightenment, had no beginning – or at least no meaningfully

¹ Penguin Classics edition, London, 1986, ed. with introduction by Conor Cruise O’Brien, p. 90.

² Penguin Classics edition, London, 1985, ed. with introduction by Eric Foner, p. 72.

identifiable starting date. Professor Jonathan Israel of Princeton is in the forefront of those scholars. Israel uses the terms ‘Moderate’ and ‘Radical’ Enlightenment to describe the exemplars that suit his theory best, assigning the great thinkers who have attracted his interest to either camp in line with his own set of pre-determined criteria. Before Israel, this ‘seamless’ approach to Enlightenment ideas, of seeking, for example, to identify the ideological provenance of revolution, especially in America, acknowledges Caroline Robbins, Bernard Bailyn, Gordon S. Wood and, arguably the most ‘extreme’ of all, J. G. A. Pocock, as its hearth gods. All of these scholars respected the philosopher John Locke but they turned the tables on their predecessors by minimising the ultimate extent of Locke’s influence, with a consequential re-alignment in favour of (a) classical sources, and (b) seventeenth century English Whig republican theorists, of whom James Harrington (1611-1677) emerged as the ‘special one’.

Israel, however, is only the latest in a line of talented scholars over the last twenty years or so who have led us to revise our thinking, forcing us to conceive of the revolutions that transformed society in the later eighteenth century as having been born out of a complex web of classical and early modern European theoretical ideas on government and politics, spanning a range of several centuries, and embracing an enormous variety of ideological traditions. On the whole, this has been good news for the Scottish Enlightenment and of late, as we shall see, there has been a renewed interest in what is now termed the ‘Atlantic Enlightenment’. In the context of revolutionary America, for example, Locke’s ideas are often said to have been “mediated” or “refracted” through portions of the works of Scottish Enlightenment writers including, most notably, Hutcheson, Hume and Smith (and perhaps with a dash of Ferguson, Reid, Millar and Stewart thrown in for good measure). It is against that backdrop that, I shall suggest in chapter 4, the unique career of John Witherspoon ought to be approached.

The contribution of Scottish Enlightenment philosophy to revolutionary and immediate post-revolutionary America is undoubtedly important. As chapter 4 seeks to show, Witherspoon’s American career epitomises the successful transplantation of Scottish Enlightenment ideas on to a canvas already rich (in an astonishingly short space of time) in his own brand of American revolutionary (and republican) experience. Not only that, since Witherspoon was a Kirk minister who became a College President and a pedagogue, he was able by virtue of that unique combination to ensure that the ideas he

taught at Princeton spread like wildfire among successive classes of young undergraduates who could be relied on to drink in to the full all that President Witherspoon instilled.

In relation to the idea of liberty and the French revolution, there has never been any doubt that the Baron de Montesquieu remains a key figure. Montesquieu is acknowledged by such disparate figures as Voltaire, Hume (though not uncritically) and James Madison as the thinker's *philosophe* whose chief concern was political liberty. It is, in John Millar's words, "the great Montesquieu" who, almost uniquely, represents an identifiable and largely unchallenged ideological influence on the outcome of the events of *both* 1776 and 1789.³ Furthermore, Montesquieu is interesting as perhaps the only one among the *galère* of eighteenth century writers on liberty to have been specifically acknowledged by Thomas Paine as one of the few whose thought Paine actually cites and, clearly, respected. Significantly for this study, Montesquieu – along with Holbach and, above all, Helvétius (and, to a degree, unlike both Voltaire and Rousseau) – could be read and understood (at least in extract or in abridged form) at a popular level in Britain, as contemporary cheap and accessible English translations and abridgements clearly show.

At the risk of stating the obvious, there are, of course, crucially important distinctions to be made between the two great revolutions of the last decades of the eighteenth century. For Americans engaged in war with the British, 'liberty' came to mean independence, no more, no less. The vision of the revolutionary leaders was, to use Wood's word, "breathhtaking"; "a utopian hope for a new moral and social order led by enlightened and virtuous men". *Can America be happy becoming independent?* asked Thomas Paine. "As happy as she pleases", he responded for all the American leaders; "she hath a blank sheet to write upon."⁴

The French Revolution, some thirteen years later, was in a number of important ways quite different from that. Here, it was not a vision of independence that motivated the

³ "The great Montesquieu pointed out the road. He was the Lord Bacon in this branch of philosophy. Dr. Smith is the Newton", Millar, *An Historical View of the English Government*, 1812 edition, v.2, pp. 429-30 note. Cited by Donald Winch in *Adam Smith's Politics*, Cambridge, 1978, p. 38. Peter Hill's Edinburgh 1792/93 sale catalogue lists two separate editions of the *Spirit of the Laws*, Amsterdam, 1784, and London, 1787 (catalogue pp. 113 and 204 respectively).

⁴ See Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, New York, 1991, pp. 189-190.

members of the National Assembly and the *citoyens*, so much as the desire to create a new order, new *modi vivendi*, and to initiate something equally “breathtaking” but different, nothing less in fact than an entire levelling-out of society. With the revolution in France came a re-interpretation of society which, from that moment on, meant ‘the People’. The same ideas also inspired the small but vocal groups of British radicals in the early 1790s when a straightforward clamour for Parliamentary reform was, in time, transmuted into something altogether less harmless and the war with France began in deadly earnest. A worried government felt it had no choice but to resort to punitive counter-measures and, for a time, any prospect of dialogue with the people, however faint-hearted, receded.

Between the fall of the Bastille and the beginning of the Terror, however, the feeling that came over poets, writers and intellectuals across the length and breadth of Europe, in the wake of such momentous events, was that of a frantic and unprecedented euphoria. It explains why English historians still tend to concentrate on, and attempt to measure and quantify what they usually term the “impact” of the French Revolution on their own country. Curiously, and on the other hand, until quite recently it was fashionable to argue that, compared with England, Scotland was relatively unaffected by the events of 1789. As recently as 1989, for example, Louis Cullen wrote:

The French Revolution ... passed over Scotland not quite unnoticed but with little sign of a likelihood of upheaval.⁵

While properly cautious in accepting Scotland’s relative stability in the period after the revolution in France, Professor Bob Harris’s engrossing study of *The Scottish People and the French Revolution* (2008) nevertheless successfully restores the balance and effectively counters this orthodoxy :

[In Scotland] ... unprecedented explosion of political debate in this period meant, for probably the first time, there was a powerful incentive to read about events in newspapers, to discuss them with others, and to seek to construct a new type of politics.⁶

“*A new type of politics*”. Harris proceeds to chart the rise and fall of the radical movement, together with its loyalist counter movement, in Scotland’s towns and cities over the final decade of the eighteenth century. In contrast with his earlier prototype,

⁵ Cited in Bob Harris, *The Scottish People and the French Revolution*, London, 2008, p. 1.

⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

Henry W. Meikle,⁷ Harris is careful to relate his story to the impact of the French Revolution on the *Scottish people*.

Harris's approach reveals and contrasts the 'intermingled' state of political activity at this time, as between the perceived loyalism of the Glasgow and Edinburgh Moderate Kirk clergy, merchants and gentry *and* the radicalism of the emergent Scottish working class. He documents what the period actually meant for the shoemakers, the bakers, the ironmongers and, above all, for the weavers. Not the least, Harris considers the manifestation of both loyalist *and* radical sentiment in the newspapers of the day, as well as on the part of Scotland's numerous and vocal printers, publishers and booksellers. He shows for Scotland, as E. P. Thompson showed many years before for England, that it is one thing to write for a certain level of contemporary polite society - the language, if it be preferred, of the lecture theatre, the withdrawing room and the salon - and an altogether different proposition to write *for the people*. In this study, I have identified Thomas Paine as the writer for the people *par excellence*. Paine's name will recur throughout this thesis - in chapters 4 and 5 more especially.

But how do we approach the idea of liberty as it evolved in the later eighteenth century, when we recognise that for the first time in, let us conveniently though unsatisfactorily call it 'early modern times' - the beginning, that is, of the period of the industrialisation of our towns and cities - the *people*, no longer so pliant in the hands of their masters, but increasingly better read (though collectively still inchoate and amorphous though they undoubtedly were) were beginning to stir and, more and more, wished to have their say and to be listened to? To paraphrase Jonathan Israel citing Holbach (1770), the last three decades of the eighteenth century were "an age of much turmoil, instability, and revolutionary violence", but they were also "an age of promise", predicated by the emancipation of man via forms of government promoting the "general good" and life in a free society that was beginning to accord "protection to all on an equal basis". And the general aspiration? Holbach had argued that :

... if error and ignorance have forged the chains which bind peoples in oppression, if it is prejudice which perpetuates those chains, science, reason and truth will one day be able to break them.⁸

⁷ H. W. Meikle, *Scotland and the French Revolution*, Glasgow, 1912 (reprinted London, 1969).

That is, argues Professor Israel, “a noble and beautiful thought”.⁹ It is also surely one that would have quietly simmered in the hearts and minds of some of the people at *every* level, though, to use the tautology, it was a view by no means universally endorsed.

Thompson’s classic study, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), opens subtly and magisterially by citing the first rule of the London Corresponding Society : “That the number of our Members be unlimited”. To extend that argument, there is a world of difference between the public accessibility of the written word of Montesquieu, Joseph Priestley and William Godwin, on the one hand, *and* the mass popular appeal of the writings of Thomas Paine and his legion of imitators and pamphleteers, on the other.

2 A bibliographical approach

If we allow that it is indeed a valid way of looking at history – through, that is, the perspective of a largely shambolic, disorganised mass, the “swinish multitude” of Burke and the “mad, bad and dangerous” otherworld of Gillray’s political cartoons – the challenge as I perceive it is to try to build bridges in order to span the different worlds inhabited by, respectively, the journalist, the hack and the bookseller and the philosopher/political theorist. It is, in large measure, the theme of this study that that is not merely an entirely legitimate approach – but perhaps on occasion, and where germane, the *only* way to approach the intrinsically difficult issue of how a basic human desideratum such as the idea of liberty, and all that that means, ought to be properly appraised. Put another way, the challenge I seek to confront here is to try to identify, access and comprehend the ‘authentic language of the people’. This means we should not disdain such as the Paisley *Declaration of Rights*, Alexander Wilson’s angry protest poems or James Kennedy’s politically shocking doggerel in the general context of our theme. All have been given their place in this study, alongside works by such as Priestley, Burke, Wollstonecraft, Godwin and their like.

One way of proceeding is to examine the issue through the perspective of what the ‘people’, variously defined, were reading at the time. Fortunately, there are ways of doing

⁸ The Baron D’Holbach, *Essai sur les Prejugés*, “Londres” [Amsterdam], 1770. Cited by Jonathan Israel in *A Revolution of the Mind - Radical Enlightenment and the Intellectual Origins of Modern Democracy*, Princeton and Oxford, 2010, p. 36.

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 36.

this that can stand up to scholarly rigour. We can access the evidence of contemporary private libraries,¹⁰ lists of subscribers to individual titles, circulating libraries' stock and publishers' and booksellers' records and catalogues. Chapters 3 and 4 of this study try to show how valuable such tools may be in this context. As ever, there are, of course, pitfalls in such a technique and it is all too easy to overstep the mark. Nevertheless, as chapter 3 in particular shows, in the latter half of the 1790s we have such valuable reference tools as Peter Hill's 1793 sale catalogue,¹¹ which, revealingly, carries two copies of Burke's *Reflections*, but mentions Paine only in respect of a hostile *Life of Thomas Paine* (London, 1791?)¹² and a seriously scurrilous pamphlet;¹³ – but no *Rights of Man*, conspicuous by its absence. Above all, there is the daybook of Alexander Leslie, the Edinburgh radical bookseller, revealing the provenance and continuity of orders for radical titles. Similarly, there are the numerous checklists of titles sold by Daniel Isaac Eaton (in London and, from there, syndicated throughout Britain), himself constantly persecuted by the authorities and often on trial for sedition. It is all, to an extent, a rough and ready guide but much better, I suggest, than nothing at all.

¹⁰ One of the most important catalogues of a personal library is that of the books and pamphlets belonging to Professor John Anderson (1726-1796) of the University of Glasgow, the MS. and printed checklist of which are in the archives of the University of Strathclyde. Anderson possessed many 'political' books which may on first sight be thought surprising, considering he was a scientist. But he was also a radical with radical ideas on most of the great political issues of his day. Thus, he owned books by Bentham, Hutcheson and Reid, Kames, Smith, and Stewart – as one might perhaps expect – but also included in his personal library are accounts of the trials of Thomas Muir for sedition in 1793 and of Downie and Watt for high treason in 1794, just two years before Anderson's death. Other titles owned by Anderson include the 4th (Jordan) edition of Paine's *Rights of Man* (London, 1791), Price's *Observations on the American Revolution* (London, 1792), and James Thomson Callender's *Political Progress of Britain* (London, 1792), which has been printed (deliberately?) in the catalogue, as "*Poetical*" *Progress*. Other works belonging to Anderson include the *French Constitutional Code* (Edinburgh, 1791), Benjamin Flower's *Account of the French Constitution* (London, 1792), *The Constitutional Miscellany*, 5 volumes (Edinburgh, 1776), *Abstract of Evidence on the Slave Trade* (Edinburgh, 1791), Chipman's *Principles of Government* (n.p., 1795), and *Historical Sketches of Civil Liberty* (London, 1788).

¹¹ For more information on Hill, see chapter 6, bibliography of Wilson's writings, *Poems*, Edinburgh, 1791 and Appendix A, 127-91.

¹² *The Life of Thomas Pain* [sic], *The Author of Rights of Men, with a Defence of his Writings. By Francis Oldys, A.M. of the University of Pennsylvania. London: Printed for John Stockdale, Piccadilly. 1791.*, which, according to Keane [*Tom Paine A political life*, p. 320], was commissioned by the government from "Francis Oldys", i.e. a fervent Scottish loyalist George Chalmers. An abridged version, prepared by Henry Mackenzie, came out in Edinburgh in 1793.

¹³ *Remarks on Mr. Paine's Pamphlet, called The Rights of Man. In a letter to a friend. ... Dublin: printed by P. Byrne, Grafton-Street. 1791.*

This study, then, is grounded in bibliographical history. That is, it seeks wherever possible to emphasise the role of *the book* throughout. Each chapter begins with a short bibliographical and source note which is usually self-explanatory. This approach is consistent with the general overall presentation I have envisaged for my study. It is, I suggest, most obvious and, I believe, most germane in the case of chapter 3 where I deal with the assault on the book trade in the wake of the sedition laws and I examine contemporary reportage of individual trials – the majority taking place in the Edinburgh High Court of Justiciary – where men were brought before prejudiced judges and packed juries, generally on a charge of sedition, or seditious libel, in relation to *specific* publications they had printed, sold, circulated or otherwise distributed, or even just possessed on their persons. *What are these books and why were they considered so dangerous?* is the question I consider it most important to address. There have been numerous studies of the sedition trials of the 1790s but this study is, so far as I am aware, the first to examine the bibliographical grounds upon which the actual charges were founded.

Before that, chapter 2 sets the scene for my study by considering in microcosm the root causes of, and the essential background to, the growth of radicalism and the reform movement of the 1790s in Scotland, but more specifically in and around the industrial town of Paisley which Harris and others agree was one of the most active radical strongholds throughout the period and, indeed, beyond, into the years of the so-called Radical “War” (with a capital ‘R’) and the reform movement known as Chartism in the earlier nineteenth century. Since, again, I believe it important to relate my study to ‘the book’, I append a checklist of all titles printed in Paisley throughout the key period of my study, from the date of the first Paisley printed book in 1769 to the end of the century, by which time the Reverend Dr. John Witherspoon was no longer alive but whose name was still venerated in Paisley (though not necessarily so elsewhere in Britain) where some of his sermons were reprinted. It is no accident that Paisley was to become one of the most active provincial printing centres in Scotland – and, hence, a cynosure of literary activity besides – in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

I believe the extensive notes in Appendix A serve to flesh out the idea of liberty in the special sense implied in chapter 2. Importantly, some of the titles listed in Appendix A shed new light on a number of the themes my study addresses, most notably perhaps, (a)

the relationship of Evangelical and secessionist theological titles to contemporary ideas of political and civil liberty, and (b) radical and loyalist literature of the early 1790s. As a whole, an extensive checklist such as this is, I firmly believe, one of the best tools available to help assess the provincial importance of a town like Paisley in the late eighteenth century in relation to contemporary popular culture and the often commented-upon maturity of its working class reading public over the same period.

In Part Two of my study - "The Making of Three Americans" - I turn to what John Witherspoon would have called the "application" of my thesis. I proceed to consider the lives and achievements of three Scots-Americans who were seized by a personal vision of liberty which they then worked out and experienced, in dramatically different contexts, in their adopted new country. It just so happens that all three went to America from Paisley, though only one (Wilson) as a native of the town. I describe the (very different) motives that lay behind the call of America as each perceived and responded to it. In each case, too, I invite attention to a purely adventitious factor linking all three, namely that each of them not only met up with Thomas Paine personally in America but, in two cases (Witherspoon and Aitken), went on to become closely involved with him in historically important ways. Thus, one of my Americans (Witherspoon), with Paine, authored contributions to the same Philadelphia journal in the course of the revolutionary war and another (Aitken) was the first to give Paine employment shortly after Paine's arrival there. The third (Wilson) knocked on the dying Paine's door in Greenwich, New York and conversed with him at a time when he was not just a spent force but reviled in most sections of American society as the not to be endured critic of Washington and the Christ-denier of *The Age of Reason*. The vision of the erstwhile Scottish radical poet sitting at the feet of the author of *Common Sense* and *Rights of Man*, a man whose name he had once idolised in an earlier, unhappy period of his life, may be regarded as pure theatre, but it is a historically accurate image nonetheless.

I now need to clarify what I hope to achieve in this introductory first chapter and how it is organised. First, it seems to me important to begin by presenting a brief overview of what I interpret by "ideas of liberty" in the period covered by my study - that is, approximately the years from Witherspoon's emigration in 1768 to the end of the century when the United States, in Jefferson's phrase, was perceived (not just by Americans) as the "Empire of Liberty". I shall, therefore, consider varieties of liberty as interpreted by those among

whom I consider its most important exponents and I shall try to set out the interrelationships among them, as for example between the economic, religious, political and civil aspects of the liberty theme. I have consciously weighted the religious factor more than others, partly because I regard Witherspoon, the churchman, as easily the most distinguished, and in historical terms the most important of my three Americans, but also on account of my preparatory reading having altered my preconceptions to the extent that I now regard the many aspects of religious belief (or for that matter, *unbelief*) as central to the idea of liberty in the later eighteenth century.

By way of apology, it is important for me to stress that my study deliberately fights shy of the massive issue of liberty *qua* manumission or emancipation; that is, of course, the huge problem of slavery. From the outset, I rapidly came to the twofold conclusion that, (a) the slavery theme is an area that has already been covered in the course of scholarly research, if not exhaustively then certainly from many different angles, and that, consequently, (b) my ability to add to the store of human knowledge in that regard was, and is, severely constrained. Having said that, I fully acknowledge the continuing centrality of the slavery theme within the overall liberty concept but since complete emancipation was not to be finally resolved (at least, in the west) until well into the nineteenth century, I feel justified (as did A. J. Ayer in his study of Paine, whose own contribution to the slavery debate is unreliably vague) in laying the slavery question aside for others, with greater insights than mine, to continue to unravel.

3 Ideas of civil and political liberty

(a) The state of nature and the problem of natural rights

It has already been noted that whereas some American scholars of the late twentieth century, after the example of Caroline Robbins,¹⁴ have downplayed the contribution of John Locke's contractualist theory of rights to the aggregation of factors determining the ideological provenance of the revolution, more recently others, while not exactly reversing that trend, have moved the argument farther on, along the direction of partially re-endorsing Locke's importance in that context, albeit in a slightly different form.¹⁵ In his *Second Treatise on Government* (i.e. *An Essay concerning The True Original, Extent,*

¹⁴ Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthmen*, New York, 1968.

¹⁵ See section (d) of this chapter below.

and End of Civil-Government) (1689) Locke's aim was to show that the existence of a state could be consistent with its citizens' natural rights. Allied to that, he wished to show that armed resistance – in effect, an uprising of the people – was justifiable when elements of the contractual relationship between the rulers and the citizenry became impaired. Locke never made a systematic exposition of the ideas of a natural law and consequential natural rights in the *Second Treatise*. However, as Lloyd Thomas points out, Locke appears never to have been in doubt that

... in the last resort political power lies in the hands of the people. This ... is a doctrine having radical implications in Locke's own day. For 'the people' will be all those with natural rights, and they will consist mostly of 'the lower orders', for example, tradesmen, shopkeepers, craftsmen, servants and agricultural labourers. Locke is saying, in effect, that it is a majority of *these* that constitute the ultimate repository of political power.¹⁶

Furthermore, if some sections of society were (as the Whigs were in Locke's day) evasive about who 'the people' were, Locke is in no doubt on that score : ultimate power lay with the people and they, therefore, and they alone should act as "primary agents" in a revolution.

Locke is saying that it is a majority of these groups that constitutes "the ultimate repository of political power". Thomas shrewdly adds:

Now in a society where most of even the leading radicals took it entirely for granted that political affairs were the domain of 'the better sort of people' (i.e. those of property, education and leisure), this was a very advanced view.¹⁷

Effectively, Locke is arguing that ultimately political power rests with the people [a deliberately vague kind of notion in Whig liberalism specifically designed to "avoid opening up divisions within a party whose supporters included aristocrats and gentry who were not keen on extending the franchise, as well as the unfranchised poor"], and it is proper that "they should participate, as primary agents, in a revolution". Thomas goes on:

Thus, the 'lower orders', amongst whom the Whigs had considerable power, were guaranteed a place in the most fundamental political processes. Legitimate government depended upon *their* consent (as well as that of others). ... So long as it could be claimed that the people had chosen to entrust political power to the very restrictedly democratic system of government that then prevailed, the 'lower orders' could support the revolution without it necessarily being an injustice

¹⁶ D. A. Lloyd Thomas, *Locke on Government*, Abingdon, 1995, p. 29.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 30

to them that they should have no formal power or influence in the post-revolutionary government.¹⁸

Locke's theory of natural rights was bent to his own purpose by Paine in his *Common Sense* of January 1776. This is the remarkable pamphlet which, in Gordon S. Wood's words, ensured that, in the case of its author

... from such a high point his reputation in America could only decline.¹⁹

And Franklin's daughter, Sarah Franklin Bache, later said of him that

the most rational thing he could have done would have been to have died the instant he had finished his *Common Sense*, for he never again will have it in his power to leave the World with so much credit.²⁰

She, of course, was wrong. *Common Sense* was not, in the end, to be Paine's masterpiece, only his most effective rhetorical call to arms and the most forceful statement yet seen in favour of outright independence for the American colonies. Take the issue of natural (Lockean) issue of rights. At only one point in the whole pamphlet does he raise the matter. After making the point that

... the most powerful of all arguments, is, that nothing but independence, i.e. a continental form of government, can keep the peace of the continent and preserve it inviolate from civil wars ...²¹

he, a little unconvincingly it has to be said, refers to the European republics of Holland and Switzerland as exemplars of states that "are all (and we may say always) in peace", being "without wars, foreign or domestic". And he concludes :

A government of our own is our natural right ...²²

- without at any time arguing from the perspective of a reasoned interpretation of what, in that context, a "natural right" actually means. It is precisely that kind of unreasoned vagueness that led such as Bentham to dismiss as bogus the whole theory of natural rights

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 31.

¹⁹ Gordon S. Wood, *Revolutionary Characters - What Made the Founders Different*, New York, 2006, p. 209. Wood does not mean here that Paine never again wrote anything so powerful or influential since in the same chapter of the book - Chapter 7: "Thomas Paine, America's First Public Intellectual" - he acknowledges that *Rights of Man* "became one of the most important works of political thought in the history of the Western world" and "the best and most succinct expression of American revolutionary political thinking ever written." (pp. 212-3).

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 209.

²¹ *The Thomas Paine Reader*, ed. Foot and Kramnick, London, 1987 - *Common Sense*, p. 89.

²² *ibid.*, p. 92.

as “nonsense upon stilts”.²³ Before that, the “always reliable” Hume had similarly expressed his scepticism in relation to dependence on the theory of rights. Ayer, who habitually counted on Hume, “if one is looking for good sense”, says of him in this context that [Hume] was not

... indeed, the first to perceive that the presumption of a state of nature, conceived after the fashion of Hobbes or of Locke, was more of a handicap than an asset in explaining the development of social institutions.

In the case of Locke’s great intellectual adversary, Hobbes, the distinction between ‘society’ and ‘government’ – a distinction that was maintained in both Locke and Paine – had simply, in Ayer’s word, been “obliterated”. For Hume, according to Ayer, the position in that regard was customarily ‘different’:

[Hume] did not see much harm in the fiction of a state of nature, so long as it was seen to be a fiction, but he did have strong intellectual objections to the notion of there being rights or duties, which do not arise out of the formation of society.²⁴

Parenthetically, in the year Britain went to war with France, in his massive *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793) – much of which he later repudiated – the dissenter and putative anarchist, William Godwin, repeating the arguments of Hume²⁵, dismissed the Lockean natural rights tradition out of hand:

One of the ill consequences which have resulted from this distorted view of the science of politics is a notion very generally entertained, that a community, or society of men, has a right to lay down whatever rules it may think proper for its own observance. ... It may be prudent in an individual to submit in some cases to the usurpation of a majority; it may be unavoidable in a community to proceed upon the imperfect and erroneous views they shall chance to entertain: but this is a misfortune entailed upon us by the nature of government, and not a matter of right.²⁶

In *Common Sense*, it is significant that Paine cites only one authority in support of his argument that the best government is the government that can deliver “the greatest sum of individual happiness, with the least national expense.” His cited source is a spectacularly

²³ For an explanation of the complex origin of Bentham’s famous phrase see Philip Schofield, *Utility & Democracy - The Political Thought of Jeremy Bentham*, Oxford, 2006, p. 63, note 33.

²⁴ A. J. Ayer, *Thomas Paine*, Chicago, 1988, pp. 22-3.

²⁵ As in, most notably, the essay “Of the Original Contract”: see Copley and Edgar, *David Hume Selected Essays*, Oxford and New York, 1993, pp. 274-292.

²⁶ William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, ed. and with an Introduction by Isaac Kramnick, London, 1976, pp. 166-7. In taking this line, Godwin appears also to be at odds with such as Rousseau who develops his own view of ‘the state of nature’ most elaborately in his *Discourse on Inequality on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men* (1755). For an extremely lucid account of Rousseau’s theory on the state of nature, see Patrick Coleman’s introduction to the Oxford World’s Classics 1994 edition of the *Discourse*, pp. vii-xxx.

obscure Italian jurist, “that wise observer on governments”, Giacinto Dragonetti (1738-1818), and the book is his *A Treatise on Virtue and Rewards (Trattato delle virtúe de premi)* (1766 - original; 1769 - English version)²⁷. We shall, of course, return to the theme of natural rights in considering the impact of Paine’s greatest work, *Rights of Man*. In the meantime, the Dragonetti citation by Paine quite neatly leads us to consider another central theme of huge importance to the epistemology of liberty – the pursuit of happiness.

(b) The pursuit of happiness

When Paine quotes from Dragonetti in *Common Sense* it is important to note why, of all the great commentators on the theme of “happiness and freedom”, he favours a minor and, to us today, wholly obscure Italian jurist. The facile answer is that Dragonetti’s pamphlet, written to rebut the argument in Cesare Beccaria’s much more celebrated *Of Crimes and Punishments*, had proved something of a minor sensation in Europe at the time, and was even translated into Russian in the same year its English version came out in London. It was Dragonetti’s message that attracted Paine who found it suited his purpose admirably. The Dragonetti extract quoted in *Common Sense* is as follows:

“The science of the politician consists in fixing the true point of happiness and freedom. Those men would deserve the gratitude of ages, who should discover a mode of government that contained the greatest sum of happiness, with the least national expense.”²⁸

In other words, always the pragmatist, Paine is attracted by the utilitarian argument that society – at the beginning of *Common Sense* he distinguishes society as “a blessing” from government, which he famously terms “a necessary evil” – demanded from its government the goal of securing maximum “happiness” for the people. This was, in effect, the real importance of *Common Sense*. To quote Lee Ward:

According to Paine’s version of modern republican regime analysis, the British Constitution was barely a rational or legitimate system of government at all precisely because British institutions

²⁷ Paine would have used the 1769 edition, in English translation - *A treatise on virtue and rewards. London: printed for Johnson and Payne, in Pater-Noster-Row, and J. Almon, in Piccadilly. M.DCC.LXIX.* [The author is named in the translator’s preface as “Jacinto Dragonetti”.]

²⁸ *The Thomas Paine Reader*, p. 92.

were not anchored in a written charter signifying popular consent. ... In Paine's America, the people would be king.²⁹

The 'pursuit of happiness' is a familiar enough concept in the eighteenth century. The economic implications of the conditional statement - "with the least national expense" - would have added to the appeal of Dragonetti's pamphlet to Paine who was always concerned that good government meant government that was efficient and effective, his tedious and (according to Ayer) weak elaboration of the issue of debt and comparative military power as between Britain and America notwithstanding.³⁰

In the light of Paine's strange reluctance to cite sources, we cannot be sure that he was familiar with the works of Jeremy Bentham. It would, however, be odd if the later Paine (i.e. of *Rights of Man*) had not read Bentham since his (Bentham's) celebrated theory of utility has, self-avowedly, its origins in the works of Hume, Claude Adrien Helvétius, and Joseph Priestley, while Locke, David Hartley, Beccaria and Montesquieu also featured prominently among Bentham's acknowledged sources. Beccaria was, as we have seen, a profound influence on Dragonetti, an altogether lesser figure. In his *A Fragment of Government* - 1776, the same year as *Common Sense* - Bentham remarks on the special importance of the doctrine of utility in Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40) -

That the foundations of all *virtue* are laid in *utility* is there demonstrated, after a few exceptions made, with the strongest force of evidence: but I see not, any more than Helvetius saw, what need there was for the exceptions.

For my own part, I well remember, no sooner had I read that part of the work which touches on this subject, than I felt as if scales had fallen from my eyes. I then, for the first time, learnt to call the cause of the people the cause of Virtue.³¹

²⁹ Lee Ward, *The Politics of Liberty in England and Revolutionary America*, Cambridge, 2004, p. 395.

³⁰ Ayer comments: "He is at his least convincing and also least interesting when he adduces figures to show that the comparative fiscal military and naval capabilities of England [sic] and America are such that the current moment is the most propitious for an American victory. He even falls into the inconsistency of claiming on one page that it is to America's advantage that she has no debts and on the next page recommending that she contract a national debt, adding that no nation should be without one." - *Thomas Paine*, p. 43.

³¹ *A Comment on the Commentaries and A Fragment on Government*, ed. J. H. Burns and H. L. A. Hart, London, 1977, p. 440 n. - cited in Philip Schofield, *Utility and Democracy - The Political Thought of Jeremy Bentham*, Oxford & New York, 2006, p. 3 and note 18.

Writing much later in his life, Bentham regretted Hume's lack of clarity about the notion of utility ("usefulness"), noting that it was only on occasion that he identified it with the meaning "conduciveness to happiness". But it is Bentham's reference in *A Fragment on Government* to the influence of Helvétius on his subsequent development of the idea of utility as "happiness" that is, I suggest, most interesting for this study. Helvétius's *De l'Esprit* (1758), rendered in English as *Essays on the Mind, and its Several Faculties*, was first published in an English version in London in 1759 and it (usually, but not always, in abridged form in pamphlets containing well-chosen extracts) became a standard title in radical booksellers' catalogues throughout the reform movement of the 1790s.³² How could Helvétius fail to appeal to radicals and friends of reform when his words appeared heaven-sent, such as these?

A. ... the general interest which knows but one invariable law. *Salus populi suprema lex*. The will of the people is the supreme law.³³

Q. Ought all laws to give way to this?

A. Yes. If an army of Turks were marching to Vienna, the legislature, to furnish them, might for a moment violate the rights of property, destroy the harvest of the people, and burn their granaries; if they be likely to fall into the hands of the enemy.

Q. Are the laws so sacred that they can never be altered?

A. They ought to be altered when they are contrary to the happiness of the majority.³⁴

Writing in the early 1770s, Bentham had noted that Helvétius had "established a standard of rectitude for actions", that is that an action was right "when the tendency of it is to augment the mass of happiness in the community". Bentham also observed that it had been Helvétius who

first had discernment and courage to set up the principle of utility as the sole and universal standard of right and wrong.³⁵

In other words, Helvétius was seen by Bentham as *the* prime authority in issues affecting both morality *and* legislation, and as his biographer Philip Schofield notes, "had then

³² e.g. in the political catalogue of the Edinburgh radical bookseller/publisher Alexander Leslie (1796-7), both "Helvetius on the Mind" and "Helvetius' Catechism" are included.

³³ This Latin tag is from Helvétius's *Catechism* and is frequently quoted in radical literature of the period, e.g. on the title page of Johnston's *Letter to the Clergy*.

³⁴ *A Catechism, translated from Helvetius. ... Edinburgh: Printed for A. Leslie, Nicolson-Street. 1796.* - p. 9.

³⁵ Cited in Schofield, *Utility and Democracy*, p. 4, note 24.

been followed by Beccaria³⁶ in relation to legislation”, and by Joseph Priestley,³⁷ “the first writer in English to do so, though neither had acknowledged him” [i.e. Helvétius]. However, it was only after reading Priestley’s *Essay on the First Principles of Government* that Bentham claimed that it was in that work that he had discovered the phrase “the greatest happiness of the greatest number”.³⁸

(c) The issue of property

In his famous ‘second discourse’, the *Discourse on Inequality*, Rousseau quotes “the wise Locke”: “Where there is no property, there is no injury”³⁹ and he traces the beginning of the end of the ‘state of nature’ – a key concept almost throughout the whole of the eighteenth century – to the moment when the idea of property was born:

The true founder of civil society was the first man who, having enclosed a piece of land, thought of saying ‘This is mine’, and came across people simple enough to believe him.⁴⁰

It was the same Locke who wrote:

The great and chief end of men uniting into commonwealths and putting themselves under government is the preservation of their property.⁴¹

The right to life, liberty and property were the three fundamentals highlighted by Locke warranting protection by virtue of the contract between the people and government and can be traced directly to the demands of the Independents in the English Civil War. For Locke, liberty meant the right of an individual to make his own choices and live accordingly, subject only to certain conditions imposed by the law of nature. Similarly ‘property’ was derived by Locke from an assumed (and entirely hypothetical, therefore according to Bentham, pointless) original state wherein land and materials were in a form

³⁶ Bentham had in mind Beccaria’s *Dei delitti e delle pene* (1764, first English version published in 1767). See Schofield, *Utility and Democracy*, p. 4, note 25.

³⁷ *An Essay on the First Principles of Government; and on the nature of Political, Civil and Religious Liberty*, London, 1768. Schofield observes: “Priestley, however, unlike Helvétius, had not, in Bentham’s view, made the connection between happiness on the one hand, and pleasure and pain on the other.”, *Utility and Democracy*, p. 4, note 28.

³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 4.

³⁹ *Discourse on Inequality*, Part II, p. 61, ed. Patrick Coleman, Oxford, 1994. The quotation Rousseau cites is from Locke’s *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, IV, 3, 18 although Locke actually said “injustice”, not “injury”.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, Part II, p. 55.

⁴¹ *Two Treatises of Government*, book II, ix, 124. (student edition, ed. Peter Laslett, Cambridge, 1988).

of common ownership, though part could be taken into private hands, provided, again, certain conditions were fulfilled.

Though there is no reference to property rights as such in the Declaration of American Independence (1776),⁴² Amendment V of the United States Bill of Rights (1791) states that

no person shall be ... deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation.

Similarly, Article 2 of the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (1789) specifically defines the “imprescriptible rights of man” tersely and unambiguously as follows:

These rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression.

The issue of property is taken into account at some length by Hume in his consideration of what he termed the “cautious jealous virtue of justice”. First, in his essay “Of the First Principles of Government” in *Essays, Moral and Political* (1741)⁴³ Hume makes his famous stark assertion:

Right is of two kinds, right to Power and right to Property.⁴⁴

Secondly, in section 3, “Of Justice”, from *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751) in his great conjoint work, with *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (1748), (known to bibliographers as the *Enquiries* [sic] *concerning Human Understanding*), he concedes that - the “ultimate point” being “the interest and happiness of human society” -

... Where this enters not into consideration, nothing can appear more whimsical, unnatural, and even superstitious, than all or most of the laws of justice and property.

Prefacing these remarks, and earlier in the same essay he insists that

⁴² Convincingly, Gordon S. Wood takes the view that “the entire [American] Revolution could be summed up by the radical transformation Americans made in their understanding of property”. His argument is set out in pp. 269-270 of *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*.

⁴³ Published posthumously. For this study I use either the edition of *David Hume Selected Essays*, ed. Stephen Copley and Andrew Edgar, Oxford, 1993 or, *The Scottish Enlightenment An Anthology*, ed. Alexander Broadie, Edinburgh, 1997.

⁴⁴ Copley and Edgar, *ibid.*, p. 25.

... all questions of property are subordinate to the authority of civil laws, which extend, restrain, modify, and alter the rules of natural justice, according to the particular *convenience* of each community.⁴⁵

In making these assertions, Hume, in a long footnote, generously acknowledges his debt to Montesquieu, author of *L'Esprit des Lois - The Spirit of the Laws* (1748) - another book that seems to cross over with ease from France to America, back to France, and thence, in the years immediately after the Revolution, into the radical bookshops in London and Edinburgh. Again, as we noted in the case of Helvétius, the centrality and directness of the message could be selectively interpreted and were always capable of being appreciated by the people at every level.⁴⁶

The popular philosopher A. C. Grayling has summed it up well:

His [Montesquieu's] seminal work on government was admired everywhere in Europe outside his native country, but most of all in America, where it had a great influence on the thinking of James Madison, one of the principal drafters of the United States constitution. ... His chief concern was political liberty. ... A free country is, said Montesquieu, one in which each person is his own governor, and therefore the ultimate legislative power rests in the whole people.⁴⁷

Adam Smith developed his own four-stage theory of property rights in his *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, much of which was erected on Hume's reasoning. Smith's achievement was to develop Hume's insights into a general theory of jurisprudence which he probably began to work out in Edinburgh as early as 1750-51. Smith is interested in the question of the origin and subsequent progress of property rights from the first stage (hunters) to the

⁴⁵ Broadie, *ibid.*, pp. 591-2. In his long Montesquieu footnote Hume seems at times to contradict himself by (in the main body of the text) first paying tribute to the *philosophe* - "A late author of genius, as well as learning ..." - then, qualifying that assessment in the note, he says that Montesquieu displays "a different theory" in which "all right" is "founded on certain *rappports* or relations, "which is a system, that, in my opinion, never will be reconciled with true philosophy." Hume goes on to cite the foundation of Montesquieu's theory of property which he summarises as follows: "Property is allowed to be dependent on civil laws; civil laws are allowed to have no other object, but the interest of society: This therefore must be allowed to be the sole foundation of property and justice. Not to mention, that our obligation itself to obey the magistrate and his laws is founded on nothing but the interests of society." He closes the note on an assertive note: "Where a civil law is so perverse as to cross all the interests of society, it loses all its authority ...".

⁴⁶ "Montesquieu's *Spirit of Laws* [sic], 2 vols. 8vo", priced 7s., is listed in the 1797 catalogue of the Edinburgh "Patriotic Bookseller", Alexander Leslie, sandwiched between "Hume's Essays, 2 vols. calf" (14s.) and "Beccaria on Crimes and Punishments, with Voltaire's Commentary" (3s.). It is of interest that Paine in *Rights of Man, part I*, says of Montesquieu that he "went as far as a writer under a despotic government could well proceed; and being obliged to divide himself between principles and prudence, his mind often appears under a veil, and we ought to give him credit for more than he has expressed." Kramnick and Foot, *The Thomas Paine Reader*, p. 238.

⁴⁷ A. C. Grayling, *Towards the Light - The Story of the Struggles for Liberty & Rights That Made the Modern West*, London, 2007, p. 140.

last (the commercial, which is by far the most complex and requires many more laws to regulate). In the view of his latest biographer, Nicholas Phillipson,

[Smith's] theory was derived from a conjectural history of property that explained the evolutionary process by which a society progresses from its savage to its pastoral, feudal and commercial stages of development. ... For Smith the sense of justice was not only shaped by the effects of property, but of government and police on a people's understanding; with his theory of property in place, he was in a position to develop complementary conjectural histories of government and police. These were built on another of David Hume's crucial insights: that it was only once members of a society had acquired a sense of the necessity of property that they would understand the need to submit to some form of regular government. After all, as Smith put it, property was 'the grand fund of all dispute', creating a need for 'settled laws - or agreements concerning property' and the means of enforcing them.⁴⁸

Broadie considers that Smith's theory of the *Origin and Development of our Property Rights* reveals him as a true apostle of the Scottish Enlightenment because it clearly demonstrates his view that progress tends to improvement and the cultivation of civilised values.⁴⁹

Finally, in relation to the Scottish Enlightenment, it is important to note the view of Oz-Salzberger that

The direct impact of Montesquieu's *De L'Esprit des Lois* (1748) on his contemporaries Hume, Smith, Millar and Ferguson makes him *the single most important source of Scottish political innovation*. [RLC's italics]⁵⁰

(d) Republicanism and the idea of republican liberty

In an important book, before proceeding to develop his own 'take' on the issue, Michael Zuckert conveniently summarises the perception of successive American historians and political philosophers (Caroline Robbins, followed by the 'trio' of Bailyn, Wood and Pocock) who, in the decade from 1965, in substitution for the former Lockean natural rights/state of nature theory as the dominant influence on the founding fathers of the United States, individually contrived what is termed "the republican synthesis" as a preferred alternative. According to this approach, as summarised by Ward, Anglo-American thought

⁴⁸ Nicholas Phillipson, *Adam Smith An Enlightened Life*, London, 2010, pp. 108-110.

⁴⁹ *The Scottish Enlightenment An Anthology*, pp. 475-7.

⁵⁰ Fania Oz-Salzberger, "The political theory of the Scottish Enlightenment", in *The Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. Alexander Broadie, Cambridge, 2003, p. 170.

inherited and developed a profoundly anti-Lockean and anti-individualist notion of liberty. This idea of liberty hearkened back to the classical Aristotelian ideal of citizenship as the fulfilment of the human personality through common political discourse and action.⁵¹

As Zuckert explains, “a prevalent new approach emphasizes instead of rights the idea of republicanism”, and he memorably quotes Joyce Appleby who has compared the reaction among historians to the ‘discovery’ of republicanism to the “reaction of chemists to a new element”.⁵² Locke, in other words, is out and, in place of Locke, the writings and theories of such as James Harrington, Grotius (Hugo de Groot) and, in the case of the “extreme” Pocock, a combination of Greek republican thought (especially Aristotle) and Italian renaissance theories (especially Machiavelli) rule. We need not, I suggest, examine in greater detail here Pocock’s elaboration of his “civic humanism” hypothesis. It is sufficient for our purpose to note the overall conclusion, binding all three American theorists together, to the effect that, in Zuckert’s words

... [all three agree that] the formative tradition for the Americans of the founding era was not the Lockean, or natural rights, tradition, but the English Whig Opposition tradition of the eighteenth century, represented by writers like Trenchard and Gordon and James Burgh. Beyond that, however, agreement breaks down, in that all three understand that tradition differently.⁵³

Nevertheless, if all this may sound confusing - and Zuckert is the first to accept that it is *indeed* confusing - essentially what has become important is the clear acceptance of the notion of republicanism as a formative, in many ways *the* dominant factor in the canon of American pre-revolutionary ideological sources. All differed, however, in the detail of their interpretations.

Caroline Robbins, Ward explains,

began the process of dethroning Locke by identifying him as only one of many figures in a diffuse stream of republican thought in Britain from the civil war and interregnum periods to the late eighteenth century radicals like Burgh, Priestley and Price.⁵⁴

For Bailyn, too, Locke was no more than one, admittedly important strand within a group of theorists on the republican ideal of liberty that encapsulated Voltaire, “writings derived from Puritan sources”, writings on the English common law (Edward Coke) and, finally, writings in the Whig Opposition tradition, including the ‘Catonian’ authors,

⁵¹ *The Politics of Liberty in England and Revolutionary America*, p. 3.

⁵² Joyce Appleby, “Republicanism and Ideology”, *American Quarterly*, 37 (1985): 461-73.

⁵³ Michael P. Zuckert, *Natural Rights and the New Republicanism*, Princeton, 1994, Chapter 6, “A Neo-Harrington Moment? Whig Political Science and the Old Republicanism”, p. 163.

⁵⁴ Ward, p. 3.

Trenchard and Gordon. For Wood, on the other hand, it was the idea of “Power against Liberty” and “the appeal of antiquity” that lay behind his more summary dismissal of Locke. Although he was later to shift his perceptions back to Locke to an extent, for the young Wood of the *Creation of the American Republic* (1969) it was the public good that lay at the heart of the republican ideal. The republic demanded of the individual that he be willing “to sacrifice his private interests for the good of the community” -

Only private virtue could produce “public virtue”, which “was primarily the consequence of men’s individual private virtues. Only private virtue could produce public virtue; thus the republic of virtue “demanded an extraordinary moral character in the people”.⁵⁵

Accordingly, for Wood, the “essence of republicanism” lay in the “common interest” which he defined as “an entity in itself, prior to and distinct from the various private interests of groups and individuals”. And he sums up his views on the American republican ideal by concluding that it

meant more for Americans than simply the elimination of a king and the institution of an elective system. It added a moral dimension, a utopian depth, to the political separation from England - a depth that involved the very character of their society.⁵⁶

This is all a much more remote republican world from the republican world-vision of Locke’s great opponent, Hobbes, whose famous chapter 21 of *Leviathan* defined for a generation the notion of republican liberty as a basic contention that, in the words of his distinguished interpreter, Quentin Skinner,

we retain the entirety of our natural liberty [to obey or disobey the laws as we choose] even under the most absolute forms of monarchical sovereignty that can possibly be imagined.⁵⁷

The republican theory of liberty, as perceived by Hobbes, is, therefore, above all “concerned with the freedom not merely of individuals but of whole communities”:

The Libertie, whereof there is so frequent, and honourable mention, in the Histories, and Philosophy of the Antient Greeks, and Romans, and in the writings, and discourse of those that

⁵⁵ Zuckert, *Natural Rights and the New Republicanism*, pp. 150-183. For a slightly different analysis of the trio’s approach and a more detailed account of the influences of Whig politics in England and its legacy in America, see Ward, *The Politics of Liberty in England and Revolutionary America*.

⁵⁶ Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787*, Chapel Hill, N.C., 1969, p.47.

⁵⁷ Quentin Skinner, *Hobbes and Republican Liberty*, Cambridge, 2008, p. 173.

from them have received all their learning in the Politiques, is not the Libertie of Particular men; but the Libertie of the Common-wealth.⁵⁸

Collins reminds us, on the other hand, that Hobbes – according to many commentators “an inveterate foe of republicanism” – “despised classical republicanism” and in *Leviathan* had attributed anti-monarchist sentiment to the same reading of the classics of “the antient Greeks and Romans”. James Harrington, in his riposte to Hobbes, dissented from him on the relative merits of republics and monarchies, as well as on the “legitimacy of dividing sovereignty, and on the merits of the ancient political wisdom”.⁵⁹

Despite the best efforts of Zuckert, Ward and others over the period since c. 1990 to represent, as they prefer to see it, a more balanced view of things – which really means putting Locke back on his former pedestal – it is still beyond dispute that Robbins *et al* achieved their goal in pointing the way towards legitimate alternative visions of liberty in eighteenth century revolutionary America. Certainly, writers such as Harrington are key in this context if only for their rebuttal of Hobbes’ claim in the well known passage of *Leviathan* that the citizens of a republic, such as Lucca, had no more liberty than the subjects of an absolute monarch like the sultan of Constantinople, since both were ultimately subject to the rule of law as an overriding constraint. As pointed out by Viroli, what makes the citizens of Lucca freer than the subjects of Constantinople, according to Harrington, is that in Lucca

both rulers and citizens are subject to civil and constitutional laws, whereas in Constantinople the sultan is above the law and may arbitrarily dispose of the property and lives of his subjects, obliging them to live in a condition of complete dependence and therefore without liberty.⁶⁰

It is not difficult to see how seductive Harrington’s views were for members of the trio of American political theorists trying to unravel the ideological background to their revolution. Ironically, that point of view – the idea that the rule of law protects citizens from the arbitrary will of others – “passed from the books of republican theorists to those written by the founders of liberalism”,⁶¹ of whom the greatest exponent is, of course, none other than John Locke himself:

⁵⁸ Cited by Skinner in *Hobbes and Republican Liberty*, p. 174.

⁵⁹ Jeffrey R. Collins, *The Allegiance of Thomas Hobbes*, Oxford, 2005, p. 186.

⁶⁰ Maurizio Viroli, *Republicanism*, (English translation), New York, 2002, pp. 50-1.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p. 50.

The end of Law is not to abolish or restrain, but *to preserve and enlarge Freedom*: For in all the states of created beings capable of Laws, *where there is no Law; there is no Freedom*. For *Liberty* is to be free from restraint and violence from others which cannot be, where there is no Law. But Freedom is not, as we are told, *A Liberty for every Man to do what he lists*: (For who could be free, when every other Man's Humour might domineer over him?) But a *Liberty* to dispose, and order, as he lists, his Person, Actions, Possessions, and his whole Property, within the Allowance of those Laws under which he is; and therein not to be subject to the arbitrary Will of another, but freely follow his own.⁶²

4 The Scottish Enlightenment and transatlantic ideas of liberty

There is an interesting paradox at the heart of the generic term, 'Scottish Enlightenment'. It is this: How is it that the Scottish Enlightenment's "immense appeal" in the latter half of the eighteenth century has been attributed to - to borrow Jonathan Israel's words - "its emphatic restricting of philosophical reason by means of faith and theology", yet its high watermark, on both sides of the Atlantic, coincided almost precisely with "the new natural morality anchored in reason alone"? That is a difficult issue we shall consider briefly in this introductory chapter. It is also, as we shall see, a question that is integral to the related matter of the conjunction of ideas of liberty and aspects of religious faith which I shall discuss at some length later in this chapter.

(a) Francis Hutcheson (1694 -1746)

No other writer of the Scottish Enlightenment, with the single exception of Adam Smith, rivals Hutcheson in terms of the transforming influence of his thought, spanning both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. Hutcheson is not perhaps the most enduring - Smith wins that contest hands down - but he is unchallengeably one of the greatest figures of the Scottish Enlightenment whose writings on political theory and government exerted, for a variety of reasons, a profound impact on certain of the leaders of the American revolution, including Benjamin Franklin, (probably) Thomas Jefferson and, perhaps especially, James Madison. His greatest work, *A System of Moral Philosophy, in three books* was first printed, posthumously, by the Foulis brothers ("printers to the

⁶² *ibid.*, cited by Viroli, p. 51 from Locke's *An Essay Concerning the True Original, Extent, and End of Civil Government*, 57.29, in *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett, Cambridge, 1998.

University”) in Glasgow in 1755 for Andrew Millar and Thomas Longman in London.⁶³ Among the subscribers are Adam Smith and Richard Molesworth, third Viscount and son of the first Viscount, Robert Molesworth, the Irish pamphleteer and English ‘country Whig’ M.P. who had originally introduced Hutcheson to the stream of seventeenth century political thought that included such writers as Milton, Sidney, Harrington, and, above all, Locke.⁶⁴ In his letter to the Principal of Glasgow University, Archibald Davidson, acknowledging his election by the students as Rector, Smith paid his mentor Hutcheson the compliment of referring to him as “the never to be forgotten Francis Hutcheson” whose “abilities and virtues” were never in doubt.

In his *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) Smith gives a comprehensive account of “those systems [of moral and ethical philosophy] which make virtue consist in benevolence”, and singles out for praise “this amiable system” [of Hutcheson] ... which

has a peculiar tendency to nourish and support in the human heart the noblest and the most agreeable of all affections, and not only to check the injustice of self-love, but in some measure to discourage that principle altogether, by representing it as what could never reflect any honour upon those who were influenced by it.”⁶⁵

Of all the patrons of this system – defining, that is, “Virtue” as “Benevolence” –

the late Dr. Hutcheson was undoubtedly, beyond all comparison, the most acute, the most distinct, the most philosophical, and what is of the greatest consequence of all, the soberest and most judicious.⁶⁶

As we have already noted, Gordon S. Wood – ironically, as a young man, one of the ‘trio’ of American historians who put forward the claims of classical republicanism as the

⁶³ Philip Gaskell, *A Bibliography of the Foulis Press*, London, 1964, 297, p. 199. Among the subscribers are no less than three Moderate Paisley ministers, Robert Finlay, James Hamilton and John Rae, all of whom would doubtless have heard Hutcheson lecture at Glasgow University. Among the famous names listed as subscribers are Adam Smith, Professor John Anderson, Viscount Molesworth, William Leechman and William Thom. Unsurprisingly, however, John Witherspoon’s name is not there.

⁶⁴ See Andrew Skinner, “Mercantilist Policy: The American Colonies” in *A System of Social Science: Papers Relating to Adam Smith*, Oxford, 1979, pp. 184-208, and the same author’s chapter 8, “Adam Smith and America: The Political Economy of Conflict” in *Scotland and America in the Age of Enlightenment*, ed. Richard B. Sher and Jeffrey R. Smitten, Edinburgh and Princeton, 1990, pp. 148-162. Professor Skinner, a personal friend, generously let me see a slightly different, unpublished version of the latter which he entitles “Francis Hutcheson and Adam Smith: Visions of America” which I have found particularly helpful in this context.

⁶⁵ *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie, Oxford, 1976, vol. I, chapter iii.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

dominant force in the ideological origins of the revolution in preference to Lockean contractualism - has, in successive later books, much toned down his views in favour of a reassessment of Locke, and through Locke, of his great disciple, Hutcheson. In his *Revolutionary Characters*, for example, Wood attacks Pocock for having “got carried away” with his theory of “civic humanism” and he also cites Garry Wills who, in *Inventing America*, possibly went *too* far in the *opposite* direction and exaggerated somewhat the impact of Hutcheson on the drafting of the Declaration. For Wills had argued that the Declaration of Independence

owed less to the possessive individualism of John Locke than to the communitarian sentiments of the Scottish moralist Francis Hutcheson”.⁶⁷

It cannot be overlooked, however, that scholars still fall out over the extent of Hutcheson’s intellectual influence on Jefferson and, consequently, on the idea that there are perceptible traces of Hutchesonian thought in the drafting of the Independence document. Fleischacker, for one, finds Wills’ case for the importance of Hutcheson to Jefferson “more convincing than the views of his critics.”⁶⁸

Chapter 4 of this study considers in some detail the apparent paradox of John Witherspoon’s earlier rejection of Hutchesonian thought throughout the course of his Scottish ministries, in comparison with his later enthusiastic recommendation of the *System* to his Princeton undergraduates. I point out that at times he stands on the brink of “plagiarising” whole swathes of Hutchesonian moral and, especially, political thought in his *Lectures on Moral Philosophy* which he first gave from around 1770-1 onwards. As Thomas Miller, the editor of his *Selected Writings*, has put it:

While he rejects the aestheticism of Hutcheson’s moral sense, Witherspoon adopts Hutcheson’s political philosophy almost without reservation.⁶⁹

And Daniel W. Howe is able to describe Witherspoon as “a quintessentially Atlantic figure”, giving his own slant on the enigma that is Witherspoon where he makes a useful distinction between Hutcheson’s moral thought and his Moderate theology :

⁶⁷ Garry Wills, *Inventing America : Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence*, New York, 1978.

⁶⁸ Samuel Fleischacker, “The Impact of America: Scottish philosophy and the American founding”, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. Alexander Broadie, Cambridge, 2003, pp. 316-337. The quotation is to be found on p. 320.

⁶⁹ *The Selected Writings of John Witherspoon*, ed. Thomas Miller, Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1990, p. 36.

John Witherspoon knew Francis Hutcheson's philosophy thoroughly. Since Hutcheson was the leader of the Moderate clergy, Witherspoon despised his theology. As a philosopher, however, Witherspoon accorded him a measure of respect.⁷⁰

If Howe's view on Witherspoon's debt to Hutcheson is thought too half-hearted, we may prefer that of Jeffrey H. Morrison who believes that

.. by siding with Hutcheson against [Jonathan] Edwards in favour of the moral sense, Witherspoon supported a moral epistemology that ended up dominating American thinking.⁷¹

(b) David Fordyce (1711-1751)

A relatively minor figure, Fordyce earns his place in this study for two reasons. First, as a student of Marischal College, Aberdeen from 1724 he had spent some time in Glasgow where he heard Francis Hutcheson lecture. His *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* (1754) is considered by its modern editor⁷² as not only an undeservedly neglected work but, because it was available in no less than three different forms in the third quarter of the eighteenth century, it became in its day extremely well-known.⁷³ Indeed, it is claimed that

Few essays of eighteenth-century moral philosophy can be said to have circulated so widely.

Secondly, it is not in doubt that

Soon after its separate publication, Fordyce's ... *Elements* ... was introduced into the curriculum of the American universities where it became a standard text at Harvard University and one of the most widely used texts in American universities in the second half of the eighteenth century.⁷⁴

Its content and tone owe much to his mentor, Hutcheson. It is even possible, in the light of its esteem and general popularity - and taking account of the normal student

⁷⁰ *John Witherspoon and the Atlantic Enlightenment*, p. 69.

⁷¹ *John Witherspoon and the Founding of the American Republic*, p. 64.

⁷² Thomas Kennedy, ed., *The Elements of Moral Philosophy by David Fordyce*, Liberty Fund, Indianapolis, 2003.

⁷³ That is: (i) Robert Dodsley had contracted for Fordyce to write the essay which he published as section 9 of his textbook, *The Preceptor* (1748); (ii) as a treatise, Fordyce's work was published posthumously by Robert and John Dodsley in 1754; and (iii) [in Kennedy's words], William Smellie, editor and compiler of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Edinburgh, 1771) "used a generous selection of Fordyce's *Preceptor* work on moral philosophy as the article *Moral philosophy, or Morals* for the encyclopaedia" so that "Fordyce's essay remained a major entry in the encyclopaedia well into the nineteenth century".

⁷⁴ Kennedy, *ibid.*, p. x.

convention of sometimes preferring cribs to the real thing – that Hutcheson was introduced to generations of American undergraduates *through* Fordyce.

It is worth pointing out that Fordyce's other major work, his *Dialogues Concerning Education* (volume 1, 1745; volume 2, 1748), was also particularly appreciated in America. In a related study, I have shown how Franklin wrongly believed Hutcheson to have been the author of the *Dialogues*, setting his (i.e. Fordyce's) educational advice alongside that, and in the company of, Locke and George Turnbull. Franklin, who commended "Hutcheson"/Fordyce to the youth of Pennsylvania, believed that his emphasis on "useful knowledge" was just the thing for bright young Americans whose training might advance the cause of the country when they "enter the world".⁷⁵

(c) David Hume (1711-1776)

In his own day, Hume was regarded as in every way as distinguished an historian as an influential and 'reliable' philosopher of the highest standing, even though his appeal in the latter regard was by no means universal.⁷⁶ He was certainly read with care and attention in America, this despite the 1771 "Proposals" for an "elegant" eight volume reprint of Hume's *History of England* – advertised, on a subscription only basis, as in the pipeline by Robert Bell (1730?-1784), the Glasgow-born Philadelphia printer – coming to naught, most probably on account of an insufficient number of subscribers.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ See Ronald Crawford, *Enlightenment Themes in Education – Benjamin Franklin and John Anderson*, privately published, Glasgow, 2008.

⁷⁶ "Leaving aside his *Enquiries*, which were widely read then as now, Hume is known today chiefly through his *Treatise of Human Nature* and his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. The *Treatise* was scarcely read at all during Hume's lifetime, however, and the *Dialogues* was not published until after his death. Conversely, most readers today pay little attention to Hume's various books of essays and to his *History of England*, but these are the works that were read avidly by his contemporaries. If one is to get a balanced view of Hume's thought, it is necessary to study both groups of writings. If we should neglect the essays or the *History*, then our view of Hume's aims and achievements is likely to be as incomplete as that of his contemporaries who failed to read the *Treatise* or the *Dialogues*."- Eugene F. Miller, Foreword to *David Hume, Essays, Moral, Political, Literary* (1777), Liberty Fund edition, Indianapolis, 1987, p. xii.

⁷⁷ Sher, *The Enlightenment and the Book*, p. 521 where a facsimile of Bell's advertisement is reproduced. A reprint of Adam Ferguson's "celebrated" *Essay on the History of Civil Society* is also listed in the same advert as "re-printing by subscription" but, like Hume's *History of England*, apparently suffered the same fate. It is interesting that Bell's advert invites attention to an attractive price for the American, compared with the more expensive English editions of both books; the Hume selling for "One Dollar each Volume, which is only Eight Dollars for the whole Set, although the Quarto edition is SOLD at Thirty Dollars", and the Ferguson for "One Dollar,

As one of his better and more recent biographers has put it, Hume's *History* was "easy to read" and consequently "available to more people than his philosophy".⁷⁸ Moreover, across the Atlantic American ears would have pricked up at his assertion that the "Great Charter" (the Magna Carta) had benefited not only the nobles and clergy but produced gains for the people as well. That was generally consistent with his philosophy of government and society. Thus, in the last of his essays, *Of the Origin of Government* (1777, published posthumously) from *Essays Moral, Political and Literary* (a title first used by Hume for a collection published in 1758), Hume indicates that while justice is necessary for the maintenance of peace and order, a balance must be struck between authority and liberty. Nevertheless, Hume makes it clear that, for him, there is no doubt that (in Broadie's words) "it is authority that has primacy". Furthermore, a crucial factor concerning the relation between liberty and the maintenance of civil society is the rule of law. Hume constantly emphasises the importance of the universality of the law. Broadie again:

What is at stake is the degree of our freedom [Hume conceives here of 'freedom' and 'liberty' as synonyms]; random acts by the government are an obstacle to the development of a free society. It is not sufficient that the legislators obey the law; the citizens must be able to find out whether or not the legislators are being obedient. Only in such conditions is there the constitutional basis for the kind of civic stability that Hume especially prized.⁷⁹

Thus, in Hume's own words:

The government, which, in common appellation, receives the appellation of free, is that which admits of a partition of power among several members, whose united authority is no less, or is commonly greater than that of any monarch; but who, in the usual course of administration, must act by general and equal laws, that are previously known to all the members and to all their subjects. In this sense, it must be owned, that liberty is the perfection of civil society; but still authority must be acknowledged essential to its very existence: and in those contests, which so often take place between the one and the other, the latter may, on that account, challenge the preference. Unless perhaps one may say (and it may be said with some reason) that a circumstance, which is essential to the existence of civil society, must always support itself, and needs be guarded with less jealousy, than one that contributes only to its perfection, which the indolence of men is so apt to neglect, or their ignorance to overlook.⁸⁰

although the British Edition is SOLD at Four Dollars." The advert goes on to justify the reprinting of such works in America which, Bell assures his customers, is conducted "without the smallest infraction of the British embargo upon literature."

⁷⁸ Roderick Graham, *The Great Infidel A Life of David Hume*, Edinburgh, 2005, p. 253.

⁷⁹ *The Scottish Enlightenment An Anthology*, ed. Broadie, pp. 513-4.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 517-18.

In the much earlier essay, *Of the First Principles of Government* (1741), Hume had considered the “surprising” fact of “the easiness with which the many are governed by the few” and asks why has that come about. The usual reply to that question, he says, is twofold, viz. (i) “interest”, by which he means the general advantage in having that type of government in place, and (ii) “right”, especially “right to Power and right to Property”. In a key passage Hume sets out his stall against meddling with the existing British practice of seven year Parliaments and he opposes the direct rule of the people – the latter as represented, for example, much later in the century in the (theoretical) aim of the French Declaration of Rights of Man and of the Citizen (1789) :

... were this influence [of the crown over “the collective body in the elections of members”], which at present is only exerted once in seven years, to be employed in bringing over the people to every vote, it would soon be wasted; and no skill, popularity, or revenue, could support it. I must, therefore, be of opinion, that an alteration in this particular would introduce a total alteration in our government, and would soon reduce it to a pure republic; and, perhaps, to a republic of no inconvenient form. For though the people, collected in a body like the Roman tribes, be quite unfit for government, yet when dispersed in small bodies, they are more susceptible both of reason and order; the force of popular currents and tides is, in a great measure, broken; and the public interest may be pursued with some method and constancy.⁸¹

However, Hume concludes, that last hypothesis is most unlikely to become a reality:

.. it is needless to reason any farther concerning a form of government, which is never likely to have place in Great Britain, and which seems not to be the aim of any party amongst us. Let us cherish and improve our ancient government as much as possible, without encouraging a passion for such dangerous novelties.⁸²

These words are relevant in the context of Hume’s transatlantic appeal, not to mention their continuing relevance to the events of fifty years later in France and Britain. Here it is significant to point out that where Hume refers to a “noted author” who “has made property the foundation of all government”, he in all likelihood means James Harrington who argued that balance of power is ultimately dependent on balance of property. And, of course, it was Harrington who, as we have already discussed, is seen by Pocock and other modern American political historians as “the main figure in the Anglo-American version of the republican tradition”- though Hume finds him “carrying the matter too far.”⁸³

⁸¹ *ibid.*, p. 511.

⁸² *ibid.*, pp. 511-12.

⁸³ Zuckert, *Natural Rights and the New Republicanism*, p. 159.

Hume paints an altogether more general, yet different message in the early essay *Of Civil Liberty* (1741).⁸⁴ Here he seeks to distinguish between the chief characteristics of “civil liberty” and “absolute government”, stating his clear view that one of “the great advantages of the former above the latter” is that the arts and sciences – today we might use the term ‘culture’ for what Hume has in mind – “could never flourish, but in a free government”. However, one exception to that rule is (of course, pre-revolutionary) France

which scarcely ever enjoyed any established liberty, and yet has carried the arts and sciences as near perfection as any other nation.⁸⁵

Hume then turns his attention to commerce and trade, indicating that, similarly, “commerce can never flourish but in a free government” -

The three greatest trading towns now in Europe, are London, Amsterdam, and Hamburgh; all free cities, and protestant cities; that is, enjoying a double liberty.⁸⁶

Again, however, as in the case of the arts and sciences, we must allow for exceptions, and once more, the example of France seems to show that “the subjects of an absolute prince [Louis XV] may become our rivals in commerce as well as in learning.” It is in discoursing on commerce and liberty that Hume expresses the kind of view that tended to make his writings inimical to some populist thinkers later in the eighteenth century and which encouraged the tendency, noted by the modern editor of the *Essays*, Eugene F. Miller, to regard the *History* as an altogether more accessible work for most of the eighteenth century than the preponderance of his philosophical writings. Observing that in his opinion, commerce “is apt to decay in absolute governments”, Hume states (in words that must have irritated Thomas Paine, had he made himself aware of them), -

A subordination of ranks is absolutely necessary to the support of monarchy. Birth, titles, and place, must be honoured above industry and riches. And while these notions prevail, all the considerable traders will be tempted to throw up their commerce, in order to purchase some of those employments, to which privileges and honours are annexed.⁸⁷

Clarifying his position, he then declares his preference for “monarchical government” over “popular governments”. The former, he asserts, “seems to have made the greatest advances towards perfection”, since “what was formerly said in praise of republics alone”,

⁸⁴ Originally entitled *Of Liberty and Despotism* which Hume changed to *Of Civil Liberty* for the 1758 edition of *Essays and Treatises*.

⁸⁵ *David Hume Selected Essays*, ed. Copley and Edgar, p. 51.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, p. 52.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, p. 53.

viz. “that they are a government of *Laws, not of Men*”, may now be held to be true of “civilized monarchies”. By contrast, the “source of degeneracies” associated with “free governments” lies in their propensity to contract debt and “mortgaging the public revenues”, a practice that “may, in time, become altogether intolerable” and when “all the property of the state be brought into the hands of the public”. The practice of public ownership (not, of course, Hume’s phrase) was “of modern date” and it, together with the concomitant “borrowing [of] great sums at low interest” threatens “all free governments; especially our own, at the present juncture of affairs.” Such a scenario, Hume believes, can only strengthen our

strong motive ... to increase our frugality of public money; lest for want of it, we be reduced, by the multiplicity of taxes, or what is worse, by our public impotence and inability for defence, to curse our very liberty, and wish ourselves in the same state of servitude with all the nations that surround us.⁸⁸

(d) Adam Smith (1723-90)

By scholarly consensus, Adam Smith comfortably bestrides the Atlantic like a colossus, almost as tangibly now in the eyes of modern Enlightenment scholars as much as he surely did in the more restricted public world of his own lifetime. Arguably, to an extent unlike those of his close friend Hume, Smith’s works were generally popular in America and, of these, his masterwork, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776) - published in the same year as Paine’s *Common Sense* and the signing of the Declaration of Independence - was reprinted by Dobson in Philadelphia in 1789 and again in 1796.

For Donald Winch

The *Wealth of Nations* can be accurately ... described as an extended treatise on the reciprocal relationship between commerce and liberty.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, p. 56.

⁸⁹ Donald Winch, *Adam Smith’s Politics, An essay in historiographic revision*, Cambridge, 1978 [re-issued, with corrections, 2008], p. 70. For the structure and general approach I wish to follow in this section I have relied heavily on Winch’s chapter 4, “Commerce, Liberty and Justice”, and on chapter 8 of *A System of Social Science Papers relating to Adam Smith*, “Mercantilist Policy: The American Colonies”, Oxford, 1979, pp. 184-208, the work of my good friend, Andrew S. Skinner. I am particularly indebted to Professor Skinner for allowing me to have sight of an

Winch is careful, however, to caution against falling into the trap of regarding Smith as either the father, or as evil genius, of economic liberalism (a nineteenth-century label), depending on one's point of view, while neglecting consideration of "the other side of the relationship" between commerce and liberty; by that Winch means [Smith's interest in] "the effect of the emergence of commercial prosperity in producing a regime of liberty and justice".

In the context of the general theme of this study, I concentrate here on trying to clarify Smith's attitudes to the commerce/liberty interface. Smith has much more to say about the happiness of the people depending on "the equity and expediency of the laws that are enacted", than about civil liberties, in the popular connotation of the term, designed that is, in Dugald Stewart's words, "to inflame the passions of the multitude." In that important regard, therefore, Smith is much more the ally of his close friend, David Hume, than the disciple of his old mentor, Francis Hutcheson. Approaching the political thought of Hutcheson, the Lockean principle of

a mutual agreement or contract between the governors ... and the people, the former obliging themselves to the faithful administration of the powers vested in them for the common interest, and the latter obliging themselves to obedience⁹⁰

has always to be balanced against doctrines reflecting his own personal experience of societal disadvantage in Britain and Ireland which were "likely to find ready acceptance in the context of the developing crisis in North America".

At the same time, however, as Andrew Skinner points out, it is equally important to avoid thinking that parts of the *Wealth of Nations* were somehow written for the purpose of allowing Smith to let off steam about the impending crisis in America. On the contrary, Smith was not addressing that crisis at all, despite the coincidence of dates as between the publication of his great book and of the American Declaration of Independence. According to Skinner, the main section dealing with America [IV.vii] "may have been designed as an essay in *persuasion*", and he explains what he means, referring to the essential difference in his tone and general approach as between 1776 (the date of the first

alternative, unpublished version of that chapter which he entitles *Francis Hutcheson and Adam Smith: Visions of America*.

⁹⁰ Hutcheson's *System*, Glasgow, 1755, ii. 227.

edition and of the Declaration of Independence) and 1783 (the date of the third edition and of the Treaty of Paris, ending the war):

In 1776 Smith was still seeking to persuade and still be on the offensive. By 1783, the year of the third edition and of peace with America, he could write *as if* his case had been confirmed by events, and with a degree of confidence which would have been inappropriate ten years earlier when he was in London: “It is unnecessary, I apprehend, at present to say any thing further, in order to expose the folly of a system, which fatal experience has now sufficiently exposed.” [IV, viii,15]⁹¹

This is not the place to go into the detail of the various elements within Smith’s argument for a balanced approach to the issue of Britain’s colonial dependencies in general and the American situation in particular. However, as Skinner points out, the famous dramatic concluding section of the *Wealth of Nations*, in which Smith states his view that a form of union be devised that would give the colonies representation in the British parliament, would, if effected, not only have created a single state but had also, he stipulated, to be accompanied by *freedom of trade* between all parts of the empire.⁹²

In dealing with the theme of commerce more generally and the ways in which it related to liberty, Smith was guided in the main by the writings of his predecessor, Montesquieu, and his contemporary, Hume, but as Winch has rightly observed, the theme is also apparent in the writings of other Scottish historians of civil liberty, including Kames, Ferguson, Robertson and “Smith’s most intelligent” pupil, the incumbent (from 1761) of the Glasgow chair of civil law, John Millar.⁹³ To Hume, however, Smith paid the special compliment of having been “the only writer, who so far as I know, has hitherto taken notice of” the way in which

commerce and manufactures gradually introduced order and good government, and with them, the liberty and security of individuals, who had before lived almost in a continual state of war with their neighbours, and of servile dependency upon their superiors.⁹⁴

He owed to Montesquieu the idea developed in *The Spirit of the Laws* that, first, regarding the ancient trading republics

when a democracy is founded on commerce, private people may acquire vast riches without a corruption of morals [because] the spirit of commerce is naturally attended with that of frugality, economy, moderation, labour, prudence, tranquillity, order and rule.⁹⁵

⁹¹ Skinner, *A System of Social Science*, p. 208.

⁹² *Wealth of Nations*, V. iii.68 and 72.

⁹³ Phillipson, *Adam Smith*, p. 125.

⁹⁴ *Wealth of Nations* III.iv.4.

And, secondly and more generally, he acknowledged (though not uncritically) Montesquieu's explanation of the relationship of commerce to different forms of government and its effect in controlling "the great and sudden arbitrary acts of the sovereign". Commerce was, into the bargain, a benevolent influence in stimulating peace among the nations.

But it was to the ever dependable Hume that Smith owed the centrality of his vision when dealing with the commerce/liberty theme. Winch notes that one may group together two of the 'economic' essays, *Of Commerce* and *Of Luxury*, with *Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences* and *Of Civil Liberty*, to form "a sequence of arguments on the political theme of commerce and liberty".⁹⁶ Accordingly, Hume had begun his essay *Of Commerce* by inquiring into the compatibility of commerce and luxury with the maintenance of stability, power and independence and he notes the "modern" position in this matter as follows:

The greatness of a state, and the happiness of its subjects, how independent soever they may be supposed in some respects, are commonly allowed to be inseparable with regard to commerce; and as private men receive greater security, in the possession of their trade and riches, from the power of the public, so the public becomes powerful in proportion to the opulence and extensive commerce of private men.⁹⁷

Commerce helps to maintain free governments, in precisely the same way, says Hume - as already observed above in discussing the essay *Of Civil Liberty* - as the arts and sciences are likelier to thrive under free, rather than under oppressive regimes.

In the *Wealth of Nations* Smith develops Hume's thinking further, expanding the notion that commerce is susceptible to liberty "because", again to borrow Winch's words, "it destroys a source of arbitrary power". At the same time, it is crucially important to recognise that, as Forbes has insisted, Smith's interest in liberty, like Hume's, did not lie in the narrow question of political liberty or "free governments". Forbes, employing a historical perspective, saw that Smith did not maintain "there was a necessary connection between economic progress and freedom," on the grounds that

⁹⁵ Cited in Winch, *Adam Smith's Politics*, p. 71.

⁹⁶ *Adam Smith's Politics*, p. 73.

⁹⁷ *David Hume Selected Essays*, ed. Copley and Edgar, p. 156.

One cannot have freedom without commerce and manufactures, but opulence without freedom is the norm rather than the exception.⁹⁸

Forbes's point is that Smith would have had no truck with other contemporary ideas emerging on the link between commerce and liberty. These would have included the views of such as his student, John Millar, who in 1771 in his *Observations concerning the Distinction of Ranks*,⁹⁹ portrayed commerce and manufactures as gradually eliminating servility and feudalism, so that

as the lower people, in general, become more independent in their circumstances, they begin to exert those sentiments of liberty which are natural to the mind of man.¹⁰⁰

Most important of all, Winch emphasises that what was within the next twenty or so years to become "radicalism" (of the kind, that is, espoused by Millar's son, John Craig Millar) was not in Smith's political vocabulary:

There is no evidence to suggest that Smith would have been at all sympathetic to Millar's apparent acceptance of the "clamour and tumultuary proceedings of the populace in the great towns" as one of the most effective means of preserving the spirit of liberty. Quite the contrary, ... he was highly critical of extra-parliamentary pressures on the legislature - an attitude he shared with Hume.¹⁰¹

5 Religion and the cause of liberty

Throughout the period germane to this study the extent to which religion - or, to be pedantic, *belief in a supreme creator* - contributed to the development of ideas of civil and political liberty can scarcely be over-estimated. The three exemplars I have chosen to develop my theme of the 'making of three Americans' have very little in common, yet for one, John Witherspoon, the sacerdotal practice of religion was obviously integral to his whole life, while, for Aitken and Wilson, religion in one form or another is never very far from the surface. In summary, these three are an evangelical minister of the Scots Kirk; an Antiburgher who finally (and not without some reluctance) opted for the American cause; and a poet and confused radical who, like his hero, Robert Burns, never missed an

⁹⁸ Duncan Forbes, "Sceptical Whiggism, Commerce and Liberty", in *Essays on Adam Smith*, ed. A. S. Skinner and T. Wilson, Oxford, 1976, p. 201, cited by Winch, *Adam Smith's Politics*, p. 86.

⁹⁹ There were editions published in both Dublin and London (John Murray) in 1771.

¹⁰⁰ Cited in Winch, *Adam Smith's Politics*, p. 102.

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*

opportunity to castigate priestcraft but who, unlike Burns, seems to have re-discovered religion in his later years in the land of liberty.

There are, of course, several ways of approaching the religious factor in this context. First, there is the important question of religious liberty itself; that is, how society and government are prepared (or not), in relation to the practice of different denominational ‘branches’ of Christianity, and even different religions, to tolerate worship without resorting to measures against the worshippers, forbidding them open worship. There is, too, the associated issue of established or national churches, an area of particular significance both in the context of British colonial America and in the emergent American republic. Both questions relate to, let us call it, liberty of worship. Finally, there is the entirely different question of the part played by religion in furtherance of the idea of safeguarding and extending civil and political liberty. It is with that latter sense in mind that I treat the issue of religion and liberty here.

(a) America’s God

In Chapter 4 and Appendix E I describe how John Witherspoon made a month-long visit to London and Holland in March-April 1768, immediately prior to his departure for the College of New Jersey in May of that year. Chapter 4 explains how this study provides new insight, from the ‘missing’ pocketbooks at Princeton, into the significance of the identity of the various individuals he met while in London. These included George Whitefield whom he met on two occasions, once at Whitefield’s famous wooden Tabernacle at Moorfields, close to John Wesley’s Foundry chapel. Moorfields was the site of Wesley’s public displays of ‘enthusiasm’ and of Whitefield’s amazing open air services in the 1730s and 1740s when his charismatic preaching regularly attracted attendances of 50,000 and more. In the course of his London visit, the pocketbooks reveal that Witherspoon also had meetings with two of the best-known dissenting ministers in London at the time, Thomas Gibbons and William Langford.

Witherspoon’s two London meetings with Whitefield were probably not his first and it is also highly likely they were not to be the last time they saw each other. In total, Whitefield made fourteen visits to Scotland and when Witherspoon met him in London in March 1768 it was only a matter of weeks before Whitefield set out that summer on his last visit to Scotland, at the end of which he commented that he was “in danger of being hugged to

death”.¹⁰² In September 1769 Whitefield left for America and, having left his mission HQ at Bethesda, Georgia (his own creation) in April of 1770, he preached in Philadelphia, New York and New England where he made “outspoken common cause with the American patriots”. Whitefield made no less than seven visits to America and was present in the House of Commons in 1766 to hear Franklin present his list of colonial grievances.

Whitefield’s name will always, of course, be associated with the First Great Awakening of 1740-42, a revivalist campaign that, according to Noll, had unintended consequences:

The awakeners [i.e. in addition to Whitefield “who went everywhere”, Jonathan Edwards in Northampton, Massachusetts, Joseph Bellamy in rural Connecticut, Gilbert Tennent in New Brunswick, New Jersey, and Samuel Davies in Virginia] preached a higher, more spiritual vision of the church, yet the result was decline in the very notion of church and a transfer of religious commitment from the church to the nation. ... they preached a traditional doctrine of the atonement yet opened the way toward redefining the work of Christ as an outworking of governmental relationships rather than the assuagement of God’s wrath.¹⁰³

Noll concludes that, whether it be called ‘Christian republicanism’ or something else, -

After 1750 - in the wake of increasingly republican perceptions, accelerating participation in the crisis of empire, and fragmenting force of the Puritan covenant - evil increasingly came to be styled “vice” and piety “virtue”. As these new usages prevailed, concepts from political ideology and political economy secured a place in the language of theology, and forces were unleashed that led to the displacement of clergymen as supreme intellectual authorities.¹⁰⁴

Clark, who like others, believes that the key to a proper understanding of the American revolution is to approach it as essentially a war of religion, sees a clear link between what he calls “denominational dynamics”- meaning the ability of religious sects to connect more easily with their members (a microcosm of society) - and

special access to the tensions and conflicts usually negotiated, or disguised, within the constitutional structures of representation and law.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Boyd Stanley Schlenker, in his Oxford DNB piece on Whitefield, notes that his first visit to Scotland from July to October 1741 was prompted by the Erskine brothers, Ralph and Ebenezer, the original seceders and leaders of the Associate Presbytery. However, Whitefield found to his dismay that they insisted he preach only in their churches. “When he refused, they fell upon him mercilessly, branding him a sorcerer, ‘a poor, vain-glorious, self-seeking, puffed-up creature’, ‘a limb of AntiChrist, a boar, and a wild beast’”. [L. Tyerman, *The Life of the Rev. George Whitefield*, 2 vols., (1876-7)].

¹⁰³ Mark A. Noll, *America’s God*, Oxford, 2002, p. 13.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*, p. 49.

¹⁰⁵ J. D. C. Clark, *The Language of Liberty*, Cambridge, 1994, pp. 42-3. Certainly Methodism has always been identified with effective communications. In 1820 the poet Southey wrote: “... the manner in which Methodism has familiarized the lower classes to the work in combining in associations, making rules for their own governance, raising funds, and communicating from one

Clark illustrates what he means by enlarging his landscape to include the key concept of fast (by the standards of the day) dissemination of news to others both in America and Britain; the result could be, and often was, contextually germane beyond the strict confines of religion, straying into the (related) world of politics when appropriate. He explains:

News of the special operation of divine grace quickly touched off interest and emulation in other countries or even other continents: the work of George Whitefield in England was quickly news in America, urged forward the revivals in the Connecticut valley in 1739-42, and these in turn were a deliberate model for Scots revivalists of the 1740s [including at Cambuslang in July and August 1742 where Whitefield's open air communions drew 20,000 and 30,000 communicants]. Groups with such a sharp and eloquent means of communication, could not be other than central in the process of political mobilisation.¹⁰⁶

Both Whitefield and Wesley knew the power of tracts and pamphlets and exploited the printed word to the full in order to aid them in their missionary zeal. Wesley, for example, can hardly be said to have abstained from personal involvement in the American crisis and in four publications in particular - *Free Thoughts on the Present state of Public Affairs* (1768), *Thoughts on Liberty* (1772), *Calm Address to our American Colonies* (1775), and especially *Some Observations on Liberty* (1776)¹⁰⁷ - he adopted an accusatory stance, condemning the Americans and portraying them as allied with English radicals. In 1778 he roundly attacked Witherspoon in a little-known pamphlet entitled *Some Account of the Late Work of God in North-America*, details of which can be found in chapter 4 below. The British Library's English Short Title Catalogue (ESTC) lists a staggering 1,500 + titles throughout Wesley's career to the date of his death in 1791, *either* bearing his name as author *or* with his name on the title page cited as author of a particular tract which another writer is praising or to which he is taking exception.

Whitefield, similarly, is a bibliographical phenomenon. The ESTC lists over 530 titles bearing his name on the title page in his lifetime. To colonial American clerics Whitefield

part of the kingdom to another, may be reckoned among the incidental evils which have resulted from it". (cited in Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 46)

¹⁰⁶ *The Language of Liberty*, p. 43.

¹⁰⁷ The London edition was printed by R. Hawes "and sold at the Foundry, in Moorfields, and at the Rev. Mr. Wesley's Preaching-Houses in Town and Country. 1776." An Edinburgh edition (no printer cited in the imprint) came out in the same year.

became “the Noisie Mr. Whitefield”. Thanks in part to his spivish PR man, William Seward,

Whitefield’s presence throughout mainland America from 1739 to 1741, and the hearty acclaim and opposition it produced, contributed directly to the expansion of colonial printing. Before arriving in America, Whitefield had published well over 100 imprints in England. The number of American publications nearly doubled from 1738 to 1741, the majority attributable to his presence, and each year from 1739 to 1745 American publishers produced more works by Whitefield than by any other writer on any subject. ... According to a supporter, Whitefield had “made *Sermons*, once a *Drug*, a *vendible Commodity*”.¹⁰⁸

In the end, however, the supreme paradox of the outcome of the revolutionary war – its “radicalism” to borrow Wood’s phrase – lies in the fact that the place of religion in the new republic was dealt with by the founding fathers with a resolute and determined negativity. If it is true that a legitimate interpretation of one outcome of the war is to see it as a triumph of Presbyterianism over the forces of Anglican orthodoxy, it is just as true that, for the Empire of Liberty that was to be, the victory was never going to be accompanied by any sense of triumphalism. Far from it, since part of the price to be paid for victory was a conscious decision on the part of the founding fathers, not to exclude religion from the prescription of the independence document, but effectively to withhold from it any aspiration that religion might become formally part and parcel, in a national and ‘established’ sense, of an independent America. When, for example, Alexander Hamilton was asked why the members of the Philadelphia Convention had not recognized God in the Constitution, he allegedly replied, “speaking for many of his liberal colleagues”, “We forgot.” By the same token, the Virginia Act for Establishing Religious Freedom (1786) included the extraordinary assertion that

Our civil rights have no dependence on our religious opinions, any more than on our opinions in physics or geometry.¹⁰⁹

The final irony, however, was that for Americans the last decade of the century was accompanied by a sustained outburst of religious exuberance, such that

Nowhere else in Christendom was religion so fragmented. Yet nowhere else was it so vital. American Protestantism was broken into a multiplicity of denominations, none of which claimed a monopoly of orthodoxy, yet out of whose competition emerged a common Christian truth. There was nothing like it in the Western world.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁰⁹ Gordon S. Wood, *The American Revolution*, New York, 2002, p. 130.

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 135.

By one of those largely unaccountable quirks of history, this was notably not the case in Great Britain where the century closed on a different note, characterised by confused religious messages, increased secularism, Paine's "atheistic book" (*The Age of Reason*) and, in Scotland especially, vigorous assaults on 'priestcraft'.

(b) Liberty of conscience in England and Scotland: dissenters and seceders

Ned C. Landsman provides us with as good a definition of liberty as any, in its religious context, when he writes:

In the religious culture of British Protestants, liberty meant the right to follow one's conscience in accordance with the word of God as revealed in Scripture, and freedom from arbitrary human authorities that tried to impose their wills above biblical commands. ... In cultural matters, liberty signified freedom of enquiry, without interference from church or state and without the tyrannical authority of superstition or ancient learning. Socially, liberty increasingly came to mean the right of citizens to pursue their fortunes without unnecessary hindrance from the authority of the state, or even from the tyranny of birth. Genteel origins might indeed provide privileges to those who possessed them but ought not to prevent the peaceful pursuit of prosperity and happiness among those of every station in life.¹¹¹

And for E. P. Thompson, writing of England in the later eighteenth century, -

Liberty of conscience was the one great value which the common people had preserved from the Commonwealth. The countryside was ruled by the gentry, the towns by corrupt corporations, the nation by the corruptest corporation of all: but the chapel [he means the Wesleyan chapel], the tavern and the home were their own. In the 'unsteeped' places of worship there was room for a free intellectual life and for democratic experiments with 'members unlimited.'¹¹²

As Thompson points out, however, dissent is "a misleading term" and "covers "so many sects" and "so many conflicting intellectual and theological tendencies". Indeed, for Thompson, writing as he is about the origins of the *English* working class, even the Presbyterians were classed as dissenters along with the Methodists, Baptists, Unitarians, Antinomians, Arians, Socinians, Quakers and the rest.

The English dissenters toiled throughout the century to work for civil and religious liberties. Notable dissenters included Richard Price whose *Observations on Civil Liberty* (1776), a pamphlet written in defence of the American patriots, sold in great quantity and whose admission as a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1767 was sponsored by Franklin. It

¹¹¹ Ned C. Landsman, *From Colonials to Provincials American Thought and Culture 1680-1760*, Ithaca and London, 1997, p.

¹¹² *The Making of the English Working Class*, London (revised edition), 1968, [Penguin reprint (1991)], p. 56.

was to rebut Price in his warm support for the French Revolution in the famous sermon, *A Discourse on the Love of our Country* (1789), that Edmund Burke wrote his angry but brilliant riposte, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). Price's neglected masterpiece, long in the shadow of its fierce counter-blast, Burke's *Reflections*, is not about the usual definition of patriotism as the title misleadingly conveys. Instead, it is an argument against 'patriotism', as commonly understood. Price defines patriotism as loyalty to a shared ideal, not to any notion of country as a geographical entity. As F. P. Lock explains, according to Price, the real point is:

The interests of any particular country, truly understood, are best promoted through the pursuit of the "chief blessings of human nature": truth, virtue and liberty. In the pursuit of truth, men have a duty to enlighten their country. In the pursuit of virtue, they have a duty not only to be virtuous, but to discountenance vice. One way of promoting virtue is to encourage the setting up of more rational forms of worship, since the existing Anglican liturgy is so defective that people are understandably reluctant to attend it. The pursuit of liberty is the most important of the three, because only in conditions of true freedom can truth and virtue flourish.¹¹³

Without doubt, however, the greatest and most influential figure in dissenting circles in the second half of the eighteenth century was the scientist and polymath, Joseph Priestley. His greatest contribution to the literature of liberty is his *Essay on the First Principles of Government* (1768) which separated the two principles of civil and political liberty in a way that used the principle of utility, later acknowledged by Bentham in his *Short History of Utilitarianism* (1829) to have been the true source of his 'greater happiness' principle. As in the case of Wesley and Whitefield, Priestley was a phenomenally prolific author with well over 500 titles listed in the British Library ESTC, covering English and American imprints *either* containing his own name as author, *or* with his name on the title pages of books and pamphlets by other authors referring to him and his writings.

Priestley and Price were friends, philosophers and, at bottom, though in different ways, radical idealists. Both men were licensed dissenting ministers. Both men took unequivocally the side of the American colonialists in their struggle with what they perceived as a Britain that was morally in contravention of the perceived right that the Americans seized on to govern themselves.¹¹⁴ Both men were distinguished scientists and

¹¹³ F. P. Lock, *Edmund Burke, Volume II, 1784-1797*, Oxford, 2006, p. 253.

¹¹⁴ Priestley published his *Present State of Liberty in Great Britain and her Colonies* in 1769 and the *Address to Protestant Dissenters on the Approaching Election* (1774), which attacked the parliamentary majority for its failure to repeal and for its activities in relation to the colonies. Schofield describes this second pamphlet as "the most extreme political tract Priestley had written

Fellows of the Royal Society, though Priestley was by far the greater name in that regard. Both men were concerned with the poor in society and attempted to improve their material prospects - though here Price went much further than Priestley in actually getting two bills through the Commons only for them to fail in the Lords, one on the provision for parishes compulsorily to sell annuities to persons during their working lives (1773), the other a bill “for the more effective relief of the poor” (1789).

But that is where the similarities end. Price, an Arian, who consequently renounced the doctrine that Christ could be held to be ‘consubstantial’ with God, was much at odds with Priestley’s desertion of Arianism for an anti-trinitarian view of Christian faith - that is, Unitarianism.¹¹⁵ Like Price, sadly, the great Priestley was a man for his time only. Having spent the last ten years of his life happily in America where he was welcomed and fêted and wrote over 40 papers for the American Philosophical Society,¹¹⁶ Priestley is now

and attracted the most national attention of any appeal favouring the Americans.”, Robert E. Schofield, Oxford DNB online contribution on Priestley, 2004-10, p. 10.

¹¹⁵ The best guide to Priestley’s complex religious belief is to be found in “Joseph Priestley and the Socinian Moonlight” - a reference to Coleridge’s famous line: ‘*Socinianism, moonlight; methodism a stove. O for some sun to unite heat and light*’ in his *Anima Poetae*. See chapter x of *The Eighteenth Century Background* by Basil Willey, London, 1940, (I have used the 1974 edition), pp. 168-204. Priestley and Price co-published a book of *Sermons* in 1791 with a London imprint, though the printer is not cited. In the previous year Priestley had “republished” the free-thinker Anthony Collins’s *A Philosophical Inquiry concerning Human Liberty. ... Birmingham, Printed by Thomas Pearson; and sold by J. Johnson, St. Paul’s Church-Yard, London, MDCCXC*. [1790]. Collins’s work, originally published in 1717,* was used by Witherspoon for his *Lectures on Moral Philosophy* and mentioned by him in his “Recapitulation” (see *The Selected Writings of John Witherspoon*, ed. Thomas Miller, Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1990, p. 230). * [London, “Printed for R. Robinson, at the Golden Lion in St. Paul’s Church Yard. M DCC XVII”. A “second Edition corrected” came out in the same year.]

¹¹⁶ Although it was the appalling Birmingham riots of July 14 -16, 1791 - orchestrated by placemen and others inimical to his radical views on the church and the crown (which were deliberately misrepresented and distorted) - resulting in the destruction of Priestley’s house, library, laboratory and most of his personal papers, that precipitated his emigration to America in April 1794, he had actually revealed in a letter to Franklin ten years previously (August 21, 1784) that he was considering taking up residence in Philadelphia. Franklin told him then that “it would make me very happy to have you there.” Priestley’s works represent a fascinating bibliographical study in their own right (see R. E. Crook, *A bibliography of Joseph Priestley, 1733-1804*, London, 1966). Some of Priestley’s American publications, in particular, are of unusual contemporary importance, including the *Palladium of Conscience; or, the Foundation of Religious Liberty displayed, asserted, and established, agreeable to its true and genuine Principles, above the reach of all petty Tyrants, who attempt to Lord it over the human Mind*. To make a point, the flamboyant Robert Bell has the following imprint - “*AMERICA: Printed for the Subscribers, by Robert Bell, at the late Union Library, in Third-street, Philadelphia, 1774.*” This may have been a *third* edition of the book since Bell had already published it with a different title in 1772 and it came out again in 1773. (See Clark, *The Language of Liberty*, p. 84, note 140). Also of relevance to this study is Priestley’s *Letters to Mr. Volney, occasioned by a work of his entitled Ruins, and*

remembered chiefly for his many solid achievements as a chemist and technologist.¹¹⁷ Nothing, however, can diminish his role as the greatest of all English dissenting voices in the cause of liberty on both sides of the Atlantic. As his biographer puts it:

Only in science ... has his memory remained bright – as the discoverer of oxygen, who never quite recognized his own discovery, and as the persistent critic of Lavoisian chemistry who, with the advent of physical chemistry, was shown to be not entirely wrong.¹¹⁸

In Scotland, as one might expect, the situation affecting religion and the cause of liberty was notably different from that in England, though for much of the latter half of the century the politically-minded weavers of Paisley continued to have much in common with their fellow cloth-workers in the Spitalfields of London¹¹⁹ – that is, good times and horribly bad times, allied to a capacity for sporadic outbursts of civil and political discontent, and a mixed cultural diet consisting largely of the Bible, Bunyan and Tom Paine. In chapters 2 and 3 I have tried to bring out the importance of the Scottish dimension in relation to the part played by religion from 1790 on, when Scotland made its own reaction – to some extent different from that in England, but in most ways arguably not altogether dissimilar – to the French Revolution. In chapter 2, and again (in respect of the radical career of Wilson) in chapter 6, I have written about the radical movement in the town of Paisley as a kind of microcosm for most of industrial Scotland at that time.

The history of Scottish ‘dissent’ can be traced back to the days of the National Covenant, the Union of 1707 and, above all, the ’45 rebellion when the country had been torn apart by civil war. The prospect, at least at one point in the progress of the ’45 rebellion, of a Catholic on the throne of Great Britain resulted, for a time, in a rallying behind the flag of

by his letter to the author. ... Philadelphia Printed by Thomas Dobson, at the Stone-House, No. 41, South Second-Street 1797. “Circulating” an extract from Volney’s *Ruins* was cited in the trial of Thomas Muir as part of the indictment (see chapter 3 below). Priestley took exception to Volney’s “treating the history of Jesus Christ as a mere fable”, but also, more generally, to his belief that the book “is written in such a manner as to be very captivating to the young and ignorant” which, one might think, is precisely why Dundas and others pronounced it seditious in the Scotland of 1793.

¹¹⁷ His greatest scientific books are probably *The History and Present State of Electricity, with Original Experiments* (1767), on which he regularly corresponded with Franklin, *Experiments and Observations on Different Kinds of Air* (1774, 1775 and 1777) and *Experiments on the Generation of Air from Water* (1793).

¹¹⁸ Schofield, Oxford DNB, p. 17.

¹¹⁹ “The Spitalfields silk-weavers and their apprentices had long been noted for their anti-authoritarian turbulence”, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 75.

the established Kirk against ‘popery’ certainly, but had also come about, in the words of T. M. Devine, in

the recognition that Episcopal ministers were one of the key ideological supports of Jacobitism.¹²⁰

As Devine puts it very clearly:

The thinking was that Protestantism should induce ideological conformity while prosperity would remove the poverty on which rebellion was supposed to feed.¹²¹

Yet, a full twelve years before the forces of Charles Edward Stuart occupied Edinburgh, the original (1733) secession from the Church of Scotland had been declared on the initiative of the Erskine brothers, paving the way for long years of religious entanglements, bitter dissent and a rivening of the Kirk from top to bottom from which, some still argue, it has, despite all manner of 19th and early 20th century unions and re-unions, never fully recovered. Two years after the ’45, further disruption occurred with seceders splitting into what were popularly styled ‘Burghers’ (Associate Synod) and ‘Anti-Burghers’ (General Associate Synod), depending on their preparedness to take the oath required of certain cities whereby they acknowledged the true religion publicly preached within the realm, as authorised by law.

Burleigh is of the view that:

Seceders generally were persons of sturdy independent minds, and their congregations were found largely in the rural areas and country towns in the Lowlands. Their ministers were humble men of great seriousness with strong evangelical, Presbyterian, even covenanting principles. The Evangelical party in the Church [of Scotland] itself deeply lamented the loss of these people, but in course of time the existence of dissenting congregations was accepted as natural and even beneficial, certainly not dangerous to the Establishment [sic], which could placidly watch them engage in interminable controversies amongst themselves both in their own congregations and in their synods.¹²²

However, Burleigh is only half-right if he means - as I believe he must so intend - to exclude the likes of Paisley from “the rural areas and country towns in the Lowlands”: in chapter 2, section 6 (i), for example, I describe the remarkable numerical strength of the Antiburghers, Burghers and other sects in Paisley from the 1750s onwards. Further, although we are intended to read the word “Establishment” almost certainly as a synonym for the Church of Scotland (hence the capital E), Burleigh might have added that seceders

¹²⁰ T. M. Devine, *The Scottish Nation 1700-2000*, London, 1999, p. 46.

¹²¹ *ibid.*

¹²² J. H. S. Burleigh, *A Church History of Scotland*, Edinburgh, 1960, pp. 323-4.

were often a thorn in the flesh to another kind of ‘establishment’, namely the civil and national authorities.

For the purpose of this study, however, the important feature of the Scottish seceders is their preparedness to engage in political dialogue with the people, a feature which, to some extent, they shared (especially after the American revolution) with the Popular or Evangelical party. For the Evangelicals, as McIntosh reminds us:

The most striking feature of Popular analysis of secular society was its postulation of a crucial link between religious faith and social stability.¹²³

That did not necessarily mean sympathising with Jacobin-type activities; but neither did it mean a slavish profession of loyalty to crown and government. In many cases, it *could* mean a reluctance to get involved in politics, a view once held strongly by Witherspoon until the very end of his Paisley ministry but, as we shall see, dramatically abandoned by him after he went to America. Popular support for the American revolution in Scottish religious circles as a whole had been generally half-hearted, apart from some notable exceptions including William Thom and John Erskine, both friends of Witherspoon in Paisley. In 1777, however, writing from America, Witherspoon himself had indicated his clear view that traditional Scottish Popularism – of which he had been one of the leading lights – could be identified above all with ideas about religious freedom and freedom of conscience: he is at pains to stress that as “the author of this address”

he hath ever been in that church [“a church which hath no contempt ... an opposer of lordly domination and sacerdotal tyranny, so that he is a passionate admirer of the equal and impartial support of every religious denomination which prevails in the northern colonies and is perfect in Pennsylvania and the Jerseys to the unspeakable advantage of those happy and well-constituted governments.”¹²⁴

But this sense of aligning themselves politically with the people tended to fall away dramatically among the rank and file of Evangelicals after the French Revolution, when new feelings of loyalty to the crown, allied to a general contentment with the existing constitution, predominated among most factions of the established Kirk.

¹²³ John R. McIntosh, *Church and Theology in Enlightenment Scotland, The Popular Party 1740-1800*, East Linton, 1998, p. 74.

¹²⁴ *Address to the Inhabitants of Jamaica* [*Selected Writings*, ed. Thomas Miller, p. 114.]

In the case of Scottish seceding ministers and their congregations, there are huge ambiguities that make it almost impossible to present an unqualified view of their position in relation to the ongoing events associated with radical opposition to crown and government in the last decade of the century. Perhaps that is not surprising, granted the relative freedom individual ministers seemed to arrogate to themselves in these highly controversial issues, a freedom that meshed perfectly with the stubbornly independent character of seceding church polity. A good example of this is the case of the Paisley Relief Church minister, Patrick Hutchison, in 1796, when six members of his congregation walked out of a service he was leading, protesting he had indulged in “mixing in his discourses political things”.¹²⁵

In the final analysis, nonetheless, Harris is forced to concede that, while a sharp contrast does remain, as, that is, between the position of Scottish seceders, on the one hand, and the “political restiveness” of English dissenters after c. 1760 on the other (especially in the case of radical dissenters), it is still undeniable that an appreciable number of individual Scottish secessionist ministers aligned themselves wholly on the side of the radical cause in the 1790s, Unitarians (Fyshe Palmer), Bereans (Donaldson), Antiburghers (MacFarlane, McEwan and numerous others) and Reliefs (Hutchison and Douglas) among them.¹²⁶ Of these, as my study shows, some were notable figures in the organisational apparatus of the Scottish radical movement.

(c) **The Kirk versus the People**

As far as the established Kirk is concerned, however, the position was even more ambivalent. For the Kirk, in the 1790s, the simplest way of putting it is that it had nowhere to go, except in the general direction of crown and government. As it seemed to many, both inside congregations and in the wider world, there was too often an over-zealous defence of the Pitt-Dundas line - and that generally meant *hard-line*. The really tough question that the people of the Kirk were asking themselves was this: Was the Kirk of their fathers, and of the Covenant, *on their side, or not?* As always, the supplied answer was rarely definitive. For some worshippers, it was enough that, in stark contrast with the seeming preparedness of seceding ministers in the manufacturing towns to align

¹²⁵ Letter in the *Glasgow Courier*, 23 January 1796. See also the note on Hutchison in chapter 2, §6 (a), 89-90.

¹²⁶ Bob Harris, *The Scottish People and the French Revolution*, p. 85.

themselves with the often vague, confusing and insubstantial cause of liberty, the attitude of *the* Church - with a capital C - was much less trenchant. For others, with a clearer idea of what liberty actually meant, it was acutely more painful since they could point the accusing finger at grovelling Presbyteries that had ‘unanimously’ passed resolutions of loyalty to King and Commons and, worse, at treacherous ministers who had helped send Thomas Muir to Botany Bay.¹²⁷ It was one thing for a radical poet like Alexander Wilson to forecast that the power of clergy, the “wily tykes”, was “unco fast declining”; it was quite another for newspapers to print reports of meetings of the Friends of the People cheek by jowl alongside Presbyterian professions and addresses of loyalty.

In 1794 - a veritable *annus horribilis* for the cause of liberty in Scotland - one “Mark Blake, Esq.” published *A Letter to the Clergy of the Church of Scotland* which the radical London publisher, Daniel Isaac Eaton, produced and sold for sixpence a copy from his HQ and safehouse in Newgate Street.¹²⁸ ‘Blake’s’ letter - the name is probably a *nom de plume* for one of the London Scots then being sheltered by Eaton - deserves to be better known because, in its quaintly crude way, it is a genuine historical document, revealing something of the passion behind the disappointment many of the Kirk’s former supporters must have felt at what they perceived as a missed opportunity and, more seriously, a desertion of its ministers’ true calling. The words of the ‘letter’ are put into the mouth of “the Reformer” who first castigates Kirk ministers for their opposition to reform and their seeming pro-government toadying, observing that behind their determined view may lie subtler, mercenary motives:

Let the sceptics ... recollect that a considerable part of the patronage of the Church is directly in the Crown, and nearly all the remainder in the hands of persons devoted to it - but above all, let it be known, that the augmentation of your salaries may be easily effected by Government,

¹²⁷ See chapter 3, pp. 140-146, for extensive references to (bibliographical aspects of) the trial of Thomas Muir. The role in the trial of three ministers is of great interest here: the Rev. William Dunn of Kirkintilloch, a supporter of Muir, and, of two hostile witnesses, the Rev. Daniel M’Arthur (who testified that Muir had disputed with him that it was “a wrong time for us to insist for a reform in parliament” (Howell, *State Trials*, XXIII, p. 178); and, especially, the Rev. James Lapslie, minister of Campsie, who was almost certainly a paid government informer. Muir successfully appealed to the Court for Lapslie’s removal as a witness on the grounds he was “an agent for the Crown” who had “assisted the messengers of the law in exploring and citing witnesses against me”. (ibid., p. 141).

¹²⁸ *A Letter to the Clergy of the Church of Scotland. By Mark Blake, Esq. Magna est veritas et prevalebit. London: Printed for Daniel Isaac Eaton, No. 74, Newgate-Street M,DCC,XCIV. Price Six-Pence.*

notwithstanding the opposition of your parishioners, who consider that the richer you become, the less attention you will bestow on your charge.

“The Clergy”, the Reformer goes on, “have always opposed” that “radical Reform” which he describes as “the Aurora of reason”; the “spark of liberty” that “burst out into a flame in America, which has communicated to France, and promises to illuminate the world”. However, the Reformer then asks that his audience “now observe our present situation” – and he proceeds (a little tiresomely, it has to be said) to iterate the consequences for the nation of the present war, not the least enormous increases in taxation and in the national debt. What is the reaction of government ministers to all of this?

They have the audacity to preach up the Constitution, whilst they are undermining it. They persecute its friends to quash every enquiry, and brand the advocate of Reform with the epithets of *sedition*, and disaffection to certain personages.

But as far as the Reformer is concerned, it is to no avail:

... for my part, I am not deterred by this from exercising my imprescriptible rights of canvassing the concerns of that society of which I am a member.

And he begins the process of summing up:

Great Britain seems to have fallen asleep in the road to political perfection; her lethargic members appear incapable of the free motion of a body in health: they exhibit the most striking contrast of credulity and apathy in politics, and sagacity in other parts of human knowledge that is to be found. ... There was a time when the proud distinction of freemen raised us in our ideas above all nations. -- Whence comes it, that we are now jealous of an addition to the same great brotherhood, and that we league with tyrants to overthrow the temple of liberty. ... Upon the whole, Can justice be recognized in this war of opinion; or is there an impartial person who does not pronounce it to be replete with folly at the close of the eighteenth century, even were the finances of the kingdom in a situation to make the experiment safe on that score? But, when I regard our situation in this respect, I confess that I tremble for the issue.

The Reformer’s final words are reserved for the intended recipients of his letter – the Kirk clergy:

Amidst such mighty objects, the Clergy are but insects. ... I have seen several of their productions on occasion of the late Fast. They seem all to have built on a foundation which, though it may be strictly theological, is absurd when applied to human action. ... Let the Clergy confine themselves to the cure of souls upon rational principles; and forgetting the cries of these frogs [i.e. those who attribute, “by means of their predestinarian notions”, the lack of action on reform to the will of God], let the nation press forward in the path of happiness and prosperity. Let this road be cleared from the mountainous obstacles of which the want of Reform throws in the way.

Two years later, in 1796, another “letter to the clergy of the Church of Scotland”,¹²⁹ this time by one Robert Johnston, was published in Glasgow, with the same accusation and the same message: the Kirk is pro-war and pro-government and against the people - though this time the language is dressed up in a tirade of “Anti-Popery” and an attack on priestcraft more generally:

The people of this nation have been long exclaiming against the church of Rome, as antichristian; but, if they could look at home, they will see antichrist established, and that to a high degree; for I account every religion, connected with the state, to be antichristian; and the daughter of Babylon must accompany their mother in her downfall. ... there is some among you, that have maintained Socinian errors, that now keep quiet for the sake of the loaves and fishes; whilst others of you overlook highways, and act as justices of the peace, which is quite inconsistent with your character, and the service you are set apart for. But it seems your office is now become a trade, and that you intend to imitate the careless shepherds of a neighbouring church [a reference to Anglicanism], where priests sit on thrones and riot in palaces, and must have their seats and debate on civil affairs - is not this lording over the Lord’s heritage?¹³⁰

By far the most extreme example of an attack on the Kirk and “priestcraft” more generally, however, will be found in chapter 6, 5 (iii), where I publish for the first time part of a poem, probably written in prison in 1795, by the convicted radical, James Kennedy, who cites in verse two actual incidents where, he alleges, clergymen from “one of the parish churches near Edinburgh” and from “near Falkland, in Fife” condemned in equal measure “Freedom’s Friends” [the capital F is significant], the French, and “Democrats at home”. Kennedy muses:

Thank Heaven! Delusion’s pow’rs decline;
King-Priest-craft, Superstition,
In melancholy mania pine,
Fast sinking to perdition;

¹²⁹ Interestingly, Johnston’s letter is included in Leslie’s 1796-7 catalogue of radical political books and pamphlets whereas Blake’s is not.

¹³⁰ *A Letter to the Clergy of the Church of Scotland, respecting their late political conduct. Second edition, corrected and improved by the author, Robert Johnston. Glasgow: printed for the author, and sold by J. Lang, J. Dymock, Cameron & Murdoch, Stewart & Meikle, R. Hutchison, J. M’fadyen, and Mrs. Galloway, Booksellers, Glasgow; G. Caldwell And R. Smith, Booksellers, Paisley; J. Elder, W. Berry, J. Ogle, And J. Robertson, Booksellers, Edinburgh; And G. Peattie, Bookseller, Leith, &c, 1796.* [I have been unable to trace the first edition. In the same year, John Kellerman (whose identity is unknown to me) published an “Answer to Robert Johnston’s letter” [“Edinburgh: printed for the author, 1796.”] but I have not seen it.

Their vot'ries now, with dire dismay,
Set all their legions in array --
Go, Friends of Man! At Freedom's call,
With *Reason arm'd*, attack them all!¹³¹

6 Orthodox and radical ideas of liberty

(a) Burke vs. Price : *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790)

For Jonathan Israel, the author of *Rights of Man* is quite simply

... the foremost spokesman of radical ideas in the later Enlightenment English-speaking world down to the 1790s, certainly in the political sphere.¹³²

In chapter 3 I give an account of the tangled publishing history of Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man*. Eric Foner, in his introduction to the Penguin Classics edition, estimates that the two parts had sold 250,000 copies by 1793. The first part of *Rights of Man* was written as an answer to Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790).¹³³ Paine's response to Burke was by no means the only one: others had included *Vindiciae Gallicae* (1791), by a young lawyer, James Mackintosh - "after Paine, the most successful"... "in some respects superior to *Rights of Man*"¹³⁴ - and Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindications of the Rights of Men* (1790) - "after Paine's, the most vigorous of the replies"¹³⁵ - as well as a shoal of pamphlets, one of the best known of which is probably that by the reformer, Thomas Christie, *Letters on the Revolution of France* (1791). By a different yardstick,

¹³¹ From James Kennedy's "Treason, or Not Treason! Dedicated to the Majesty of the People.", published by D. I. Eaton [n.d. - though the colophon reads "Liberty Buildings, Spitalfields, 1795".]

¹³² *A Revolution of the Mind, Radical Enlightenment and the Intellectual Origins of Modern Democracy*, Princeton and Oxford, 2010, p. 238.

¹³³ *Reflections on the Revolution in France, and on the Proceedings in Certain Societies in London relative to that event. In a Letter intended to have been sent to a Gentleman in Paris. By the Right Honourable Edmund Burke. London: Printed for J. Dodsley, in Pall Mall . M.DCC.XC.* (The "certain societies" are the (London) Constitutional Society, otherwise known as the Society for Constitutional Information - founded by Major Cartwright in 1780 - and the (London) Revolution Society, founded in 1788.)

¹³⁴ F. P. Lock, *Edmund Burke, Volume II, 1784-1797*, Oxford, p. 292 and p. 347. Lock's judgment is somewhat inconsistent since he also refers to *Rights of Man* elsewhere in his book as the "one reply that eclipsed the rest".

¹³⁵ *ibid.*

Keane indicates that no less than seventeen replies to Burke's *Reflections* were "sympathetic".¹³⁶

Burke had originally conceived his *Reflections* as a response to a sermon preached by a dissenting minister in his meeting-house on 4 November 1789. Richard Price's Old Jewry sermon, *A Discourse on the Love of our Country* (1789), had outraged Burke.¹³⁷

However, it soon

outgrew its original purpose, in subject as well as scale, eventually embodying his most considered and profound thoughts about politics.¹³⁸

In his sermon, an argument against 'patriotism' in the usual sense of the term, Price had stated that :

The interests of any particular country, truly understood, are best promoted through the pursuit of the "chief blessings of human nature": truth, virtue, and liberty. In the pursuit of truth, men have a duty to enlighten their country. In the pursuit of virtue, they have a duty not only to be virtuous, but to discountenance vice. ... The pursuit of liberty is the most important of the three, because only in conditions of true freedom can truth and virtue flourish. True patriots must obey the laws and respect the magistrates of their country. Yet patriotism does not entail adulation and servility, as exemplified in the recent addresses to the king on his recovery from his illness. ... Patriotism demands the defence of one's country against its **internal** [my emphasis - RLC] as well as its external enemies. Examples of internal enemies are ministers who seek to arrogate excessive power to themselves, and who use the threat of external enemies as a pretext for repression at home and aggression abroad.¹³⁹

The target was, of course, Pitt. Price's sermon urges the repeal of both the Test and Corporation Acts as well as the reform of Parliament. At the close, Price ends his sermon by reasserting that true patriotism is "perfectly compatible with the Christian principle of universal benevolence", and by celebrating recent events in France. For Burke, as for the

¹³⁶ John Keane, *Tom Paine A Political Life*, New York and London, 1995, p. 294.

¹³⁷ Burke had been particularly offended by the passage in Price's sermon relating to the 'October Days' incident which had resulted in the escorting of Louis XVI from Versailles for the last time, in the company of a heavily armed mob - the price that the king had paid for the queen's temporary guarantee of safety. Price saw in the incident a symbol of the people's freedom,* whereas by contrast Burke used it as the backcloth for his famous portrait of Marie Antoinette whom he remembers having seen sixteen or seventeen years before at Versailles, "glittering like the morning-star, full of life, and splendour, and joy."

* "I have lived to see *Thirty Millions of People*, indignant and resolute, spurning at slavery, and demanding liberty with an irresistible voice. *Their king led in triumph, and an arbitrary monarch surrendering himself to his subjects.*" [Price's *A Discourse on the Love of our Country*, cited in *Reflections*, Penguin Classics edition, ed. Conor Cruise O'Brien, London, 1986, p. 157.]

¹³⁸ F. P. Lock, *Edmund Burke, Volume II*, p. 285

¹³⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 253-4.

government, it was all too clear that Price's sermon was a dangerously radical speech with uncompromisingly radical intentions.

There can be no disputing the claim that Edmund Burke's *Reflections* is one of the great monuments of English prose of the second half of the eighteenth century. It is also a classic statement of conservative Enlightenment principles and, as such, wistfully harks back to an age that, as he acknowledged with profound regret, the revolution in France had contrived to eliminate :

... the age of chivalry is gone. – that of sophisters, oeconomists, and calculators, has succeeded; and the glory of Europe is extinguished for ever.¹⁴⁰

More important, *Reflections* is an anti-reform, anti-radical statement which, in the case of its author in 1790 (though by means consistently in his lifetime),¹⁴¹ came to mean, perhaps not outright rejection of the idea that man had inherent rights, but more an affirmation that such rights as man *did* possess were, in the final analysis, inherited rights. (Burke prefers the term “inherited liberties”). As F. P. Lock maintains, Burke did not deny the validity of the rights of men, but redefined the “real rights of men” to mean (a) protection by the law against violence and oppression, (b) certain rights governing economic relations within society – e.g. “right to the fruits of their industry”, and (c) religious rights, embracing a right to “instruction in life, and to consolation in death” (perhaps a harking

¹⁴⁰ *Reflections*, Penguin Classics edition, p. 170.

¹⁴¹ O'Brien, for example, goes so far as to say of Burke: “Had Rockingham lived, had he and his friends been in power ... it is hardly possible that Burke could have written with untrammelled eloquence about the Revolution in France. Frustrated, he was free.” O'Brien also points out that this was the view of both Mary Wollstonecraft and Disraeli, the latter attributing Burke's stored-up feelings to his vengeance against Fox for taking the Whig leadership away from him. Also, when William Godwin heard of Burke's death, he added a footnote as the third edition of *Political Justice* was preparing for the press, in which he states his high esteem of the author of *Reflections* in extravagant terms – “I regard him as the inferior of no man that ever adorned the face of the earth” – but then goes on to describe “his principal defect” as his having left us “... a memorable example of the power of a corrupt system of government to undermine and divert from their genuine purposes the noblest faculties that have yet been exhibited to the observation of the world.” In other words, for Godwin – the friend of Paine and one of a triumvirate appointed by him to oversee the publication of the first part of *Rights of Man* after Johnson had taken cold feet and Jordan took over as printer – Burke had allowed his “dark and saturnine temper” to “infect his own mind”, and he had “entangled himself with a petty combination of political men, instead of reserving his illustrious talents unwarped, for the advancement of intellect, and the service of mankind.” [Conor Cruise O'Brien, Introduction, *Reflections*, Penguin Classics edition, p. 27].

back to his Catholic past in Ireland). But the basic “human right” for Burke was the right to protection of property under the nation’s laws. As Lock puts it:

For Burke, a just society is one in which individuals, protected by equality before the law, are free to pursue their own economic advantage. Since society is not a collection of equals, but rather a partnership between greatly unequal partners, “human rights” are a necessarily unequal system of privileges and obligations, not a set of individualistic claims against each and all.¹⁴²

It is also important to point out that although he deliberately shies away from any specific mention of the American precedent in *Reflections*, the earlier ‘liberal’ phase of Burke’s career shows that he had been far from unsympathetic to the American cause, would criticise aspects of British rule in India and, true to his upbringing in Ireland, was consistently an advocate of Catholic inclusion.

Reflections uses the well-known eighteenth century rhetorical device of a literary letter to a young man¹⁴³ from a senior and venerable figure, in Burke’s case a senior politician, formerly a Rockingham Whig, now turned government supporter and self-professed anti-liberal:

... though I do most heartily wish that France may be animated by a spirit of rational liberty ... , it is my misfortune to entertain great doubts concerning several material points in your late transactions.¹⁴⁴

Employing sarcasm as a rhetorical device, Burke deploys his classic denunciation of what he himself perceives as anti-liberty, characterised by the recent French example. It then becomes crystal-clear that Burke’s personal idea of liberty is essentially a negative one:

I should ... suspend my congratulations on the new liberty of France, until I was informed how it had been combined with government, with public force; with the discipline and obedience of armies; with the collection of an effective and well-distributed revenue; with morality and religion; with the solidity of property; with peace and order; with civil and social manners. All these (in their way) are good things too; and, without them, liberty is not a benefit whilst it lasts, and is not likely to continue long. The effect of liberty to individuals is, that they may do what they please: We ought to see what it will please them to do, before we risque congratulations, which may be

¹⁴² F. P. Lock, *Edmund Burke, Volume II*, p. 323.

¹⁴³ In the case of *Reflections*, the addressee is Chames-Jean-François de Pont, the “very young gentleman of Paris.”

¹⁴⁴ *Reflections*, Penguin Classics edition, ed. O’Brien, p. 85.

soon turned into complaints. Prudence would dictate this in the case of separate insulated private men; but liberty, when men act in bodies, is *power*.¹⁴⁵

Burke sees in Price an example of a nascent revolutionary in Britain and, in the first part of his book, he proceeds to take his sermon apart, section by section. In particular, he denies Price's dismissal of an inherited monarchy as a wrong, arguing that on the contrary:

the people of England ... look upon the legal hereditary succession of their crown as among their rights, not as among their wrongs; as a benefit, not as a grievance; as a security for their liberty, not as a badge of servitude.¹⁴⁶

In a transitional passage, Burke discusses whether Britain might learn lessons from the French experience, and if indeed, as some writers were suggesting, Britain actually had originated some of the ideas now adopted in revolutionary France. In the second, concluding part of his book Burke argues that Britain should have no hesitation in rejecting *all* of the examples set by the French revolutionaries. Thus, -

I wish my countrymen rather to recommend to our neighbours the example of the British constitution, than to take models from them for the improvement of our own.¹⁴⁷

And elsewhere, there is his famous dismissal of democracy in a single, highly prophetic, much quoted sentence:

I do not know under what description to class the present ruling authority in France. It affects to be a pure democracy, though I think it in a direct train of becoming shortly a mischievous and ignoble oligarchy.¹⁴⁸

(b) Paine vs. Burke : *Rights of Man* [part one] (1791)

[with a note on *The Age of Reason* (1794)]

Modern historians differ in their conclusions on the Paine-Burke controversy. Until a few years ago, the so-called "new Dickinsonian consensus" had prevailed, tending to the view that the intellectual forces of conservatism and loyalty, led by Burke, had won out against

¹⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p. 91.

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 111.

¹⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 375.

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 228.

the largely ‘superficial’ analysis by Paine of contemporary events in France. However, the late lamented J. R. Dinwiddy, in a brilliant counterblast, written not long before his untimely death in 1990, ventured that there was a different way of seeing the controversy: that it could, and probably should, be approached in terms, not of a confrontation between conservatism and revolution, but between “conservatism and redistributive radicalism”:

The essence of Paine’s critique of the late eighteenth-century government machine in England was that it was mainly a device for raising money from the consuming population at large and transferring it into the pockets of placeholding members of the oligarchy; whereas it *could* operate, he believed – if it was turned into a genuinely representative government – to transfer resources in the opposite direction, raising money by progressive taxation and using it to finance such things as old-age pensions and popular education.¹⁴⁹

If Paine’s famous response to Burke failed to have the immediate *political* effect of *Common Sense* (as Ayer maintains), it is equally true that even among the most outspoken of British reformers, despite the book’s phenomenal sales, *Rights of Man* was probably not at first received with universal approbation, least of all seen as a kind of *vade mecum* for ‘friends of the people’. Moreover, if he can be believed, it is surprising – and missed by most scholars of the period – that Thomas Muir claimed at his Edinburgh trial that he did not consider *Rights of Man* the kind of book he could recommend to “*his* Friends” (meaning of course the Scottish branches of the Friends of the People) on the important ground that “the spirit of republicanism breathes through all his writings”. “The principles” contained in Paine’s writings, Muir said at his trial, “might mislead the people ... and might misguide weak minds.” Republicanism, Muir went on, was Paine’s “darling system”. For his own part, Muir

did not present to them the splendid fabrics of ancient or modern republics; I wished them to keep their eyes confined at home, to repair their own mansion rather than pull it down.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ J.R. Dinwiddy, “Interpretations of Anti-Jacobinism” in *Radicalism and Reform in Britain, 1780-1850*, London and Rio Grande, Ohio, pp. 196-7. The ‘Dickinsonian consensus’ emerged from books by H.T. Dickinson, Ian Christie and others, including, most notably, Dickinson’s *Liberty and Property – Political Ideology in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, London, 1977, and Christie’s *Stress and Stability in late Eighteenth-Century Britain: Reflections on the British Avoidance of Revolution*, Oxford, 1984.

¹⁵⁰ Muir’s trial is covered in Howell’s *State Trials, XXIII*, 117-237. See also chapter 3, 139-145 below.

Of course, the hidden irony in Muir's hesitation to recommend *Rights of Man* lies in his recognition of the book's uncompromisingly radical, 'dangerous' content, any acknowledgment of which at the trial would have undoubtedly condemned him without the need for further legal embellishment.

Similarly, as his voluntary counsel, Thomas Erskine, put it in the course of Paine's trial for sedition *in absentia* in December 1792, it had been the second part of *Rights* that had proved the last straw for the government:

The First Part of the Rights of Man, Mr. Attorney General tells you, he did not prosecute, although it was in circulation through the country for a year and a half together, because it seems it circulated only amongst what he styles the judicious part of the public, who possessed in their capacities and experience an antidote to the poison; but that with regard to the Second Part now before you, its circulation had been forced into every corner of society; had been printed and reprinted for cheapness even upon whited brown paper, and had crept into the very nurseries of children, as a wrapper for their sweetmeats.¹⁵¹

And at Muir's trial, in the course of his speech in his own defence, Muir had appealed to the Court:

Is there a single man among you who has not read the Works either of Paine or of Burke? Is there a person upon the bench, upon the jury, or in this audience, who has not either purchased or lent the Treatise upon the Rights of Man?¹⁵²

It was a rhetorical question. Yet, for all that, one can almost see Robert McQueen (Braxfield) and Robert Dundas squirming uncomfortably in their chairs. For Muir was unquestionably right. *Everyone* was reading *Rights of Man*.

Of course, part of the reason for the mass appeal of *Rights of Man* was its author's 'vulgarity' and his barely concealed propagandism - ironically, the very charge most frequently levelled against Burke in *Reflections*. One of the best known sections of Burke's book concerns his unfortunate reference to the 'lower orders' of the *people* as the class that would ensure that "learning will be cast into the mire, and trodden down under the hoofs of a *swinish multitude*", a phrase that would guarantee Burke's public notoriety, at least in the eyes of reformers and radicals everywhere, right up to his death in 1797 and well beyond.

¹⁵¹ *ibid.*, XXII, 419.

¹⁵² *ibid.*, XXIII, 206.

But what it was about *Rights of Man* that explains its unprecedented mass appeal? What was its special quality that led Alexander Wilson, the weaver-poet of Paisley, to write at the time:

“The *‘Rights of Man’* is now weel kenned,
And read by many a hunder;
For Tammy Paine the buik has penned,
And lent the Courts a lounder ...”¹⁵³

Undoubtedly, it was in part simply the pure rhetoric of Paine’s remarkable book that penetrated the minds and hearts of people; rhetoric allied, that is, to wonderfully pithy epigrammatic prose that sat more comfortably alongside the journalese of the best contemporary newspaper than the often stilted language of the eighteenth century essay or political treatise. In Paine’s own taunting words, the prose of Burke, compared with his own, was “gay and flowery” - and verbose and circumlocutory into the bargain:

I know a place in America called Point-no-Point; because as you proceed along the shore, gay and flowery as Mr. Burke’s language, it continually recedes and presents itself at a distance before you; but when you have got as far as you can go, there is no point at all. Just thus it is with Mr. Burke’s three hundred and fifty-six pages.¹⁵⁴

But though his easy prose - with its journalistic flair for the snappy aphorism - may account for some of its success, that is scarcely the point. Nothing detracts from the plain-crafted bluntness of Paine’s radical message which was the real reason behind the phenomenon that was *Rights of Man*. It is a straightforward, direct message and can be summed up in a few sentences:

- Burke is wrong to dismiss the revolution in France. His book is a case of “darkness attempting to illuminate light”. Instead, Price got it right when he hailed the revolution as the fulfilment of a right “resident in the nation”, a right that Burke denies exists.
- “Every generation is equal in rights to the generations which preceded it, by the same rule that every individual is born equal in rights with his contemporary.”

¹⁵³ Alexander Wilson, *Address to the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr* by “Lawrie Nettle”. See chapter 6 below.

¹⁵⁴ *Rights of Man*, ed. Eric Foner, Penguin Classics edition, New York and London, 1985, p. 49.

- A “general revolution in the principle and construction of governments is necessary” and the Americans and the French have shown how that can be achieved in England. There are, however, *two* kinds of revolution – active and passive – and of these the passive one is to be preferred; that is, by “reason, accommodation, and general consent.”
- “Society and civilization” is all-inclusive and “man is so naturally a creature of society” that he cannot be put “out of it”.
- A constitution is “the property of a nation, and not of those who exercise the government”. In England, by contrast, “everything has a constitution, except the nation”. A country’s constitution is, therefore, not the “act of its government, but of the people constituting a government.”
- Monarchies do not constitute legal governments. The difference between “a republican” and “a courtier with respect to monarchy” is that the one opposes monarchy, “believing it to be something”, while “the other laughs at it knowing it to be nothing”. [It is, note, the *institution* of monarchy that Paine opposes and not the persons of either George III or Louis XVI.]

Running through this entire vision is Paine’s theory of natural rights. It is the classic eighteenth century world order adapted to his radical idea of democratic republican polity. It is important to remind ourselves of Paine’s clear statement of his belief in the natural rights theory as he perceived it:

Natural rights are those which appertain to man in right of his existence. Of this kind are all the intellectual rights, or rights of the mind, and also all those rights of acting as an individual for his own comfort and happiness, which are not injurious to the natural rights of others. – Civil rights are those which appertain to man in right of his being a member of society. Every civil right has for its foundation, some natural right pre-existing in the individual, but to the enjoyment of which his individual power is not, in all cases, sufficiently competent. Of this kind are all those which relate to security and protection.¹⁵⁵

The modern English philosopher and author of *Language, Truth and Logic*, A. J. Ayer, has pointed out the weaknesses in Paine’s thought in relation to his natural rights ideas bearing on the notion of lawful government. Paine believes that the traditional (i.e.

¹⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 68.

Lockean) contractualist theory of “compacts” existing between the governors and the governed in the state of nature falls down when one considers that

as man must have existed before governments existed, there necessarily was a time when governments did not exist, and consequently there could originally exist no governors to form such a compact with. The fact therefore must be, that the *individuals themselves*, each in his own personal and sovereign right, entered into a compact with each other to produce a government: and this is the only mode in which governments have a right to arise, and the only principle on which they have a right to exist.¹⁵⁶

Accordingly, so Paine argues, it is wrong to think of “the principles of freedom” being advanced on the basis of establishments of compacts originating between government and society; for him this is “putting the effect before the cause”. To Ayer, however, all this is flawed since there is a basic contradiction here:

On the one hand, we have found him holding that society precedes any form of government; on the other, he now goes on to say that only governments of reason “arise out” of society. ... Without mentioning Locke, Paine rejects Locke’s theory of the social contract as being a contract between a sovereign, whether it be a single person or an assembly, and the persons who voluntarily put themselves under the sovereign’s rule. ... Paine’s argument is fallacious, since Locke’s theory is consistent with the parties to the contract choosing a sovereign among themselves, rather than agreeing to acknowledge a sovereign who already existed as such. Neither is it conclusive on the question at issue, since it does not explicitly reject Locke’s view of the individuals who participate in the social contract as only thereby emerging from the state of nature.¹⁵⁷

At least Paine’s words here are consistent with his statement in *Common Sense*, composed fifteen years before, on the eve of another, very different revolution: “A government of our own is our natural right.” In the same way, his image of monarchical government has altered from one of the tyrant king (1776) to that of the illegal king (1791). While Ayer’s instinctive criticism of Paine’s false reasoning in his admittedly deeply flawed concept of the Lockean contract theory (where Paine’s lack of attention to detail, and, worse, his lack of knowledge of philosophical tradition, are undeniable), Ayer in one sense misses the real point: that it was precisely this careless disdain of knowledge for knowledge’s sake, and Paine’s greater concern for flourish and effect, that succeeds in making *Rights of Man* the political powder-keg in the view of government. It is, in every

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p. 70.

¹⁵⁷ A. J. Ayer, *Thomas Paine*, Chicago, 1988, p. 80.

sense, a radical book and in that regard at least it did not disappoint its adoring reading public - the ‘people’.

The phrase the “age of reason” is first used by Paine in the second part of *Rights of Man* which many - including Ayer - have seen as a kind of blueprint for the first welfare state, containing as it does numerous radical ideas relating to poor relief, care of the aged, reform of taxation, state pensions, etc. Above all, though it may appear naive to the modern sceptical reader, Paine’s prescription for peace on earth - at least in the western world as he understood it - and for the economic and political liberation of Spanish South America, are far ahead of their time. For Paine in 1792 the catch-all term ‘age of reason’ was employed by him to represent a new state of human liberty, ruled, one suspects, by the principles that informed, and now governed, America and France with their heady mix of equality and republican freedoms:

Never did so great an opportunity offer itself to England, and to all Europe, as is produced by the two revolutions of America and France. By the former, freedom has a national champion in the Western world; and by the latter, in Europe. ... the iron is becoming hot all over Europe. The insulted German and the enslaved Spaniard, the Russ and the Pole, are beginning to think. The present age will hereafter merit to be called the Age of Reason, and the present generation will appear to the future as the Adam of a new world.¹⁵⁸

When, however, he came to use the same phrase for the title of a book he had planned while a fugitive from Pitt’s book police in France in 1794, he adapted it for a quite different purpose - for an assault on organised religion, including Christianity, from the standpoint of his Deist beliefs.¹⁵⁹ Unfortunately for him, however, his Deism was confused

¹⁵⁸ Foner edition of *Rights of Man*, p. 268.

¹⁵⁹ The first part of Paine’s book in French, *Le Siècle de la Raison*, which lists the translator, François Lanthenas, as its author, was published in Paris. Only one copy has survived, now in the library of the American Philosophical Society, Gimbel Collection. * As Keane points out, however, *Le Siècle de la Raison* “differs substantially from its English-language sequel, *The Age of Reason; Being an Investigation of True and Fabulous Theology* (Paris: Printed by Barrois, 1794.), including that, “significantly, the latter’s opening jeremiad about ‘the total abolition of the whole national order of priesthood, and of every thing appertaining to compulsive systems of religion, and compulsive articles of faith’ does not appear in *Le Siècle de la Raison*.” John Keane, *Tom Paine A Political Life*, New York and London, 1995, pp. 389 and note 17 on p. 599.

* *Le Siècle de la Raison, ou Le Sens Commun des Droits de l’Homme: Par. F. Lanthenas, Député à la Convention Nationale: Suivi d’un Tableau frappant du despotisme & fanatisme ancien & moderne dédié à tous les Sans-culottes de la République Française & à nos Descendants; par le Citoyen Néez, propagateur de l’esprit révolutionnaire.* [I am grateful to Roy Goodman of the APS for sending me a copy of this rarest of title pages.]

with atheism in the eyes and minds of too many of his readers and for Thomas Paine the publication of the *Age of Reason* marked the beginning of the end.

(c) Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) and William Godwin's *Enquiry concerning Political Justice* (1793)

The modern description of Mary Wollstonecraft, and that favoured by Kramnick and others, is that she was a “radical feminist”. To a student of the eighteenth century it is remarkable just how radical it was for a woman at that time to claim that women had any rights at all. In all my preparatory reading for this study virtually *only* Wollstonecraft's name is associated with the case for woman's rights.¹⁶⁰ We have to wait a full hundred years and more before a momentum in the direction of woman's rights could secure any recognisable kind of organisational platform in Britain. Ironically, moreover, however uncompromisingly radical Wollstonecraft's books were undoubtedly regarded in her lifetime, the two *Vindications* do not appear in any of the catalogues of contemporary radical booksellers, notably Alexander Leslie's. The most tragic irony of all, however, is identified by Isaac Kramnick, the modern editor of *Political Justice* (1793), a huge book written by Wollstonecraft's future lover (and eventually her husband), William Godwin.¹⁶¹ Kramnick relates the tragic story of Wollstonecraft's death of puerperal fever in September 1797 shortly after giving birth to their daughter, Mary, the future wife of the

¹⁶⁰ But as E. P. Thompson (*The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 178) points out it was a *man* – Thomas Spence (1750-1814) – who took up the cause of mothers (“one of the only Jacobin propagandists to address his writings to working women”) in his pamphlet, *The Rights of Infants; or, the Imprescriptable [sic] Right of Mothers to such a share of the elements as is sufficient to enable them to suckle and bring up their young in a dialogue between the aristocracy and a mother of children. To which are added, by way of preface and appendix, strictures on Paine's Agrarian justice. By T. Spence, Author of the Real Rights of Man, End of Oppression, Reign of Felicity, Pigs' Meat, &c. London: printed for the author, at No. 9, Oxford-Street, lately removed from No. 8, Little Turnstile.* [n.d., but 1797 according to ESTC]. For all that, Spence “believed women should be excluded from positions of political responsibility because of what he termed the delicacy of their sex.” (H. T. Dickinson, “Thomas Spence, radical and bookseller”, Oxford DNB, online version, 2004-2010). Even the republican historian Catherine Macaulay (1731-91), whom Wollstonecraft revered, had little practical interest in what today we would call the feminist ‘movement’.

¹⁶¹ They had first met at a dinner party in the home of the publisher, Joseph Johnson, in November 1791 but had only married, after Mary discovered she was pregnant, in March 1797. [Oxford DNB article on Mary Wollstonecraft by Barbara Taylor, online version, 2004-2010, pp. 13-14.]

poet Shelley and author, at the age of 21, of the novel, *Frankenstein* : and he comments that it was peculiarly “a woman’s lot” to die in such circumstances.

What today is called her ‘second *Vindication*’¹⁶² – the first, of course, having been *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*¹⁶³ (1790) written as a reply to Burke’s *Reflections* – came out in 1792, with a second edition in that year and the whole work reprinted in 1796, the same year as the first (Mathew Carey) American edition. Beyond doubt, and by any reckoning, Wollstonecraft, by her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* alone, earns her rightful place as a major writer of the Radical Enlightenment ‘school’, fully entitled to her position of prominence in that regard alongside the likes of Price, Priestley, Paine and Godwin. Certainly, Israel is in no doubt that her contribution to the feminist cause – at a time when it was quite simply unthinkable for women to contend for anything like equal status with men – is immense.

The sheer ‘impertinence’ of her claim is breathtaking : women, she said, were seen by men everywhere as “pretty nothings”, -

... they are still reckoned a frivolous sex, and ridiculed or pitied by the writers who endeavour by satire or instruction to improve them.¹⁶⁴

Marriage, for women of property, was no more than a legalised trap of total subordination to their husbands, such that “the most respectable women are the most oppressed”. We would be wrong, however, if we thought no more of her work than to regard it as merely a list of gripes on the subject of men’s “brutal”, inhumane treatment of women – though the *Vindication* does certainly contain that kind of language too. But it is clearly much more than that. Wollstonecraft is at pains to indicate, with constructive suggestions, how, in her view, the worst grievances she enumerates can be tackled and the abuses remedied.

¹⁶² *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects. By Mary Wollstonecraft. London: Printed for J. Johnson, No 72, St. Paul’s Church Yard. 1792.* Johnson published a second edition in the same year. In 1794 Matthew Carey of Philadelphia published the first American edition. Joseph Johnson published Godwin’s *Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman* - which also went into two editions – in 1798.

¹⁶³ *A Vindication of the Rights of Men, in a Letter to The Right Honourable Edmund Burke; occasioned by his Reflections on the Revolution in France. London: Printed for J. Johnson, No. 72, St. Paul’s Church-Yard. M.DCC.XC.* Notice that, interestingly and significantly, this ‘first’ *Vindication* does not bear her name on the title p. as author whereas the ‘second’ does.

¹⁶⁴ *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792, first edition), Introduction, p. 8.

Reserving her most withering criticism for Rousseau (who treats women with consummate disdain in works like *Emile*) she coolly proceeds to say of him:

His ridiculous stories, which tend to prove that girls are *naturally* attentive to their persons, without laying any stress on daily example, are below contempt.¹⁶⁵

She had also to face a barrage of scorn and ridicule – at times, the most scathing from writers of her own sex like Hannah More. Indeed, she reserves her greatest anger for her own sex:

Pleasure is the business of a woman's life, according to the present modification of society, and while it continues to be so, little can be expected from such weak beings. ... Women, in particular, all want to be ladies. Which is simply to have nothing to do, but listlessly to go they scarcely care where, for they cannot tell what.¹⁶⁶

For all that, however, Wollstonecraft is first and foremost a political writer. Take, for example -

... till more equality be established in society, till ranks are confounded and women freed, we shall not see that dignified domestic happiness, the simple grandeur of which cannot be relished by ignorant or vitiated minds; nor will the important task of education ever be properly begun till the person of a woman is no longer preferred to her mind. ... Let woman share the rights, and she will emulate the virtues of man; for she must grow more perfect when emancipated, or justify the authority that chains such a weak being to her duty.¹⁶⁷

Or the following, almost Paineite dismissal of the contemporary 'system' of parliamentary representation and of the nexus of working class injustice and monarchical excess:

... as the whole system of representation is now, in this country, only a convenient handle for despotism, they [women] need not complain, for they are as well represented as a numerous class of hard working mechanics, who pay for the support of royalty when they can scarcely stop their children's mouths with bread. How are they represented whose very sweat supports the splendid stud of an heir apparent, or varnishes the chariot of some female favourite who looks down on shame? Taxes on the very necessaries of life, enable an endless tribe of idle princes and princesses to pass with stupid pomp before a gaping crowd, who almost worship the very parade which costs them so dear. This is mere gothic grandeur, something like the barbarous useless parade of having sentinels on horseback at Whitehall, which I could never view without a mixture of contempt and indignation.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p. 86.

¹⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p. 116.

¹⁶⁷ *ibid.*, p. 444.

¹⁶⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 335-6.

William Godwin's massive book, the *Enquiry concerning Political Justice*¹⁶⁹ was published in two volumes in 1793 by the London publisher and radical sympathiser, George Robinson, who had only two years previously published James Mackintosh's *Vindiciae Gallicae: Defence of the French Revolution and Its English Admirers* (1791). The *Enquiry* is, in part only, a work of political science. Much of it – especially with the wholesale changes he effected from the third edition of 1798 – is more in the nature of a general treatise on his idiosyncratic brand of moral and social philosophy. In its day, however, it was seen (as it should be seen today) as a great manifesto of anarchistic belief, though now it is hardly read at all. It is interesting and significant that *Political Justice* is included in Leslie's 1796-97 catalogue of radical political writings but I suspect that this has more to do with its author's great contemporary reputation, as "the Philosopher" (*and* the book's misleading title), than for any appeal it might have had to the reader of Paine, Holcroft or the trial proceedings of the Scottish martyrs. Even so, Godwin, whose father had been a Sandamanian (Glasite)¹⁷⁰ minister educated at Doddridge's dissenting academy at Northampton, deserves to be remembered in the context of this study if only for his passionate concern for *injustice* which he saw everywhere around him. It is sometimes overlooked, moreover, that while it is certainly true that *Political Justice* never carried the immediate street credo of *Rights of Man*, Godwin immersed himself in the radical and reform movement of his day, having been present, for example, at Richard Price's Old Jewry sermon in 1789, Paine's trial *in absentia* in 1792 and the London treason trials in November-December 1794. Not only that: he actually visited the Woolwich hulks and conversed with Muir and Palmer while they awaited transportation.

Godwin's novel, *Things as they are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794), a fictional *Political Justice*, continues the theme of exposing contemporary injustice. Indeed, it was written in part

¹⁶⁹ *Enquiry concerning Political Justice, and Its Influences on General Virtue* [from the second edition, changed to *Morals*] *and Happiness*. By William Godwin. In *Two Volumes*. [Vol. I.] London: Printed for G. G. J. And J. Robinson, Paternoster-Row. M.DCC.XCIII.

¹⁷⁰ Glasites were followers of John Glas (1695-1773), minister of Tealing, Forfarshire, who was deposed by the General Assembly for his book, *Testimony of the King of Martyrs* (1727). Glas formed at Dundee a sect of Independent Presbyterians, later removed to Perth where he was joined by Robert Sandeman (1718-1771), later his son-in-law. Sandeman was originally a linen manufacturer at Perth, then exercised his own ministry in Perth, Dundee, Edinburgh and London. In 1764 Sandeman went to New England and a year later founded his church at Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

to expose the evils which arise out of the present system of civilised society; and to lead the enquiring reader to examine whether they are safe ... irremediable ... to disengage the minds of men from presuppositions, and to launch them upon the sea of moral and political enquiry.¹⁷¹

It cannot be overstated that, in the final analysis, Godwin's novel is no more than a thinly disguised, much more accessible distillation of *Political Justice*.

E. P. Thompson's judgment is probably right when he says of the relative inaccessibility of *Political Justice*: that its influence "was confined to a small and highly literate circle" - which he interestingly contrasts in that regard with Volney's *Ruins of Empire*, published in cheap pocket book format "and [which] remained in the libraries of many artisans in the nineteenth century".¹⁷²

Appropriately, the final words in this chapter belong to Godwin who begins *Political Justice* with an iteration of the "principles" he intends to develop in the volumes that follow. These include:

I The true object of moral and political [my emphasis - RLC] disquisition is pleasure or happiness. ...

II The injustice and violence of men in a state of society produced the demand for government. Government, as it was forced upon mankind by their vices, so has it commonly been the creature of their ignorance and mistake.

Government was intended to suppress injustice, but it offers new occasions and temptations for the commission of it.

By concentrating the force of the community, it gives occasion to wild projects of calamity, to oppression, despotism, war and conquest.

By perpetuating and aggravating the inequality of property, it fosters many injurious passions, and excites men to the practice of robbery and fraud.

Government was intended to suppress injustice, but its effect has been to embody and perpetuate it. ...¹⁷³

The last of Godwin's principles cited above - "*Government was intended to suppress injustice, but its effect has been to embody and perpetuate it*" - could almost be said to represent a kind of motto for this study. It is certainly as good a definition as any of what

¹⁷¹ Cited in D. Lock, *A Fantasy of Reason: the life and thought of William Godwin*, 1980, p. 72.

¹⁷² *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 107.

¹⁷³ William Godwin, *Enquiry concerning Political Justice*, Penguin Classics edition, ed. and with introduction by Isaac Kramnick, London, 1985, pp. 75-6. The Penguin text is from Godwin's third edition of 1798 which differs substantially from that of his first (1793) and, to a somewhat lesser extent, second edition (1796).

the liberty theme actually meant in the later eighteenth century and of what those striving to attain liberty kept in the forefront of their thinking in attempting, and, in the process, often failing to secure it.

Chapter Two

“That seditious infection”: Paisley and its radical traditions

“... that seditious infection which fevered the minds of the sedentary weavers, and working like flatulence the stomachs of the cotton-spinners ...”

John Galt, *Annals of the Parish*, Chapter 36, Year 1795¹

Bibliographical note

Superficially, it might be thought disappointing to find so few titles in Appendix A - a checklist of books and pamphlets printed in Paisley from 1769 to 1799 - *directly* bearing on the events of the early 1790s. One might perhaps have expected more Paisley imprints relating to Paisley as a prominent locus of radical/reformist activity in those years. However, as Bob Harris reminds us -

Scottish radicalism in the 1790s produced few pamphlets of note and only two short-lived newspapers.²

In relation to pamphlets with a Paisley provenance, that is perhaps open to question. Even so, the point behind my opening sentence remains valid. Thus, the loyalist pamphlet of 1792 - *The Paisley Weaver’s Letter to his Neighbours and Fellow Tradesmen* - is the work of the office of the (loyalist) *Glasgow Courier*, though there are special reasons why that should have been so. Again, with one notably odd exception,³ there are no Paine reprints printed in Paisley or published by Paisley booksellers; and hardly any of the cruder derivatives that were in evidence from time to time in active reformist centres elsewhere in Scotland (e.g. Perth) and especially, of course, in Glasgow and Edinburgh. An interesting exception is the weaver and moderate reformer, David Lawson’s, *Thoughts on Liberty and on Mr. Paine’s Writings*.⁴

On the other hand, what is, I suggest, of great interest in the checklist are those titles whose contents, on closer examination, are fully intelligible *only* in the context of

¹ John Galt, *Annals of the Parish*, (with *The Ayrshire Legatees* and *The Provost*), ed., with an introduction by Ian Campbell, The Saltire Society, Edinburgh, 2002, p. 117.

² Bob Harris, *The Scottish People and the French Revolution*, London, 2008, p. 5.

³ *Letter to Camille Jordan* (Appendix A, 201-97).

⁴ Appendix A, 133-92.

contemporary events and the anxious and troubled spirit of the times. Special attention, therefore, should be paid in that context to the numerous religious works printed by John Neilson throughout the second half of the 1780s and into the early years of the final decade, many of which are calculated to appeal to seceding congregations and, thus, one suspects, to weaving communities more generally. As it happens, this period also coincides with the vast and numerous outpourings of James Maxwell (1720-1800), self-styled “poet in Paisley”, who as Carruthers⁵ and Crawford⁶ have discovered, may be of little or no interest as a man of letters, but is of considerable historical importance as a commentator on contemporary events, as well as a bibliographical phenomenon in his own right. Maxwell is also important as an acquaintance of the Paisley weaver and radical poet, Alexander Wilson, and will be considered in greater detail in that special context in chapter 6 below.

1 “We’re all radicals here!”

The radical traditions of Paisley are well known. From the ‘black nebs’⁷ of ‘Pitt’s Terror’ of the 1790s to the Radical War of 1819-20 and the Chartist movement of the 1840s, Paisley seems to have been unusually prominent as a locus of political turmoil and protest. In modern times, Willie Gallacher, the only Communist returned as a Member of Parliament (not for Paisley, but for the West Fife constituency) belonged to Paisley and died there in 1965. His funeral – according to the *Paisley Daily Express* – attracted an estimated 10,000 people, lining the streets of the town, to pay their last respects as the cortege made its way to the local crematorium. “Nothing had ever been seen like it before” was the banner headline.⁸ In an earlier age, the Covenanting martyrs James Algie and John Park were executed for refusing the abjuration oath in Paisley in 1685.

⁵ J. C. Hadden, rev. G. Carruthers, Oxford DNB article on James Maxwell, “pseudo-poet of Paisley”, (online edition, 2004-10).

⁶ Robert Crawford *The Bard*, London, 2009, p. 324

⁷ e.g. “Cameron was a ’93 ‘black-neb’ Democrat, and had a great fund of solid information on almost every subject then known. ... William M’Lerie ... ,too, was tainted with ‘Black-nebism’ in politics, and in his younger years had had to abscond for a time for having been a member of the National Convention in 1793.” David Gilmour, *The Pen Folk*, Edinburgh, 1898, pp. 258 and 261.

⁸ *Paisley Daily Express*, 23 August 1965. Gallacher (1881-1965) had the ‘distinction’ of having been sentenced to imprisonment for sedition (1916) and for rioting (1919).

Sylvia Clark knew what she was doing, therefore, when she entitled one of the chapters of her popular and well-researched book *Paisley, a history*, “We’re all radicals here!”.⁹ In the same way, Catriona Macdonald was inspired to document the story of Liberal politics and the textiles industry in the town in its Victorian heyday in her fine book, *The Radical Thread*.¹⁰ My aim in this chapter, therefore, is to focus on the background to reformist/radical activity in Paisley in the final decade of the eighteenth century and to try to identify factors that contributed to the town’s contemporary and historical reputation in that regard. The chapter concludes with a brief analysis of three pamphlets of significance – one reformist and two loyalist – together with three case studies of prominent individuals, each of them important in their age and highly germane to this study.

3 Urbanisation and population growth

Quoting Jan de Vries, T.M. Devine has shown that from 1750 to 1800 the percentage of total population living in towns in Scotland with over 10,000 inhabitants rose from 9.2 to 17.3 – a huge rise of around 88%. For England and Wales the rise is from 16.7 in 1750 to 20.3 in 1800, a much more modest 22%. This has to be compared with countries in continental Europe – in the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and France – where the percentage of total population living in towns actually *declined* over the same time frame. The increase in urban population (as defined above) in Scotland at 1800, compared with that in 1750, comes out at a staggering 132%. The comparable increase *mutatis mutandis* is a much more modest 83% in England and Wales.¹¹

However, although we can arrive at the provenance of residents of Scottish towns and cities from a simple extrapolation of birthplace statistics from the 1851 census (showing, interestingly, as just one example, that from a snapshot taken at that year more than 12.5% of Paisley residents were born in Ireland, many percentage points higher than in

⁹ Edinburgh, 1988.

¹⁰ Scottish Historical Review Monograph No. 7, East Linton, 2000. Macdonald (p. 306) cites my unpublished Glasgow University B. Litt thesis, *Literary Activity in Paisley in the Early Nineteenth Century*, 1965, as a secondary source.

¹¹ T. M. Devine, *The Scottish Nation*, London, 1999, pp. 152-4. Devine’s source is Jan de Vries, *European Urbanisation, 1500-1850*, London, 1984, pp. 39-48. See also Devine’s contribution, entitled “Urbanisation” (chapter 2), to *People and Society in Scotland 1760-1830* vol.1, ed. T. M. Devine and Rosalind Mitchison, Edinburgh, 1988, pp. 27-31.

the case of either Glasgow or Edinburgh), the evidence of residential provenance in our towns for the 1790s more generally can only, in the last analysis, be mainly anecdotal.

Nevertheless, in 1782 in Paisley we learn from Semple's continuation of Crawford's *History of the Shire of Renfrew* that a third of the total of muslin "manufacturing houses" (six out of 18) were London owned, with the implication that some at least of the operatives (like as not from the Spitalfields area, the centre of the textiles industry in London throughout the eighteenth century) may have made their way north, probably in a supervisory capacity only, at the instigation of their employers and with the attraction of high wages. Similarly, in the thriving soap and tallow (i.e. candle-making) industry in the town it was "a man from London at very high wages" who was engaged to develop the high quality finished product that would produce outstanding results and sell best.¹²

We are on firmer ground when we examine actual population growth. It is not an exaggeration that the growth in population of Paisley at the turn of the 18th and into the first decade of the 19th century - and the pace and momentum of that growth - is staggering. Smout calls it "an extreme case".¹³ Sinclair's *Statistical Account* published in 1793, with figures germane to the year before, shows the population of (i) the Town of Paisley and (ii) the Abbey Parish of Paisley in 1755 and 1792 as follows:

1755

population of Town of Paisley - 4,290

population of Abbey Parish of Paisley - 2,509

combined - 6,799

1791/92

population of Town of Paisley (1792) - 13,800

population of Abbey Parish of Paisley (1791) - 10,792¹⁴

¹² George Crawford "and continued to the present Period by William Semple", *The History of the Shire of Renfrew...*, pp. 323-6, (Paisley, Alex. Weir, 1782.) See Appendix A, 49-82.

¹³ T. C. Smout, *A History of the Scottish People 1550-1830*, London, 1969, pp. 367-8.

¹⁴ Strictly, these figures will overstate the urban population since they include the "country part"; the Abbey Parish contributor in Sinclair gives the population for the Parish at 1791, whereas his Town counterpart lists it at 1792; and in 1801, the comparable aggregate figure for Town and Parish of Paisley rises to 31, 200, or a *further* 27%.

combined (1791/92) - 24,592 (19,903 if the total of town and suburbs “without the country part” is calculated)

Increase from 1755 to 1791/92 (combined Town and Abbey Parish) - 361%¹⁵

Smout’s table of population growth in Scotland’s largest towns clearly shows that from 1755 to 1801 the population of what in modern terms we might call the Paisley “conurbation” (admittedly a misleading term) rose almost five fold. No other town or city in Scotland in the 18th century grew so substantially or so fast.¹⁶ No other town or city in Scotland in the eighteenth century came anywhere *near* Paisley’s record expansion. According to Nisbet:

In Scotland as a whole, 45% of population growth in the period 1755-1801 was in towns. The growth of Paisley was particularly significant, rising from seventh position in 1755, and overtaking Perth, Inverness, Aberdeen and Dundee to become Scotland’s third largest town after Glasgow and Edinburgh, a position it retained into the nineteenth century.¹⁷

By 1831, the astonishing growth that Paisley had experienced - such that the town was then larger than any city or town in Scotland had been a century earlier - was quite without precedent. Further, there was “a degree of concentration and uniformity in one occupation that must have been unusual even at that date” and was to prove “a source of instability and weakness” later in the 19th century.

4 The rise and rise of ‘King’ Cotton and the wages factor

One of the most significant factors influencing the population explosion in towns at this time was rural to urban migration, a steady and rapid drift that was almost exclusively driven by high wages. As Devine states:

Higher wages than were usual in the rural economy and a greater range of employment opportunities helped to hasten migration to towns in the later eighteenth century to such an extent that Scottish farmers in the zones where urban growth concentrated were forced to raise wages in order to retain labour.¹⁸

¹⁵ Sir John Sinclair Bt., *The Statistical Account of Scotland*, Edinburgh, 1793, vol. 7, Town and Parish of Paisley, pp. 62-98. [The percentages are RLC’s]

¹⁶ Smout, Table II, p. 243 and p. 367. See also Stuart M. Nisbet, *The Rise of the Cotton Factory in Eighteenth Century Renfrewshire*, unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Paisley (now University of the West of Scotland), 2003, chapter 4, p. 89; and the same author’s “The Making of Scotland’s First Industrial Region: The Early Cotton Industry in Renfrewshire”, *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*, 29.1, 2009, 1-28.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, (Nisbet, PhD thesis), p. 89.

¹⁸ *The Scottish Nation 1700-2000*, p. 163.

Undoubtedly what prompted that migration from the countryside into a town such as Paisley was the nature of handloom weaving itself. Fraser points out that, after all,

plain weaving involved very little skill. It could be picked up in about three weeks, so there was potentially almost no limit to the expansion of the labour force.

But there was a downside to that, in that

... the weaver had very little bargaining leverage against an employer ...,¹⁹

- a factor that will become evident in a graphic example of the exploitation of weavers by a prominent Paisley owner (or ‘cork’) described in chapter 6 below.

The attraction of work in the various facets of the Paisley textiles economy was irresistible. That was particularly true after the steady and ultimately massive switch from the linen cloth trade in favour of other more lucrative specialties – first, ‘fancy’ silk gauze and, then, above all, cotton cloth weaving and thread making in the decade of the 1780s. Fraser is worth quoting *in extenso*:

From the 1750s Paisley, which had developed as an important fine linen centre, began to specialise in silk gauze manufacturing, with about 5,000 weavers involved in it at its peak in 1784. By 1776 it was claimed that over 12,000 people were employed in Paisley in linen and silk manufacture. Much was to change, however, from the 1780s with the coming of cotton. Within a decade it took over as the main Scottish textile. Of the 60,000 handloom weavers at the beginning of the nineteenth century, 50,000 were in cotton, six times more than eight years before. There were new workers, some formerly part-time country workers, many others the unemployed or the displaced from other trades. ...²⁰

Indeed, the demand for weavers’ services became, for a time, almost insatiable –

The coming of cotton and with it the movement of spinning into factories brought a great demand for handloom weavers’ services in the late 1780s and in the 1790s. This was the so-called ‘Golden Age’ of the handloom weavers when, it was reputed, they could earn 25s. or 30s. a week.²¹

Nisbet is even more specific about the tremendous variability in weavers’ wage rates :

Weavers’ rates in the Abbey parish were reputedly up to 60d. per day, a rate almost beyond belief If accurate, such rates can only be for webs of the very finest muslin or silk. Paisley manufacturers were certainly purchasing the ultimate quality of silk and mule yarns at the time. However, even lower quality weavers’ wages were still well above the day labour rate. The very broad range of pay in Paisley is confirmed by Hector who quotes 20 to 50d. per day.²²

¹⁹ W. Hamish Fraser *Conflict and Class - Scottish Workers 1700-1838* (Edinburgh, 1988), p. 32.

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ *ibid.*, p. 34

²² Nisbet, *The Rise of the Cotton Factory in Eighteenth Century Renfrewshire*, p. 122. The reference to “Hector” is to W. Hector, *Extracts from the Judicial Records of Renfrewshire*, Paisley, 1876, volume 2, p. 197.

But, quoting Norman Murray, Fraser warns

... such claims need to be treated with some caution. By no means all could attain such levels, and anything near that was likely to be for a very short period. It was a trade bedevilled by seasonal fluctuations and by cyclical fluctuations. ... None the less, weavers at this time were clearly amongst the best-paid groups and attracting increasing numbers.²³

This good-time/bad-time scenario, with its potentially calamitous wage-earning cycles and fluctuations, was to be graphically illustrated in the desperate times following the start of the war with France in 1793. Strikes took place in some trades in the west, notably in shoe and boot making, such that by the summer of 1793

... there was unemployment and distress on unprecedented levels, with claims that some people were dropping dead from hunger in the streets of Glasgow.²⁴

In the course of the good times in the textiles industry, however, the rise in living standards continued inexorably. According to Treble, the shift from linen cloth to cotton weaving lies in its impact on earnings and wages: the shift

... was the product of the dynamic demand for cotton weavers in the West where cotton had replaced linen as the dominant fabric in little more than a decade. What was taking place during the 1780s ... was a massive increase in the demand for all types of weavers - Murray has estimated an 80 per cent growth in their numbers during that decade --, an expansion in the full-time element of the labour force and enhanced opportunities for upward mobility in the labour market, all with positive consequences for the level of real earnings compared with mid-century.²⁵

As a footnote, in the course of time, these serious income 'fluctuations', so characteristic of the economy of the weavers, were set to degenerate into full-scale catastrophe. This strange conjunction of rising numbers and levels of pay is perfectly illustrated by Treble as follows : while weavers' standard of living had generally gone on rising well into the 19th century, with numbers of Scottish weavers employed increasing from c.25,000 in 1780 to c.78,000 in 1820, by 1811 the situation affecting their take-home pay was again parlous when, in that year,

it was claimed that rates had fallen to a third of what they had been when the table of rates had been agreed in 1792.²⁶

²³ *Conflict and Class - Scottish Workers 1700-1838*, pp. 34-5. Fraser cites Norman Murray, *The Scottish Handloom Weavers, 1790-1850: a Social History*, Edinburgh, 1978.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 70.

²⁵ J. H. Treble *The Standard of Living of the Working Class* in *People and Society in Scotland*, vol. I, chapter 10, p. 197.

²⁶ *Conflict and Class - Scottish Workers 1700-1838*, p. 85.

5 Handloom weavers – a “special people”

For Michael Lynch and others, in the second half of the eighteenth century the handloom weaver was “the fastest increasing trade in Scottish towns”.²⁷ And yet, as late as the 1830s “two-thirds of all handloom weavers were still based in villages or on the edges of towns”. As Lynch admits, it is “a muddled world” and he himself, it has to be said, adds a little to the potential for confusion when, a few lines later, he states that “even in the 1830s, looms were still located in rural villages as well as in specialist textile towns such as Paisley.”²⁸ At least Sinclair’s 1793 *Statistical Account* is unambiguous in relation to the town of Paisley:

The trade and manufactures of Paisley, which have always chiefly been in the weaving branch, are the main articles which render it of importance ...²⁹

From a bibliographical point of view, one of the most accessible ways of appreciating the pervasive presence of the weavers in the economy of a town like Paisley, and its immediate locale throughout west Renfrewshire, is to examine the subscription lists often appended to books of the period with a Paisley imprint. Richard B. Sher, for example, has employed that technique to good effect. In *The Enlightenment and the Book*³⁰ Sher refers to the eight volume set of *The Whole Works of the Reverend Robert Millar* which John Neilson printed and sold for Robert Reid in 1789.³¹ This is an important provincial title for two reasons: first, for a printer in Paisley an eight-volume set would have represented a considerable workload and capital outlay, even with a good response from subscribers. One suspects it is just possible that Neilson and/or Reid may have attracted part sponsorship for the enterprise from the wealthy surviving family of the author’s illustrious brother, the London publisher Andrew Millar, whom Sher describes as “the greatest [London] bookseller and publisher of the mid-eighteenth century”.³² Secondly,

²⁷ Easily the most comprehensive study of the economic history of handloom weaving in Scotland in the period is by Norman Murray – based on his Strathclyde Ph.D thesis – *The Scottish Handloom Weavers*, 1978. Murray is weak, however, on the radical connections with the trade, at least in the later eighteenth century where he seems to rely a shade too much on the unpublished Strathclyde M.Sc dissertation by C.M. Burns, *Industrial Labour and Radical Movements in Scotland in the 1790s*, Department of Politics, 1971.

²⁸ Michael Lynch, *Scotland - A new History*, London, 1991, pp. 383-5.

²⁹ Sinclair, p. 63.

³⁰ Chicago and London, 2006, pp. 276-7.

³¹ Appendix A, 96-89. *The Enlightenment and the Book*, p. 275, describes Robert Millar as “an ecclesiastical historian of some standing”.

³² See Sher’s account of Andrew Millar (1705-1768) in the Oxford DNB and his contribution, with Hugh Amory, *From Scotland to the Strand: the Genesis of Andrew Millar’s Bookselling Career in The Moving Market: Continuity and Change in the Book Trade* ed. Isaac and McKay (New

and less obviously, the name of the publisher may be significant. Apart from Millar's *Works*, Neilson had previously printed for Reid an edition of Martin Luther's *Commentary upon the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians* in 1786³³ and William Wisheart's *Theologia* in two volumes in 1787.³⁴ All three Reid titles contain lists of subscribers which, in itself, is unremarkable

It cannot be ruled out that this is the same Robert Reid who, as 'Vice President' of the 'United Societies of Paisley associated for Parliamentary Reform', is named, with Archibald Hastie³⁵ at the end of a declaration of aims published in the *Edinburgh Gazetteer* on 16th November 1792. Robert Reid's name is not mentioned in a much longer statement issued in the name of the same group that met barely one month later and whose meeting is reported in the *Gazetteer* for 1st January 1793. A 'William Reid' is named as 'Secretary' in the same announcement of 16th November and, while Robert's name has disappeared from the announcement of a meeting of the same political group one month later, William's name appears this time as the *only* one below Hastie's. It is not known if Robert and William were related. Using, however, the analogy of the Mitchell brothers,³⁶ operating in a different Paisley political group at precisely the same time and radical friends of the radical poet, Alexander Wilson, it cannot be ruled out that they were indeed related, though I concede that this is pure speculation.

The conjectures don't end there. A 'Robert Reid' is described as a 'weaver' in the subscription list appended to Knox's *The History of the Reformation of the Church of Scotland* [sic] printed by John Neilson for David Gardner in 1791.³⁷ A 'Robert Reid' is referred to as 'merchant, High Street' in the *Paisley Directory* for 1812-13. (Bob Harris calls him an 'ironmonger').³⁸ It is not known if Reid the weaver and the Robert Reid for whom Neilson printed his three titles in 1786-1789, not to mention the reformist agitator,

Castle, DE, 2001), pp. 51-70. The monument Millar erected in memory of his father Robert (the author of the *Whole Works*) and his mother Elizabeth Kelso Millar is transcribed by Semple, p. 304 and noted by Sher, p. 277, note 20. Regrettably, I have been unable to locate it in Paisley despite my best efforts.

³³ Appendix A, 64-86.

³⁴ Appendix A, 75-87.

³⁵ "Citizen Hastie", a baker in Paisley who was prominent enough in reformist/radical circles to take the chair at some of the sessions of the British Convention as 'President'.

³⁶ See chapter 6.

³⁷ Appendix A, 123-91.

³⁸ *The Scottish People and the French Revolution*, p. 104.

and the merchant of 1812/13, are one and the same man. It is by no means fanciful that he *could* have been all four – weaver, *quasi* publisher, would-be reformer and merchant/bookseller.

At that time, bookselling and part-time publishing – especially outside the big cities – were not inconsistent with the activities of a general merchant, or shopkeeper as we might term him today. Indeed, in the later 18th century – and in the Paisley of Reid’s own day – it is not uncommon for ‘merchants’ to set themselves up as booksellers or even occasional publishers. There are two fairly convincing examples to be cited in support of this contention. First, the Reverend Dr John Witherspoon’s *Trial of Religious Truth* was printed in Glasgow for James Wilken “bookseller, Paisley” in 1759 and two years later the same Wilken is described as “merchant in Paisley” on the title page of the sixth edition of James Durham’s *Christ Crucified*.³⁹ Secondly, and of considerably greater interest, William Creech’s Edinburgh edition of Burns’s *Poems* in 1787 was subscribed to in Paisley to the extent of no fewer than 90 copies. The order was transmitted to Burns personally by Alexander Pattison, “merchant”, who had personally subscribed for 12 copies. In a letter dated 11th May 1787 Burns addresses Pattison as “bookseller, Paisley”.⁴⁰ Although it is possible to believe that the poet was merely being facetious here, it is much more likely that Pattison (and his customers) would have recognised bookselling as a normal part of the activities of a general merchant.

Another example is to be found from the world of imaginative fiction. In John Galt’s *Annals of the Parish* [1821] for “Year 1790” the narrator records the opening of a bookseller’s shop in “Cayenneville”, then “spreading out with weavers’ shops, and growing up fast into a town”, and he comments:

... when I was going to dine with Mr Cayenne, at Wheatrig House, not a little to my amazement, did I behold a bookseller’s shop opened there, with sticks of red and black wax, pouncet-boxes, pens, pocket-books, and new publications, in the window, such as the like of which was only to be seen in cities and borough towns. ... The man sold likewise perfumery, powder-puffs, trinkets, and Dublin dolls, besides penknives, Castile soap, and walking sticks, together with a prodigy of other luxuries too tedious to mention.⁴¹

³⁹ See the note on Wilken in Ronald L. Crawford *Literary Activity in Paisley in the Early Nineteenth Century*, 2 vols., unpublished B.Litt thesis, University of Glasgow, 1965, vol.1, p. 54 and referenced in the NLS Scottish Book Trade Index (NLS online).

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 49-50.

⁴¹ *Annals of the Parish*, Saltire Society edition, ed. Ian Campbell, p. 104.

It then turns out that in conversing with the bookseller

... he told me that he had a correspondence with London, and could get me down any book published there within the same month in which it came out ... But what I was most surprised to hear, was that he took in a daily London newspaper for the spinners and weavers, who paid him a penny a week apiece for the same; they being all greatly taken up with what, at the time, was going on in France.⁴²

And then comes the bombshell -

This bookseller in the end, however, proved a whawp in our nest, for he was in league with some of the English reformers, and when the story took wind three years after, concerning the plots and treasons of the Corresponding Societies and democrats, he was fain to make a moonlight flitting, leaving his wife for a time to manage his affairs. I could not, however, think any ill of the man notwithstanding; for he had very correct notions of right and justice, in a political sense, and when he came into the parish he was as orderly and well behaved as any other body. ... Nor, at the time of which I am speaking, was there any dread or fear of reforming the government that has since been occasioned by the wild and wasteful hand which the French employed in their Revolution.⁴³

It scarcely takes a great effort of imagination to see Robert Reid and his like as an authentic archetype for Galt's fictional bookseller.

It is, however, the third, and chronologically the last of the books printed by Neilson for Reid⁴⁴ - the eight volume *Whole Works* of Robert Millar - that is most significant for our purpose on account of the subscription list that clearly interests Professor Sher. For Sher, it is the sheer *number* of subscribing weavers to a book of that title and content that most impresses. He writes:

... more than a thousand names appear, most of them identified by their occupations as artisans and tradesmen, including more than 350 weavers from Glasgow, Renfrewshire, and Ayrshire.⁴⁵

We can be a little more precise. The total number of individual subscribers to the eight volume edition of Millar's *Works* - some, of course, signing up for multiple copies - is 1,382 of whom 391 are weavers from outside Paisley (both Town and Parish) (28%) and 151 are Paisley weavers (as similarly defined) (11%). The ratio of weavers to other occupations named comes out at almost 40%. That may be thought extraordinary for a work of this kind.

Two more titles, not mentioned by Sher, also reward subscription analysis. In Richard Burnham's *Pious Memorials; or, the power of religion upon the mind*, printed for the

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ Appendix A, 96-89.

⁴⁵ *The Enlightenment and the Book*, pp. 276-7.

Paisley bookseller George Caldwell by John Neilson in 1788⁴⁶, the total number of subscribers' names is 697. Of these, 175 weavers subscribed from outside Paisley (25%) and 114 from the greater Paisley 'conurbation' (16%); taken together, weavers account for almost 42% of the total subscriptions taken up for this title.

It would, in theory, be quite entertaining (though by no means procedurally novel) to analyse book subscription lists in this way - provided of course the occupations of the subscribers are consistently listed. Unfortunately, for that latter reason, it is possible only surprisingly rarely since relatively few book subscription lists cite occupation in the case of each and every subscriber. Nevertheless, in an important title such as Knox's *History of the Reformation* printed by Neilson in 1791⁴⁷ one cannot fail to be impressed by the high proportion of weavers *among all occupations listed*. The book attracted a total of 1,564 subscribers but most frustratingly the printer seems to have abandoned recording occupations after the first couple of pages.

By contrast, a secular Paisley title like, for example, William Halbert's *The Practical Figurer* - a book published to assist readers in simple arithmetic and book-keeping printed by John Neilson in the same year as Millar's *Works* (1789) - took in only 312 subscribers although one of these, doubtless attracted by the reputation of the author whose name he would have instantly recognised (and in all probability known to the poet personally as a schoolmaster in Auchinleck near Ayr), describes himself with a characteristic flourish as "Robert Burns of Parnassus". Significantly, as we might expect, the majority of occupations in the case of this title are not of artisans but schoolmasters and teachers.⁴⁸

It may be banal, even unscholarly, but it remains true that the trade of handloom weaver has come to be associated with a love of, and thirst for, learning with an emphasis on biblical lore and *useful* learning. At it was so for English dissenters and cloth workers, it seems that the staple reading matter of the Scottish weavers was also a heady brew of the Bible and Bunyan, with Tom Paine thrown in for good measure.⁴⁹ As numerous social historians have concluded, allied to this innate desire for self-improvement was a

⁴⁶ Appendix A, 83-88.

⁴⁷ Appendix A, 123-91.

⁴⁸ Appendix A, 97-89.

⁴⁹ See E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, pp. 28-58.

fascination with politics and the contemporary issues that dominated conversation and ‘made’ the headlines in the newspapers of the day. Thus, Clarke and Dickson:

In weaving settlements such as those in Paisley, Radicalism [sic] could draw upon literate, close-knit communities which could and did sustain a high level of political culture.⁵⁰

Devine is more specific -

It was not surprising that the weavers were in the vanguard of the new radicalism. Their association with reform politics went back to the 1790s, when weaving villages had played an important part in the Association of Friends of the People, and specialist weaving towns like Paisley, with many families employed in the high-earning fancy trades, had sustained a lively culture of political debate and discussion.⁵¹

Harris is certainly not the first to attribute the emergence of the weaver poets of Paisley directly to a cultural milieu productive of sophisticated tastes in reading, which a contemporary source thought characteristic of the entire Scottish nation where

... the vulgar are, for their station, literate, perhaps, beyond all other nations.⁵²

Though it is beyond my period, it is also worth citing George Robertson, writing in 1818, continuing the Crawford/Semple *History*; he is also unequivocal in this regard:

There is another very prominent trait, in the character of the Paisley weavers, and that is, a pretty taste for books. If you enter into conversation with them, you will find many of them well informed on several subjects, particularly general history, natural history, religion, and, of late, politics.⁵³

Robertson’s comments are, of course, especially prescient given the ‘Radical War’ of one year later in which Paisley, and its textile workers, were to take an unusually active part.

Further, I hope I shall be forgiven for quoting Macdonald quoting from my B.Litt. thesis of 1965 in which I cite an anonymous author writing from Edinburgh a few years later:

The inhabitants of Paisley are ingenious and among the working classes, there is a degree of intelligence and a taste for literature, seldom met with.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Tony Clarke and Tony Dickson *The Birth of Class?* in *People and Society in Scotland*, p. 297.

⁵¹ *The Scottish Nation 1700-2000*, p. 223.

⁵² *The Scottish People and the French Revolution*, p. 39. The quotation is from Sinclair’s *Statistical Account of Scotland*, volume 10, Fife. New introduction, R. G. Cant (1978), pp. 48-9.

⁵³ *A General Description of the Shire of Renfrew ... Published in 1710, by George Crawford ... and continued to the present period, by George Robertson*, Paisley, Neilson, 1818, p. 337.

⁵⁴ Cited by Catriona M. M. Macdonald in *The Radical Thread*, p. 42. The quotation Macdonald borrows from my 1965 thesis is from a pamphlet published anonymously in Edinburgh in 1828

In *The Pen Folk*, his classic memoir of the weavers of Paisley from a past age, David Gilmour, writing in 1876, recalls the reading habits of one James Andrew, a weaver in the early 1800s -

Books, then a rarer commodity than now, were scattered over every available spot in the large kitchen, and in great demand after the day's labour. Milton, Burns, Shakespeare, and volumes of the 'Spectator' might be found mixed in admirable confusion with Brown's 'Commentary and Concordance', Bunyan, Bibles and The Questions. Next to 'Joshua's Wars', Shakespeare was the book of books, however ...⁵⁵

For John Galt, not all of a weaver's learning was so home-spun, though the narrator, Mr Balwhidder, chronicling the year 1795, is careful to distinguish between the rural workers in the parish and the 'sedentary' weavers, wedded as they were to the dangerous new ideas of liberty and reform -

I cannot say... that there was any increase of corruption among the rural portion of my people; for their vocation calling them to work apart, in the purity of the free air of heaven, they were kept uncontaminated by that seditious infection which fevered the minds of the sedentary weavers, and working like flatulence the stomachs of the cotton-spinners, sent up into their heads vain and diseased fumes of infidel philosophy.⁵⁶

In relation to literacy among the 'lower orders' more generally at this time in Scotland, Bob Harris quotes from Sinclair's *Statistical Account* for Fife, from the village of Auchterderran, in the early 1790s:

In common with the rest of Scotland, the vulgar are, for their station, literate, perhaps, beyond all other nations. Puritanic and abstruse divinity come in for a sufficient share in their little stock of books; and it is perhaps peculiar to them, as a people, that they endeavour to form opinions, by reading, as well as by frequent conversation. ... They likewise read, occasionally, a variety of books unconnected with such subjects.

And Harris adds:

It was from a similar cultural milieu that the weaver poets of Paisley and Renfrewshire emerged towards the end of the century, among their number several notable radicals.⁵⁷

6 The religious factor

(a) The spread of seceding and dissenting congregations, and (b) the influence of Evangelical ministries

entitled *Short Account of the Town of Paisley*. See also my Glasgow B.Litt thesis, volume I, p. 1 and pp. 57-57a.

⁵⁵ David Gilmour, *Paisley Weavers of Other Days with The Pen Folk et cetera*, Edinburgh, 1898 edition, p. 253.

⁵⁶ *Annals of the Parish* (first published 1821), Saltire Society edition, ed. Ian Campbell, p. 117.

⁵⁷ *The Scottish People and the French Revolution*, p. 39.

From various printed sources including Crawford/Semple (1782), Sinclair (1793) and the more obscure *History of Glasgow; and of Paisley, Greenock and Port Glasgow* by Andrew Brown,⁵⁸ we can form an accurate picture of the churches and denominations in Paisley in the later eighteenth century, especially over the fifteen year period until just before the turn of the century. Apart from the 12th century Abbey church itself (1160), the established Kirk was represented in three other worshipping congregations - the Laigh Church (1735), the High Church (1755-56) and the Middle Church (1781). In addition to these, there were several flourishing secessionist /dissenting congregations - an Antiburgher church which first opened in 1756, a Congregational church in 1767, a Burgher church in 1769, a Berean church in 1782 and a Relief church in 1781-82. A second Relief church was opened a few years later. Moreover, according to David Gilmour, there was at least one other minor dissenting congregation in Paisley before 1800 in the form of a small Baptist congregation which first met under a newly appointed minister in 1797.⁵⁹ Of all these, the Antiburgher congregation, in particular, prospered and flourished in the town. Crawford/Semple records that “about the year 1762” the Antiburghers built a meeting house “near the head of the Schoolhouse-wynd” which had to be “enlarged” in 1781.⁶⁰

The distinguished historian, Professor R. H. Campbell, has come in for quite rough treatment from some of his peers, notably Callum G. Brown, for his claim that the established church in Scotland at this time

... made no disrupting contribution to Scottish society ... It is enough to conclude that while personal religion of a characteristic Scottish form was still strong, a variety of factors ensured that *religious issues did not disrupt the general fabric of society in the eighteenth century*. [RLC’s italics] It was then possible to apply the motivation derived from a strong personal faith and apply it in a socially stable environment.⁶¹

To Campbell’s assertions Brown strenuously, and rightly, countered:

⁵⁸ Edinburgh, 1797, volume 2, p. 336.

⁵⁹ *The Pen Folk*, p. 263 and pp. 273-4.

⁶⁰ *A History of the Shire of Renfrew*, p. 308. The Antiburgher meeting house is clearly shown in this location on *A Plan of the Town of Paisley and Suburbs ... By Jas. Lumsden Engraver Glasgow 1781* [reproduced by Paisley Museum and Art Gallery, High Street].

⁶¹ Quoted by Callum G. Brown, “Protest in the Pews: interpreting Presbyterianism and Society in Fracture during the Scottish Economic Revolution” in *Conflict and Stability in Scottish Society 1700-1850*, ed. T. M. Devine, Edinburgh, 1990, p. 84.

This must surely represent a failure to grasp the significance of Presbyterian schism and denominational pluralism in Scotland between 1733 and 1874.⁶²

And elsewhere Brown writes:

The emergence of Presbyterian dissent represented the greatest institutionalised division in eighteenth-century Scottish society. By 1800, between rarely less than a fifth and in some places as much as 70 per cent of the population in Lowland parishes were members of dissenting churches (predominantly the Secession). *The highest proportions were to be found in industrialising communities, especially textile, metallurgical and mining towns/villages, and in agricultural parishes in areas where enclosures and improvement had proceeded the furthest. ... The Establishment-dissent split in a parish was by no means a simple one between different groups or classes in the social hierarchy, though between 1790 and 1814 Moderates linked the rise of evangelicalism with lower-class sympathy with revolutionary ideas.* [RLC's italics]⁶³

Brown must have had Paisley in mind in writing this. For in the early 1790s the proportion of “dissenters” – that is, in Paisley’s case comprising members of the “large dissenting congregations”, meaning the Antiburgher and Relief congregations, with a characteristically much smaller Cameronian (i.e. Reformed Presbyterian Church) and other minor elements - represented almost 20% of the entire population of the town at the time. That figure is precisely twice the Scottish ratio of secessionist church members to the total Scottish population (150,000 total membership in seceding congregations or 10% of the population of Scotland at that time) cited as an estimated figure by no less an authority than Robert Dundas, Lord Advocate, in a letter dated 14 November 1807, but referring to the Scottish situation in the 1790s.⁶⁴ To reiterate, the town and parish of Paisley in the 1790s exhibited *twice* an already impressive national statistic relating to worshipping numbers of individuals attending secessionist congregations in all manifestations. It is an impressive and highly significant figure. Norman Murray makes the important associated point that it seemed at times that weaving in communities went hand in glove with secessionism, and secessionism with radical activities:

... the new radical movement was discovered only in the textile counties of Renfrew, Ayr, Lanark, Stirling, Fife, Perth and Forfar. ... it can, moreover, be demonstrated that the United Scotsmen societies were found, with few exceptions, in areas with high proportions of Seceders. The degree of overlap between secession and weaving as an occupation has been considered remarkable. Although it is at best, a rough estimate, one historian [C.M. Burns – see note 27 above] has recently calculated the correlation coefficient between weaver percentage and Seceder percentage.

⁶² *ibid.* p. 84.

⁶³ Brown, “Religion and Social Change” in *People and Society in Scotland 1760-1830*, volume 1, p. 151.

⁶⁴ Robert Dundas to Robert Saunders Dundas: NLS, Melville Papers – MSS. 8, f 203. See also J. S. Brims, *The Scottish Democratic Movement in the Age of the French Revolution*, unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1983, p. 38.

Taking the parish as a unit and using figures abstracted from the *Old Statistical Account*, the result obtained for the whole of Scotland was 0.22.⁶⁵

There is an important, albeit much earlier implied reference to Paisley's reputation for radical dissension in a little known pamphlet by the Reverend William Thom, minister of Govan, (and a friend of John Witherspoon), dated "Glasgow, June, 1762". Ned C. Landsman, who has written extensively on Thom (and Witherspoon) appears to have missed Thom's satirical, almost Swiftian *Letter from a Society in Glasgow, who are not yet tainted with a taste for Literature, to their Brethren in Paisley, showing the Scheme for Erecting an Academy in its own proper colours*. In this pamphlet Thom writes:

Some of them [i.e. "ship-loads of Jesuits ... lately imported to Britain"] ... will probably harbour about the town of Paisley; but as the inhabitants of your borough have always been distinguished by a sharpness of scent after heresy, these delinquents will no doubt be immediately detected and brought to justice.⁶⁶

We are told (in the words of the Paisley contributor to Sinclair, the Rev. Dr. John Snodgrass,⁶⁷ himself a luminary of the Popular or Evangelical party of the Kirk) that the ministers of these dissenting congregations

seem to have no further aim than that of discharging the duties of their office in a quiet and conscientious manner.⁶⁸

By the same token, Snodgrass might well have warned us not to be deceived into assuming that these dissenting congregations were solely composed of weavers and other artisans. In particular, it seems to have been the case that after the original secession, first led by Ebenezer Erskine and others in the early 1730s, the Antiburgher persuasion quite quickly became of special appeal to small-time self-earners; of these, remarkably, those involved in the bookselling, publishing and printing trades appear to have had particular leanings in the Antiburgher direction. As we shall see in chapter 5 of this study, the Paisley émigré bookseller and circulating-library proprietor, Robert Aitken, was a

⁶⁵ *The Scottish Hand Loom Weavers*, p. 212. Murray's reference to the Burns calculation is to her unpublished M.Sc dissertation, p. 188.

⁶⁶ *The Works of the Rev. William Thom, late Minister of Govan. ... Glasgow: Printed for James Dymock, Bookseller, High-Street: 1799*, p. 346.

⁶⁷ Snodgrass was minister of the Middle Church in Paisley from 1781 to 1797. See John R. McIntosh, *Church and Theology in Enlightenment Scotland: The Popular Party, 1740 - 1800*, East Linton, 1998, p. 242. James Maxwell, "poet in Paisley", published an 'Elegy' on Snodgrass's death (Appendix A, 197-97).

⁶⁸ Sinclair, *Statistical Account* (1793), vol.7, Town of Paisley, pp. 67-8.

prominent Antiburgher who found comfort in his new life as a printer and bookbinder in pre-Revolutionary Philadelphia in the company of other like-minded Scottish émigré Antiburghers following his own trade, including John M’Culloch and the remarkable William Young,⁶⁹ himself with probable Paisley connections. The records of the Presbyterian Historical Society of Philadelphia contain the minutes of the Antiburgher Session in that city of which both Aitken and Young were Elders.⁷⁰

In the words of Andrew Campbell:

In the rising class of prosperous burghers the Secession found a congenial soil. It waxed strongest in the districts which first felt the warmth of the new prosperity, in Glasgow and the west. ... It was content to supply a demand without doing much to create it; and that demand arose strongly in some parts of the country and in others not at all.⁷¹

There are interesting similarities here between secessionism and the rise of Evangelical ministries in Glasgow and the west of Scotland, though these similarities do not, of course, extend to matters of doctrine and belief. Landsman has observed that in the connections between piety and industry reflected in, for example, the works of John Flavel⁷², the world of work and spirituality were linked. Even more important for this study is Landsman’s observation that freedom of choice on the part of congregations to participate in the appointment of a minister was a concept that Popular party clergy could, and did, support with enthusiasm. Accordingly, in Landsman’s words, piety, liberty, and prosperity (the latter as the sure reward of honest toil) were all connected in Popular party conceptions. Further, he elaborates:

Over the next several decades [that is, roughly the whole of the period covered by the checklist in Appendix A - RLC] that effort [i.e. the publication of evangelical books and pamphlets that sought to link work and spirituality and piety and industry] would be continued in Glasgow and Paisley by weavers and other artisans who subsidized a dramatic expansion in evangelical

⁶⁹ For a detailed account of Young’s career in Philadelphia, see Sher, *The Enlightenment and the Book*, pp. 546 - 571. Young had been a student of Professor John Anderson at Glasgow, who, in a *testamur* for the 1779-80 academic year, describes him as “a worthy Young Man, and an assiduous Student” on the basis of his performance as one of the ‘togati’ students [full-time], as opposed to his “anti-toga class” which mainly comprised mechanics and other operatives attending on a part-time basis, perhaps the late 18th C. equivalent of a modern sandwich course.

⁷⁰ See chapter 5, section 6(a), 273-5.

⁷¹ Andrew J. Campbell, *Two Centuries of the Church of Scotland 1707-1929*, Hastie Lecture, (University of Glasgow), Paisley, 1930, pp. 63-4.

⁷² See Appendix A, 9-70, 10-70 and 82-88.

publishing of works of marked diversity in origin and doctrine but heavily weighted towards practical religion.⁷³

Landsman develops this theme more generally elsewhere where he makes an important connection between Popular party ministries and their lay supporters in kirk sessions and the weaving community, especially in the west of Scotland and the Glasgow (and Paisley) areas in particular. I shall return to Landsman's important conclusions in that context in chapter 4 where I deal with aspects of John Witherspoon's ministerial and presidential career in Scotland and at the College of New Jersey respectively.⁷⁴

Concomitantly, the end of the eighteenth century also witnessed the final eclipse of Moderate dominance of the Church of Scotland which had reached its zenith under men such as Principals William Robertson and William Leechman (the latter often referred to as the "saint of moderatism" and John Witherspoon's predecessor as minister at Beith before his translation to Paisley in 1757). Superficially, the decline and ultimate eclipse of Moderatism may be thought inconsistent with the prevailing spirit of the Enlightenment and its Hutchesonian ideals of tolerance and devotion to high culture, associated as they were with the new ideas of economic materialism. (Andrew Campbell, for example, makes a convincing case for tracing the seeds of the "atmospheric change" marking the beginning of the decay of Moderatism to the opening of the Carron Iron Works in 1760, astonishing though that may seem).⁷⁵

However, on closer examination, it turns out that it was precisely the determined Evangelical/Popular approach to church practice and polity, allied to contemporaneous population growth and a creeping urbanisation, higher wage-earning, resultant increased wealth and the expansion of commerce and industry, that finally led many to side with - as they perceived them - the attractive alternatives offered by the opponents of Moderatism who consistently stressed the ethic of industry *cum* spirituality. Furthermore, English Evangelicals - Methodists like John Wesley and especially George Whitefield (who

⁷³ Ned C. Landsman, "Liberty, Piety and Patronage: the social context of contested clerical calls in Eighteenth-Century Glasgow" in *The Glasgow Enlightenment*, ed. A. Hook and Richard B. Sher, East Linton, 1995, p. 222.

⁷⁴ Landsman, "Witherspoon and the Problem of Provincial Identity" in *Scotland and America in the Age of the Enlightenment*, ed. Richard B. Sher and Jeffrey R. Smitten, Edinburgh and Princeton, 1990, p. 34: "No group was more important in the Scottish awakening than the rapidly growing community of spinners and weavers in Glasgow and its environs, who dominated church sessions wherever the revival spread."

⁷⁵ *Two Centuries of the Church of Scotland*, p. 143.

seemed to be constantly visiting Scotland throughout his long ministerial career and had contributed personally to the ‘Cambuslang wark’ of 1742)⁷⁶ brought the good news of a better life to many at a time when ordinary folk were ready to accept its message of hope, salvation and a more confident future (Landsman’s “prosperity”). That message held special appeal to the emergent Scottish working classes, and in a town like Paisley it seemed pure manna from heaven.

In some ways, then - if one can insist on an informed understanding of what is really intended by the hypothesis - it could even be said that the rise of the Evangelicals in the latter half of the eighteenth century on the one hand, and the slightly earlier growth of secessionist congregations on the other, were but two faces of the same coin. To the historian, that of course is far too simplistic - and Landsman for one points out the salient differences between the two. Nevertheless, the religious factor remains highly significant at a time of increasing (though in the last analysis, ephemeral) reformist activity in a national (British-wide) atmosphere heavily saturated with the Scottish sedition trials, and their menacing curtailment of liberties, not the least being the liberty of the press and freedom of utterance more generally (as will be extensively discussed in chapter 3).

Another factor of importance here which should not be overlooked is the presence of a fledgling and increasingly vigorous book industry in the town of Paisley, dating from the end of the 1760s. Though close to Glasgow, a manufacturing town like Paisley still managed to develop its own distinctive, and eventually flourishing, printing and bookselling trade ensuring a steady flow of reprints of largely Evangelical and secessionist texts. Paisley’s well-known reputation for religious dissent, together with its tradition of Popularist/Evangelical ministries, aggregated into a heady brew and almost guaranteed by that fact alone an upswelling of reformist sympathy. Harris puts it succinctly:

Dissent ... nurtured a critical attitude honed on theological and religious dispute, as well as a profound respect for the printed word, although such characteristics were also strongly entrenched in the popular [i.e. Evangelical] wing of the Church of Scotland, *which was very strong in the west around Glasgow and Paisley*. [RLC’s italics]⁷⁷

Bibliographical analysis, such as my checklist of Paisley titles (Appendix A), bears out and confirms the general accuracy of Brown’s and Harris’s assertions in this context. Certainly

⁷⁶ For a discussion of the role of English Methodism in the context of 18th C. ideas of liberty generally, see chapter 1 §5 above.

⁷⁷ *The Scottish People and the French Revolution*, p. 86.

detailed consideration of the religious titles printed in Paisley over the period from 1769 almost continuously up to 1800 backs up that view. Further, checklists such as Appendix A help set in context Landsman's perceptive conclusions about the real meaning of 'liberty, piety and prosperity' in this important period in Scottish history. That at any rate is what in my view is meant by a bibliographical approach to history which resonates with the approach of distinguished bibliographical historians such as Richard Sher and the late Philip Gaskell.

The checklist in Appendix A reveals the extent to which the works of many of the best known names in the bibliographical history of 'popular' theology throughout the later eighteenth century were reprinted in Paisley in this thirty year period, virtually to the end of the century. These include - as a representation only, and in alphabetical order -

Robert Blair (1699-1746) See 33-76 and 130-91. A favourite dissenting author, the poet Blair was an ordained minister at Athelstaneford in East Lothian. Originally published in 1743, *The Grave* was an instant success. The same title was printed and published by Robert Aitken in Philadelphia in 1773 and George Caldwell had it printed for him by an uncited Glasgow printer in 1781.

Thomas Boston (1677-1732) See 15-71 and 141-92. Boston is described by Burleigh as "an utterly sincere, godly, deeply exercised man" who "watched over the spiritual welfare of his people with entire devotion and genuine love". And he adds:

Men of his type were perhaps exceptional, but both in the Lowlands and the Highlands their influence had much to do with the shaping of the religious life of Scotland.⁷⁸

Boston's works would, I believe, have been of special appeal to members of the town's substantial Relief congregation since it was Boston's son - also Thomas Boston (1713-1767) - who, with Thomas Gillespie and one other minister, formed the breakaway 'Presbytery of Relief' in 1761. For more on Gillespie see chapter 4.2 where his role in the notorious 'Inverkeithing case' is discussed.

Ralph Erskine (1685-1752)⁷⁹ See 12-71 and 102-89. Ralph was a younger brother of Ebenezer Erskine who effectively founded the Associate Presbytery in 1733. The works

⁷⁸ J. H. S. Burleigh *A Church History of Scotland*, Edinburgh, 1983, p. 269.

of both Erskines were tremendously popular throughout this period. The Glasgow printer John Bryce brought out more than 30 titles of works by the two Erskine brothers from the 1740s up to the mid 1780s.

William Ferrier (1763-1835) See 206 and 207-98. An account of Ferrier and the importance of his influential role in the Sabbath schools in the artisan community of Paisley in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century can be found in Ronald L. Crawford's 1965 Glasgow B.Litt thesis, volume I, Appendix II, pp. 285-8.

John Flavel (1630?-1691) See 9-70, 10-70 and 82-88. According to David Gilmour, Flavel was a particular favourite of the Paisley weavers and his works considered as "gran fat meat". Landsman says of his writings that they "specifically linked work and spirituality".⁸⁰

John Gill (1697-1771) See 125-91. The title alone is self-explanatory - *The Glorious State of the Saints in Heaven*. The bookseller, George Caldwell senior, was an avid Antiburgher, like Robert Aitken.

Patrick Gillespie (1617-1675) See 124-91. Is it fanciful to connect Gillespie's historically well-known hostility to the person and powers of the king - in his case Charles II - with anti-monarchical feelings in certain quarters in Scotland in, of all years, 1791? In any event, *Testimony-bearing exemplified* was a particular favourite of secessionist congregations. Gillespie was made principal of the University of Glasgow in 1652.

James Hervey (1714-1758) See 27-74, 83-88 and 144-92. Another pillar of early "Evangelicalism" - but in a different sense of the term, within the Church of England - who quarrelled with John Wesley over doctrine.⁸¹ The *Meditations among the Tombs* was his most popular work; first published in 1745, it went through 25 editions before the end of the century. A Paisley edition was published by Alex Weir in 1774.

⁷⁹ Frequently confused with the Rev. John Erskine (1721?- 1803), minister at Culross, then of Greyfriars, Edinburgh, who was an intimate friend, and erstwhile fellow undergraduate at Edinburgh, of John Witherspoon.

⁸⁰ Ned C. Landsman, "Liberty, Piety and Patronage", in *The Glasgow Enlightenment*, ed. Hook and Sher, p. 222.

⁸¹ Wesley attacked Hervey's *Dialogues between Theron and Aspasio* (1755), Hervey's reply being issued posthumously - *Eleven Letters from the late Rev. Mr. Hervey, to the Rev. Mr. John Wesley*, London, 1766.

Patrick Hutchison (1740/41-1802) See 86-88. Hutchison was the first ministerial incumbent of the earliest Relief Church in Paisley, built in Canal Street in 1782 and “the authoritative expounder of the principles of the Relief”. In one respect at least the Relief was “diametrically opposed” to the Secession: that lay in the view that the Covenants – which depended on compulsion to ensure religious uniformity – were not necessarily permanent in their effect upon individuals and their descendants. In his well-known tract *A Dissertation on the Nature and Genius of the Kingdom of Christ* (popularly known as *Messiah’s Kingdom*) (1779) Hutchison fulminated:

I esteem it ground of humiliation and mourning before God that so many in these lands swore those oaths, in which there are sundry things unlawful to be sworn, and other things which not one hundred of the whole British subjects sufficiently understood.⁸²

With this publication Hutchison sparked off an extensive pamphlet war with both the Reverend James Ramsay of Glasgow⁸³ and the Reverend David Walker of Pollockshaws,⁸⁴ both of whom took exception to his assault on different aspects of “the Secession in general, and Covenanting in particular”. The exchange is of great potential interest to students of different ‘branches’ of Scottish seceding churches at this time.

Hutchison appears to have taken an active part at the time of the reformist troubles during his ministry in Paisley. A letter published in the *Glasgow Courier* on 23 January 1796 records that six of his congregation had left his church on account of Hutchison “mixing in his discourses political things”.⁸⁵

⁸² Cited by Andrew J. Campbell, *Two Centuries of the Church of Scotland 1707-1929*, p. 91.

⁸³ From two sermons by Ramsay published by John Bryce of the Salt Market in Glasgow it appears that Ramsay was a minister of the established Kirk in 1780 – “Minister of the Gospel in Glasgow” – but by 1782 had become a “Minister of the Gospel in the Associate Congregation of Glasgow”. See Ramsay’s *A Sermon Preached at Newton of Mearns 5th of September, 1780.*, Glasgow, John Bryce, 1780, and *A Sermon Preached before the Associate Presbytery of Glasgow, at Beith, on the 31st, of July*, Glasgow, John Bryce, 1782.

⁸⁴ Walker attacked Hutchison’s views in *A Sermon Preached At Pollockshaws, on a Day of Public Fasting, 4th Nov. 1779. ... together with Animadversions on the Rev. Mr. Patrick Hutchison’s Attacks on the Secession in general, and Covenanting in particular.*, Glasgow, William Smith, 1780 and *A Candid Examination of the Rev. Mr. Hutchison’s Animadversions: ...*, Glasgow, W. Smith, 1782.

⁸⁵ The *Courier* letter is signed by Archibald Morison, “weaver, Broomlands” and five other weavers in Paisley. They write: “We have heard you [Hutchison] express those sentiments [i.e. in support of the war with France] in different discourses from the Pulpit; and we make bold to say that some of us have left you in the middle of these discourses; and numbers have left you, though not in quite so public a manner; and many are much dissatisfied, who are still under your ministry.” “The War”, they go on, “was the efficient cause of all our distresses and calamities: our

William McGill (1732-1807) See 119-90 and 136-92. McGill was a farmer's son and a friend of the poet Burns. He was minister at the 'Auld Kirk' in Ayr. It is worth quoting Andrew Campbell:

[McGill's] Essay [i.e. his *A Practical Essay on the Death of Jesus Christ* published in 1786]⁸⁶ was not intended by its author as a theological treatise, but for practical ends only. It was an endeavour to explain clearly the doctrine of the Atonement; but the cry of Socinianism was at once raised. Secession and Relief broke out in a loud chorus of criticism, not unmixed with a certain glee that they had found the Church of Scotland in error again ...".⁸⁷

The circumstances of the McGill case - which eventually collapsed at the General Assembly of 1789 after McGill's partial recantation - are well described by Robert Crawford in his biography of Burns, *The Bard*.⁸⁸ Burns equated McGill's liberal theology with 'commonsense' and mockingly wrote of

the blasphemous heresies of squaring Religion by the rules of Common Sense, and attempting to give a decent character to Almighty God and a rational account of his proceedings with the Sons of Men.⁸⁹

George Whitefield (1714-1770) See 161-94. Whitefield was a charismatic English evangelist who was invited by the Associate Presbytery of the Seceders to come to Scotland in the hope that his presence would strengthen their cause. All in all he paid 14 visits to Scotland. Whitefield went to America four times, finally in 1769, and died there, in Massachusetts, in 1770. Whitefield is especially associated with the so-called 'First Great Awakening' which, in the words of Commager, "swept the colonies in the second and third quarters of the eighteenth century" and there "played an explosive role".⁹⁰ (See also chapter 1§5 above).

John Witherspoon (1723-1794) See 80-88, 94-88 and 110-90. See also chapter 4 *passim*. As Appendix A shows, a few of Witherspoon's titles were reprinted in Paisley in his

trade was ruined, and probably will continue so during the War. ... the War was occasioned by us wantonly promoting it, and wishing to suppress the liberties of France." See also *Review of a Paper published in the Glasgow Courier, on the 23 January, 1796, called a Deed of the Relief Congregation of Paisley; ... By Archibald Morison, one of the Paisley Volunteers. Air: [sic] Printed by J. & P. Wilson. 1796.*

⁸⁶ McGill had been awarded an 'earned' D.D. by the University of Glasgow for his work on the *Practical Essay*.

⁸⁷ *Two Centuries of the Church of Scotland 1707-1929*, pp. 133-4.

⁸⁸ Robert Crawford, *The Bard - Robert Burns a biography*, London, 2009, pp. 34-5, 170, 279.

⁸⁹ *The Letters of Robert Burns*, ed. J. De Lancey Ferguson, 2nd edition, ed. G. Ross Roy, 2 vols., Oxford, 1985. The letter from which the quotation is taken is cited in *The Bard*, p. 34 and the whole text is to be found in Ferguson, vol. 1, 454.

⁹⁰ Henry Steele Commager, *The Empire of Reason*, (U.K. edition), London, 1978, p. 181.

lifetime. None of his titles published prior to his departure for New Jersey in 1768 was, of course, originally printed by a Paisley printer since the first printed book only appeared in Paisley a year later.

As an important postscript, it should not be overlooked that several dissenting ministers were prominent in the reform movement of the 1790s. Quite a number were from Perth; obviously, the most celebrated is Thomas Fyshe Palmer, the English Unitarian minister at Perth who was tried and sentenced to transportation in 1793. But Harris names others including the Antiburgher minister, James McEwan (delegate to the second general convention), James Donaldson, Berean minister (delegate to the second and third general conventions), and Niel Douglas, a minister of the Relief Church (delegate to the third and British conventions).⁹¹ And, as already noted, there is Patrick Hutchison, Relief minister in Paisley, who attracted indignation from six members of his congregation in 1796 for “mixing in his discourses political things.”

7 The Paisley Declaration of Rights and the cause of reform

When Thomas Muir, already stripped of his professional calling as Advocate, came before the High Court of Justiciary in Parliament Hall, Edinburgh on 30th August 1793 the indictment drawn up by the Lord Advocate, Robert Dundas, comprised four charges, that is:

- exciting disaffection by seditious speeches, especially at meetings Muir had himself been instrumental in calling;
- advising and exhorting persons to purchase and peruse seditious and wicked publications; and
- specifically, reading the Address of the United Irishmen at the first Convention of the Friends of the People in Edinburgh in December 1792 – described in Robert Dundas’s indictment as a work “of a most inflammatory and seditious tendency”⁹²

The remaining charge was as follows:

- circulating various seditious papers –

⁹¹ *The Scottish People and the French Revolution*, p. 85.

⁹² See also chapter 3.7 (b) below.

- (a) *Rights of Man*
- (b) A pamphlet approved by the Friends of Reform in Paisley: *A Declaration of Rights and an Address to the People*;⁹³
- (c) *A Dialogue between the Governors and the Governed* - an extract from Volney's *Ruins, or a Survey of the Evolution of Empires*⁹⁴
- (d) *The Patriot*⁹⁵

Meikle mentions the Paisley *Declaration* in a footnote only⁹⁶ but it is unclear if he is referring to the published 16pp. pamphlet cited in Muir's indictment or, as I think more likely, to the statement - also called a *Declaration* and run off separately as a "handbill" - appended to the advertisement dated 8 February 1793 (which Clark Hunter reproduces in full)⁹⁷ that appeared simultaneously in the *London Star*, *Glasgow Advertiser* and *Edinburgh Gazetteer*. Harris fails to mention it at all. I firmly believe that the Paisley *Declaration* - while admittedly not unique - is an important document in the history of radicalism at this time in Scotland. For that reason I have transcribed as Appendix B those parts of the Paisley *Declaration* quoted by Robert Dundas in his oral prosecution of Muir. I find it strange that the document has been largely overlooked in this way, considering the importance historians generally now attach to reformist activity in Paisley and the west of Scotland in the 1790s and their broad consensus that Paisley has to be regarded as one of the most active of all Scottish 'radical'⁹⁸ hotspots.

⁹³ See also Appendix B. Christina Bewley, *Muir of Huntershill*, Oxford, 1981, pp. 68-9. Bewley wrongly supposes that the Paisley *Declaration* and the *Address* are two *separate* pamphlets. J. S. Brims, in his unpublished Edinburgh University Ph.D. thesis, castigates Bewley for her "unscholarly and confusing" account of the Muir story which is a little too hard on her, I believe. Brims praises Michael Donnelly's short biography of Muir, on the other hand, in the *Biographical Dictionary of Modern British Radicals*, ed. Baylen and Gossman, I, Sussex, 1979, p. 330.

⁹⁴ See also the extensive note on Volney and this title in particular in my discussion of other bibliographical aspects of the Muir trial in chapter 3§4, note 55.

⁹⁵ See the possible candidates for this title in chapter 3§4, note 56.

⁹⁶ Henry W. Meikle, *Scotland and the French Revolution*, Glasgow, 1912, p. 93, note 1.

⁹⁷ Clark Hunter, *The Life and Letters of Alexander Wilson* (American Philosophical Society), Philadelphia, 1983, Appendix II, pp. 429-432.

⁹⁸ It will be noted that I avoid the term "Radical" - with a capital R - in this study on the grounds it is misleading, inappropriate and, for this period (the 1790s), anachronistic. Jonathan Clark comments: "The adjective 'radical' (meaning from the root, fundamentalist) was long familiar in English discourse, and did not become joined in the phrase 'radical reform' until the 1790s; 'radical reformer' had been shortened to the substantive, 'a radical', only by c.1802". See J.D.C. Clark, *The Language of Liberty*, Cambridge, 1994, p. 143.

Why does the Paisley *Declaration* (together with its companion-piece, the *Address to the People*) deserve more attention? First, there is the obvious legal importance of the *Declaration* as a Crown exhibit in its case against Thomas Muir, in which it was a key production for the prosecution. Like the other subsequent Scottish sedition trials of Palmer, Gerrald, Margarot, Skirving, Mealmaker *et al* the Muir trial was palpably ‘designed’ by Henry and Robert Dundas and others as a show trial and arguably, for them, crucial in relation to their desire for a wholly successful outcome – though that was never in doubt. It is unnecessary here to rehearse once more the extent to which, as Lord Cockburn was to conclude in the 1850s, it was a flagrant travesty of justice with the terrible verdict crudely designed, above all, *pour encourager les autres*.⁹⁹

Secondly, the Muir trial had a number of other features relevant to Paisley apart from the indictment itself. Most important of these is the disclosure that no less than seven Paisley men were named as exculpatory witnesses. They were (as read out to the Court):

Robert M’Kinlay, “print-cutter in Mr. Fulton’s employment, near Paisley”;
William Orr jun., “manufacturer in Paisley”;
James Craig, “manufacturer, “Water Brae, Paisley”;
James Gemmel, “merchant, Storie-Street, Paisley”;
William Muir, “Fisher-row, Paisley”;
Hamilton Ballantyne, “Storie-Street, Paisley”;
James Muir, “weaver, Shuttle-Street, Paisley”.

Unlike most other contemporary statements of the kind from different local branches of the Friends of the People in Scotland, the Paisley pamphlet is generally a well written document and its argument impressively mustered and fairly skilfully argued. For that reason, it led Clark Hunter in his American Philosophical Society edition of Alexander Wilson’s life and letters to conclude that it - and/or the other handbill referred to in the newspaper advert - might even have been the work of the weaver-poet Wilson himself, whose friend and fellow weaver James Mitchell has his name subscribed to the advert in his role as ‘Secretary’ to the organisation in whose name it was issued. Though I respect Hunter’s normally impeccable scholarship, I conclude that his view on the authorship of the document cannot be more than romantic speculation.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Quoted by Meikle in *Scotland and the French Revolution*, p. 131. “This is one of the cases the memory whereof never perisheth; history cannot let its injustice alone.” – Henry Cockburn, *Life of Lord Jeffrey* (2 vols.), Edinburgh, 1852, I, pp. 144-184.

¹⁰⁰ *The Life and Letters of Alexander Wilson*, p. 46.

From a bibliographical point of view, it is significant that the *Paisley Declaration*, lacking both imprint and date, was almost certainly not printed in Paisley. The only printer working in the town at the time, John Neilson, would never have agreed to handle it. For one thing, Neilson had already got his fingers burned by agreeing to take on the scandalous (and technically libellous) poem by Wilson known as *The Hollander; or, light weight* earlier in the same year – again without any printer’s name cited on the title page.¹⁰¹ It seems to me more likely that the *Paisley Declaration* was printed in Glasgow – quite possibly by one of the several printers used by the booksellers Brash and Reid, a firm with radical sympathies that had already arranged publication of reprints of Wilson, and of several titles by other noted radicals including Muir himself, the Reverend William Dunn of Kirkintilloch, John (Craig) Millar and Thomas Fyshe Palmer. All were to suffer harshly at the hands of the Court.

The British Library ESTC lists the date of publication of the *Paisley Declaration* as 1790 with a question mark. In my judgment 1790 is right. The style and language are markedly pre-*Rights* and for that reason alone I favour a date just before the issue of the first part of *Rights of Man* – i.e. before February 1791. There are no traces of the *Paisley Declaration* having been directly influenced by *Rights* part 1 either contextually or stylistically.¹⁰² There are, on the other hand, a number of interesting stylistic traces of the French *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*, passed by the National Assembly in August 1789, the language of which would, of course, have been thoroughly familiar to Thomas Muir.

8 Two Paisley loyalist responses

(a) *The Paisley Weaver’s Letter to his Neighbours and Fellow Tradesmen* [Glasgow, Courier office, Reid, 1792]

From 1792 Harris records that

the majority of Scotland’s newspapers furnished unwavering support to the anti-radical cause.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ *The Hollander* episode is discussed in chapter 6 below.

¹⁰² Hunter, however, thinks that the *Paisley Declaration* was “written about the same time as Paine’s [*Rights of Man*]” and that it “summarized the Paisley reformers’ interpretation” of that work. – *The Life and Letters of Alexander Wilson*, p. 45.

¹⁰³ Bob Harris, “Scotland’s Newspapers, the French Revolution and Domestic Radicalism”, *The Scottish Historical Review*, vol. LXXXIV, 1: No. 217, April 2005, p. 51.

In the van of the loyalist press was the *Glasgow Courier* whose publisher was William Reid and Co. The *Courier's* initial editorial outlook, from the date of its inception in the autumn of 1791, had been largely moderate and broadly reformist in its sympathies. All that changed, however, by the end of 1792 by which time it was obvious that its editorial policy, reflected in its content, was solidly behind the Pitt/Dundas regime. In Harris's words the *Courier's* position had become "vehemently loyalist" and "its political outlook shifted suddenly and decisively in late November 1792".¹⁰⁴

It was at this time that a number of propagandist pamphlets appeared in Scotland, purporting to have been written either by named authors, very often artisans, or whose authorship was left anonymous. They were all fiercely loyalist in tone, anti-radical and anti-reformist and at least some of them are even thought to have been paid for from government funds.¹⁰⁵ Harris comments:

Several of these were aimed specifically at readers from the labouring classes in an effort to dissuade them from joining or supporting the radical societies which were expanding rapidly in number and size in the west and other parts of the lowlands during that autumn.¹⁰⁶

One such production of the *Courier* office at this time was *The Paisley Weaver's Letter to his Neighbours and Fellow Tradesmen*. The colophon dates the pamphlet at "Paisley, 20th Dec. 1792". A slightly abbreviated version of the *Letter* was printed in the issue of the *Courier* for the same date.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.* p. 47

¹⁰⁵ See Boyd Hilton *A Mad, Bad and Dangerous People?*, New Oxford History of England, Oxford and New York, 2006, p. 69: "An official press campaign was mobilized to discredit Paine, and secret service money disbursed to loyal propagandists such as the placemen John Bowles and John Reeves". [It was at this time that the word 'Reevesian' entered the language, connoting 'loyalist' and even 'in the pay of government' or more simply 'spy' - RLC.]

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ And also in *A Collection of Publications, selected by the Committee of the Glasgow Constitutional Association, and recommended by them to the Public. Glasgow: printed by David Niven, and sold by J. and W. Shaw, booksellers, Trongate, M,DCC,XCIII*. Harris prints part of a letter to Robert Dundas from George Paterson of Castle Huntly dated 21 January 1793 in which he refers to Constitutional Associations as men "strongly expressive of loyalty and attachment to the constitution and declaring themselves ready to sacrifice their lives and fortunes in support of government ... in general these have been Men of Rank and fortune, or of such a superior class of men whether in Town and Country from which the militia cannot be drawn. ... In many places several have signed these or similar resolutions, who are indeed not of the highest ranks in life; but many such will be found to have done so from an influence, or from interested motives, and not from principle." [NLS: Melville Papers, MS 14,838, fols 88-91.] See *The Scottish People and the French Revolution*, pp. 131-2 and note 115 on p. 274.

In simple prose the anonymous author says he thought himself generally pleased with life as a weaver until he bumped into some of his fellows who, by contrast, were “much dissatisfied with their situation” on account of a combination of high taxes and “great inequality in our situation”, the latter complaint substantiated in the prevalent view that “a Reform of Parliament is necessary”.

But - our author drones on -

Another thing that I hear frequently within these past few weeks past is, that all men are equal, and that there is no reason why one man should have a great fortune, and the like of us little or none.

Using Biblical authority, the pamphleteer dismisses such talk as “foolish”. At one point, he concedes that “some improvement might be made as to the representation in Parliament”. However, as his diatribe climaxes, while that may be desirable,

Such associations [i.e. the Friends of the People and similar organisations] are always dreaded in a country: in the present case they will only furnish the enemies of a reform with a new reason for opposing it, and from the fears of encouraging the dangerous spirit that now appears in the country, it will make the real friends of a reform more cautious in promoting it, or perhaps induce them to drop the measure entirely.

The pamphlet concludes with a simplistic statistical analysis of the disruption that would follow industrial unrest in the town and locality of Paisley if large numbers of workers in the textiles industry were thrown out of work, and

if any thing should put a stop to these manufactures even for a short time, as the disturbances with which we are now threatened certainly would.

He reckons that the jobs of 90,000 persons, engaged in weaving, working in the cotton mills, calico printing and “various other branches” - receiving daily wages amounting to £6,850 in the four counties of Lanark, Ayr, Renfrew and Dumbarton - might then be in jeopardy. In consequence, he does not rule out “misery and distress” and the prospect of families “reduced to beggary”.

His final words are chilling, prescient and, it has to be said, prophetic:

If we should live to see the day when our manufactures shall be driven out of the country, when we are wandering idle about the streets, when our families may be crying for bread, and we have none to give them, how earnestly will we then be praying, that we could but again see such times as the present, of which we are now so much complaining.

(b) *Letter from an Inhabitant of Paisley to his Fellow Townsmen* [Paisley, Neilson, 1800]¹⁰⁸

This is another of the same. A late example of an overtly loyalist propaganda piece, the primary interest of the *Letter* lies in its date, since it is written at much the same time as the events described by William McDowall in his letter of 16th November 1800 to the Lord Advocate and his subsequent Proclamation regarding the appointment of Special Constables, with which this pamphlet should be paired.¹⁰⁹

You cannot be ignorant of some events which have disgraced this place If you view the conduct of those persons in a proper light who have been accessory to the late violent and tumultuous proceedings, you will acknowledge it to be as foolish as it is criminal

And its anonymous author then goes on to refer to the selfsame “seditious handbills” McDowall describes to the Lord Advocate:

Bills have been pasted up, calculated to inflame your minds, and inviting you to assemble in crowds. I cannot imagine more base and detestable conduct than that of the authors of such bills. ... I entreat you then to attend to the proclamation which the Magistrates very prudently issued on this subject. Keep your houses, when any disturbance is apprehended, and make those over whom you have influence to do the same. Keep at a distance from the places fixed for these dangerous and illegal meetings. Pay no attention to those inflammatory addresses.

The letter is dated in the colophon *Paisley, Nov.20th, 1800* - just four days after William McDowall wrote to the Lord Chancellor and precisely one week before the date of his Proclamation dealing with the appointment of Special Constables to help maintain the peace in the county of Renfrew.

The real importance of the 1800 *Letter* lies in its message: it has to be seen as a calculated attempt to attribute the rioting in the main to economic rather than political factors. In reality, of course, it was a mixture of the two. Reading the *Letter* with care, one is left in no doubt that it was fear of hunger and privation that was the real cause of the riots rather than any serious political motivation. That is, of course, precisely what the writer wants the reader to believe. But, as already observed, it is important to put this propagandist *Letter* and McDowall’s private letter to the Lord Chancellor side by side. As we shall see, according to McDowall there can be no mistake: that is, the one issue has been deliberately used to exploit the other to maximum effect:

¹⁰⁸ See the author’s B.Litt thesis, p. 191, title no. 166.

¹⁰⁹ See pp. 104-6 below.

The spirit of 1794 has been set forth and politics is mixed with the present scarcity to excite the disaffected to tumult and insurrection.

While not exactly agnostic on the question of whether the rioting was at bottom politically inspired, our anonymous author comes down more heavily on economic factors as the real explanation. The grave shortages in grain, he maintains, must and will be tackled by a renewal of foreign imports and, in any event, civil disobedience only exacerbates an already difficult economic situation:

The present alarm will subside; and when the dealers in provisions find that their persons and properties are protected, and the farmers have reason to expect civil treatment from the inhabitants, I have no doubt that we shall see a regular supply of provisions again brought to our market. ... Our chief resource must be the importation of foreign grain.

The letter closes with a recipe for porridge! You can still make good porridge, our man advises, if you use *rice* as a substitute for oatmeal.¹¹⁰

9 A reformist view

Thoughts on Liberty and on Mr. Paine's writings. In a letter to a friend. By David Lawson [Paisley, John Neilson, 1792].

This rare 1792 pamphlet bears a Paisley imprint.¹¹¹ Its author's name is supplied and the date, place and printer are also on the title page. The half-title should be noted – "*Published at the desire of several respectable persons in this place*". The author, David Lawson, was a journeyman weaver and master in the Incorporation of Old Weavers in Paisley. Lawson's premises (which he shared with a fellow weaver) were in the centre of the town, a stone's throw from the Reverend Dr. John Witherspoon's former charge, the Laigh Church. The pamphlet is of interest largely on account of its proven authenticity as the work of a named individual weaver with moderate reformist sympathies and not as the outcome of government-inspired propaganda.

Bibliographically, Lawson's pamphlet is of considerable interest in that it refers, mainly sceptically, to two of Paine's works – *Common Sense* (1776) and both parts of *Rights of Man* (1791-92). Echoing the cautious treatment Thomas Muir alleges he took in regard to

¹¹⁰ See also note 125 below.

¹¹¹ Appendix A, 133-92.

recommending any of Paine's works to his "Friends",¹¹² Lawson, while objecting to Paine's ignorance of the Bible, does agree with his view on natural rights –

Without all doubt, this writer, however well he may be skilled in politics, is very ignorant as to the scriptures, and the doctrines contained therein; yet it must be confessed, that what he has written of the rights of man, as a social being, has opened the eyes of thousands to know their natural right and privileges as men, and as members of society, and I don't question but Providence has raised him up for that purpose, and as a mean and instrument to deliver mankind from the cruelty and tyranny of despotic princes.¹¹³

He readily admits, however, that he lacks the intellectual means to make much headway with the difficulty of the subject in an abstract sense: it is after all

perhaps too deep a subject for my weak genius to attempt. I define liberty, in its obvious meaning, to be a power, opportunity, or advantage, that any one has to do as he pleases

What really interests and concerns him, on the other hand, is the issue of privilege and inherited 'rights'. Lawson proceeds to enunciate his own clear idea of liberty. In the process, he demonstrates only a sketchy knowledge of Montesquieu, characterizing the great *philosophe* as a kind of radical free-thinker:

I can see no reason why a king should have any more power but the casting vote in the Legislative body, for whatever more he may have, the people must always have the less in proportion. Liberty certainly is best maintained, where the legislative power is lodged in several persons. It should extend to every individual person of a nation. If it do not do this, there had better to have been none at all [sic]. For it only can be properly called liberty, which exempts one man from subjection to another, so far as the order of government will permit. Thus liberty (Montesquieu says) rightly understood, consists in the power of doing whatever the laws permit. ... The French nation, after being under despotic slavery for many centuries, have at last thrown off the iron and cruel yoke, and emancipated itself from bondage to liberty. ... The great Montesquieu says, in his *Spirit of Laws*, that all civil power originates from the people, and that they have a just right to converse and dispute upon matters of state. Certainly they have the power of choosing [sic] their representatives; for, *suprema lex salus populi*, is our motto, and with us the *vox populi* is the *vox Dei*.¹¹⁴

10 Three Paisley case studies

(a) William McDowall III of Garthland and Castle Semple

¹¹² This is discussed in chapter 3, 140-145 below.

¹¹³ *Thoughts on Liberty*, p. 8.

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 17.

There can be few more charismatic figures in Renfrewshire in the late 18th century than William McDowall¹¹⁵. McDowall was immensely rich, in his heyday successful almost beyond compare in the west of Scotland and a political heavyweight, both in a Scottish and London context, until his own and his family's ruin on the back of the failure, and ultimate bankruptcy, of the great trading house, Alexander Houston and Company, in the first decade of the 19th century.¹¹⁶

McDowall's career demonstrates the extent to which this period in Scottish history cannot properly be understood outside its British context. McDowall was counted on by Henry Dundas and the Prime Minister, William Pitt, as a reliable Member of Parliament who could be depended on to 'do the business' for them in his Scottish constituency. More unexpectedly perhaps, there seems genuinely no doubt that McDowall was also lionised by sections of the ordinary people of the county of Renfrew and the town of Paisley in particular, in whose eyes he did little wrong and was generally regarded as a munificent benefactor. Even the radical weaver-poet, Alexander Wilson, successfully sought out McDowall when he was canvassing subscriptions for his collected *Poems* (1790).¹¹⁷ When Lords-lieutenant were appointed (or, more properly re-introduced) in Scotland by Pitt on the recommendation of Dundas in the summer of 1794 to cope with the prevailing unrest, McDowall was one of the first to be nominated for the county of Renfrew.

McDowall's great wealth was inherited from his father and grandfather - William McDowall I¹¹⁸ and II¹¹⁹ - whose fortunes had been made from the sugar trade and their large plantations in the West Indies, especially on the islands of St. Kitts, Nevis, St. Vincent and Grenada. Stuart M. Nisbet has recently made a substantial contribution to

¹¹⁵ 1749-1810. His monument in Paisley Abbey is inscribed "His Majesty's Lieutenant and in Five Parliaments the Representative for Renfrewshire".

¹¹⁶ The first Alexander Houston ('of Jordanhill') was a cousin of the first William McDowall. For an account of the failure of this immensely prestigious concern - arguably the most devastating in Scottish history to that date - see (i) S. G. Checkland *Two Scottish West Indian Liquidations after 1793* (Scottish Journal of Political Economy, vol. 4, 1957) (ii) D. J. Hamilton, *Scottish Trading in the Caribbean: the rise and fall of Houston and Co. in Nation and Province in the First British Empire - Scotland and the Americas, 1600-1800*, ed. N. C. Landsman, London, 2001 and (iii) the same author's *Scotland, the Caribbean and the Atlantic World 1750-1830*, Manchester, 2005.

¹¹⁷ See chapter 6 below, note 41, and Clark Hunter, *The Life and Letters of Alexander Wilson*, pp. 35-6.

¹¹⁸ 1678-1748.

¹¹⁹ c.1718-1786. William McDowall II is the McDowall referred to in James Maxwell's song on a curling match at Lochwinnoch between McDowall and the Duke of Hamilton. (see Appendix A, 63-85).

our understanding of the importance of the sugar trade to the Scottish economy in the eighteenth century. It is now generally acknowledged that the subject has not attracted the attention it deserves, not least on account of the McDowalls' (and others') huge involvement in the slave trade, an inconvenient truth that until relatively recently has been largely ignored and, arguably, obfuscated.¹²⁰

Nisbet has assiduously visited the old McDowall estates on St. Kitts and Grenada where he tells us that, massively, the evidence is still all around for everyone to see. Movingly, he has even discovered how slave names on surviving lists of the McDowalls' workforce include those of 'Paisley', 'Kilbarchan' and 'Craigends' - the latter the name of the estate belonging to the Cuninghame family who, with the Houstons and the Millikens, formed a kind of grand alliance of sugar barons, all of them with substantial properties in the west of Scotland, mostly in the neighbourhood of Paisley.

William McDowall III is of interest in this study in several contexts. First, he was, for the times, a not untypically ubiquitous Member of Parliament: MP for Renfrewshire from 1783-1786 and 1802 to 1807; for Ayrshire from 1789 to 1790; and for the Glasgow Burghs from 1790 to 1802. He became lord lieutenant for the county of Renfrew in 1794 and continued in that office until his sudden death in 1810. In his last-named role in particular his name crops up from time to time in Home Office records throughout the testing times of reformist and political agitation in Paisley and district right up to 1800 and beyond. The letter reproduced here makes him out as a hard man and tool of the government.

Secondly, despite that apparently unpromising background, McDowall seems to have maintained a generally popular presence in Renfrewshire and certainly the liberal-minded Paisley cotton-thread manufacturer and Chief Magistrate William Carlile, and numerous others, thought highly of his benign attitude to the social and domestic problems of the textiles workforce throughout his time as MP.¹²¹ He was not an absentee Member and

¹²⁰ Stuart M. Nisbet, *Castle Semple Rediscovered*, n.p., privately published, 2009.

¹²¹ It was probably McDowall who is "a certain Member of Parliament" behind the subscription for unemployed weavers referred to by Carlile in a letter published in the *Edinburgh Gazetteer*, number 80 for 10 December 1793. Carlile takes great exception to the newspaper's claim in its previous issue that the benefits of the subscription would be closed to any reformist-minded weaver unless "he has the infamy to change his principles.", a claim he describes as "an infamous falsehood".

always took a lively and participative interest in Paisley affairs – especially in the bad times when the weavers suffered greatly as a result of the war with France.

To illustrate further this benevolent side of McDowall's character, the following excerpt from the Paisley Town Council records for 20th August 1784 is worth citing:

The Magistrates and Council unanimously voted thanks to William McDowall, Esq., Member for the County, for the attention he paid to the manufacturing interests in this place, by obtaining an exemption of the lawns and gauzes, of linen or namedsted, figured or sprigged with cotton, from the tax proposed. And likewise for his cordial union with other members in obtaining the proposed duty upon manufactured silks to be laid upon the raw materials; and appointed the Magistrates to intimate this to Mr. McDowall.¹²²

Of special interest to this study, and to illustrate further the problems that Paisley posed for the Dundas administration at intervals almost throughout the 1790s, is a letter that Ian MacDougall notes¹²³ (and Harris quotes in part)¹²⁴ from McDowall to the Lord Advocate dated 16th November 1800. It is worth transcribing in full because, first, the date is relatively late in the radical/reformist period and, also, its content is significant on account of the references to real hardship 'exciting' the "disaffected to tumult and insurrection" in Paisley and its environs. The incident to which the letter refers was clearly serious and there is no doubt whatsoever that McDowall takes it extremely seriously. The Lord Lieutenant writes:

Paisley Nov. 16th, 1800

My Dear Lord

I received your letter this morning and as I know the variety of public and private business in which you are engaged I shall not expect an answer to my letter except some particular reasons may appear to yourself to require it. Your Lordship is perfectly right in your opinion as applicable to Renfrewshire, that if seditious handbills were let alone, the public tranquillity would not have been interrupted, but the spirit of 1794 has been set forth and politics is mixed with the present scarcity to excite the disaffected to tumult and insurrection. I enclose the copy of a handbill which was posted up in different parts of Paisley on Thursday morning and as the former seditious notices had been followed up by a very serious riot which was quieted by the Paisley Volunteers after several of the principal inhabitants being severely wounded, a very general alarm took place in consequence of it. The Magistrates applied to General Drummond for military assistance, particularly cavalry. This with his usual attention he answered he was ready to send, but in

¹²² MS. minute book in Paisley Central Library.

¹²³ *A Catalogue of some Labour Records in Scotland and some Scots records outside Scotland*, compiled and edited by Ian MacDougall, Edinburgh, Scottish Labour History Society, 1978, vol.86, ff. 280-3. MacDougall erroneously attributes the authorship of the letter to the "Sheriff of Paisley".

¹²⁴ *The Scottish People and the French Revolution*, p. 218.

consequence of a conversation with me did not chuse to do, until he was acquainted with my wishes.

As I was then in Glasgow I set out immediately for Paisley and told the Magistrates etc. that I was determined to preserve the peace and suppress any riots that might happen with the Volunteers force under my command, and that unless the officers of corps were of a different opinion I would not apply for any regular or militia force but would write a General Command that no assistance was necessary. I accordingly convened the officers who agreed with me unanimously and I ordered the Royal Paisley Volunteers to be under arms at 3 o'clock yesterday and three companies of the county corps to be stationed at the three great roads to and from Paisley, [and received] from a number of threats [?] very anxious letters to farmers, millers and corn dealers, depredations were expected in the vicinity of Paisley. As I likewise heard that information of the intended riot had been received in different parts of the county, I ordered the other seven companies to be ready for service wherever it might be required. On the morning of yesterday above 400 respectable inhabitants were sworn in as special constables and provided with batons to whom I paid a visit at their different places of rendezvous, and established patrols in every part of the town. I remained at Paisley all night and no disturbance took place, but as I find the public mind is still convulsed I have ordered a fifth guard to be mounted every night at 4 o'clock and the duty to be taken both by the Royal Paisley and the county corps which consist of 16 companies of 60 men each. I shall in a week from this date establish special constables in every part of the county of Renfrew. It is impossible for me to express how much I was gratified with the zeal and alacrity of the volunteers, and I send your Lordship a copy of the returns made to me which I am confident will afford you satisfaction as it marks in a very meritorious manner the feelings of the men who were at such a distance. Find enclosed a precognition which I thought it necessary to be taken and as I am clearly of opinion that the present spirit must be crushed with determination and despatch, some striking examples are necessary, your Lordship will judge whether this would be a proper one.

Two men were lodged in Paisley jail early this morning and I hope some evidence will be obtained respecting the authors of the late inflammatory notices.

I forgot to mention that the person respecting whom the precognition was taken left Ireland during the rebellion under very suspicious circumstances and is generally considered as of bad and seditious principles and conduct.

I shall write to your Lordship the moment I hear from Mr [?].

Yours most truly

Will. McDowall

Eleven days later McDowall had John Neilson print a *Proclamation*, addressed to “*the Deputy Lieutenant, Justices of the Peace, and Magistrates of Towns, in the County of Renfrew*” and signed by him, concerning the appointment of the Special Constables referred to in the letter.¹²⁵ The Proclamation is headed “*Castlesemple, 27th. Nov. 1800*”

¹²⁵ See the author's 1965 Glasgow B.Litt thesis, p. 191, title 163. The next title listed (164) is another broadsheet Proclamation also addressed from Castlesemple, dated 14th December 1800, and relates to the need for “the greatest oeconomy and frugality in the use of every species of grain”. Interestingly, it contains “six receipts for dressing rice” – cf. the use of rice as a substitute for grain in the making of porridge in the anonymous *Letter from an Inhabitant of Paisley*. This

and in the document McDowall explains the argument behind the decision to proceed to make such appointments:

The appointment of Special Constables in the towns of Paisley and Pollockshaws has been attended with the best consequences, from the zeal and respectability of those who came forward at this critical period; and were similar constitutional associations diffused over the county, they would restore complete confidence to the farmers and corn-dealers, as well as to the industrious and well disposed of every description, from a conviction that their persons and properties were in perfect security, while the disorderly and disaffected would more powerfully feel the difficulty and danger of interrupting that permanent tranquillity and good order which the respectable inhabitants of all ranks and situations are determined to maintain, by offering every aid in their power to the Lieutenancy and Justices of the Peace of the County of Renfrew.

He ends on a personal note, unusual in a document of this kind, by uttering an unambiguous threat to anyone disregarding his words:

I flatter myself that as the peace of the County of Renfrew appears to be restored, it will in future be completely preserved, but if contrary to my expectations, riotous and tumultuous meetings should unfortunately be again excited, I am confident, that the Special Constables will not only be useful and active in the Parishes, where they are enrolled, but will assemble, from every quarter, at the shortest notice, to aid the Civil Power in suppressing riot and insurrection.

On the reverse side of the broadsheet are listed the names of the great and the good who, throughout Renfrewshire, McDowall has charged with the task of making appointments of Head and Assistant Constables: these include former MPs for Renfrewshire, Sir John Shaw Stewart, Archibald Speirs of Elderslie and Boyd Alexander, as well as John Cuninghame of Craighends and Sir John Maxwell of Pollock, a supporter of Shaw Stewart. Cuninghame was McDowall's brother-in-law while Speirs was brother-in-law to Henry Dundas. Boyd Alexander "of Southbarr", who had been put up by McDowall for the Renfrewshire seat in 1796, was a 'nabob' who was connected with Shaw Stewart by marriage. In 1802 Alexander, contesting Glasgow, had changed places with McDowall who was returned unopposed for the Renfrewshire seat once more. The list is a veritable object lesson in the incestuous nature and associated skulduggery of parliamentary politics of the time. As such it is, of course, of considerable historical interest on that score alone.

Another name on the reverse side of the Proclamation is that of McDowall's nephew, the tragic Dayhort McDowall of Walkinshaw who bought the Castlesemple estate from an increasingly financially embarrassed William in 1808 but failed to meet the date for

would seem to reinforce the case once and for all for the *Letter* having been a government contrivance.

repayment of a promissory note on the Trustees for the Alexander Houstoun bankruptcy, a catastrophe which ultimately led to ruin for the whole McDowall family. Dayhort committed suicide by drowning in Castlesemple Loch in 1809.¹²⁶

For William McDowall III, it can be said that the jury is still out.

(b) William Carlile - “believer in the liberty of the subject”.

Like William McDowall, William Carlile¹²⁷ also has his plaque inside Paisley Abbey, though it is much less grand. However, a little strangely, his name is not referenced by either Meikle or Harris.

Carlile was a very different kind of man from William McDowall. Superficially, one could be led into thinking of him as a stern loyalist, as one of Dundas’s men, on not dissimilar lines to McDowall. Thus, the *Glasgow Courier* and the *Glasgow Advertiser* both carry a report of the meeting, chaired by William Carlile as Head Magistrate, held in the Court Hall in Paisley on 14th December 1792, the flavour of which is not merely overwhelmingly loyalist but positively and unmistakably inimical to the reformist cause -

We do most earnestly expect and entreat all those over whom we have any influence to discontinue their attendance in such societies [i.e. the Friends of the People and similar reform associations] before they shall be hurried into conduct which they may have cause deeply to regret, when it is not in their power to remedy it ...¹²⁸

Should that warning be ignored, the report of the meeting continues, -

We shall ... on the one hand use all our influence to counteract every attempt to inflame the minds of the people, or to raise popular discontent; and we shall on the other consider ourselves

¹²⁶ It was the death of Dayhort McDowall, William’s nephew, to which the weaver-poet Robert Tannahill refers in his letter to James King of 16th July 1809, contemplating his own suicide (also by drowning) which occurred in Paisley on 17th May 1810. See Ronald Crawford’s “New Light on Robert Tannahill, the weaver-poet of Paisley”, *Notes and Queries*, vol.13, no.5, May 1966, 184-9.

¹²⁷ 1745-1829. Carlile was also the author of an article *Description of Paisley* [or, in the case of the former journal, *New Description of Paisley*] which appeared in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* vol. 57, May (pp. 372-4) and June 1787 (pp. 465-7) and reproduced also in the *Scots Magazine* vol.49, June (pp. 293-4) and July 1787 (pp. 324-6). Much later, Carlile updated the piece for the *Scots Magazine* for July 1806 as *Sketches of Paisley*, pp. 17-18. In 1809 William Taylor, a weaver, published a reply to Carlile in the form of *An Answer to Mr. Carlile’s Sketches of Paisley* (Paisley, Stephen Young, 1809): see Crawford’s B.Litt thesis, p. 206, title 226 and MacDonald’s *The Radical Thread* p. 42, note 25.

¹²⁸ *Glasgow Advertiser* 14-21 December 1792; *Glasgow Courier* 18 December 1792.

as bound to give every preference and encouragement in the way of business to those among our workmen, who shall at this time distinguish themselves by a peaceable and regular conduct.

This is not the kind of language a man of liberal sympathy might be expected to endorse, even allowing for the fact of his (theoretically) temporising role in the chair.

Nevertheless, we have it on his own authority that Carlile - as one of the best-known cotton thread manufacturers in the town - changed his mind, and his sympathies, on the genuineness and sincerity of the motives on the part of the majority of Paisley reformists once the full effects of the war with France began to take their toll on the daily lives of his operatives. From the anonymously supplied Foreword to his *Autobiography*, written towards the close of his long life (Carlile died in 1829 at the age of 84)¹²⁹ we learn that

During the stirring times of the French Revolution, he was in the vigour of his manhood and mental energy, and entered with great ardour into all the political questions which then agitated society. As he never feared to give full and free expression to liberal sentiments, which by many were then little understood, he necessarily exposed himself to the dislike of a strong and influential party; while on the other hand, he won the enthusiastic support of the friends of liberal opinions.¹³⁰

Carlile himself describes a fascinating, but disturbing incident that occurred in Paisley at this time, in which he and others suffered considerably at the hands of unscrupulous government agents determined to undermine his authority and good name. After the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act in 1794 the notorious ‘gagging’ Bills had been laid before the Commons introducing new legislation on (a) Seditious Meetings and Treasonable Practices, and (b) Seditious Meetings and Assemblies. By this time Carlile’s conscience was telling him that enough was enough and accordingly he had resigned as Chief Magistrate (later termed Provost) in order to secure his own neutrality before calling a meeting “of respectable inhabitants” for the purpose of petitioning both Houses against the passing of the two pieces of legislation. In this action Carlile, a seriously devout Christian,

was convinced it was [my] duty to promote the good of mankind, as far as opportunity was afforded or ability given. This duty, I conceived, embraced both civil and religious liberty. ... I determined, after consulting a few friends privately, to call a meeting of respectable inhabitants, who met accordingly, to the number of about forty, at which meeting we resolved to petition both Houses of Parliament against the passing of these Acts. Our petitions were signed by above 3,000

¹²⁹ W. Carlile, *Autobiography*, Glasgow, Thomas Smith, privately printed, 1863.

¹³⁰ *ibid.*, p. iv.

inhabitants, the greater number being heads of families, which included a majority of the town, against this strong measure of ministers.¹³¹

Along with many others from all over Britain, the Paisley petition was sent, received and noted.¹³² It made no difference whatsoever and both Acts entered the Statute Book in 1795. However, what followed for Carlile and his liberal sympathisers is of the greatest interest in the tortuous history of the Pitt government's devious actions at this time. Carlile graphically tells the story:

At our meeting a faint opposition was made to the petitions by three young men, officers in a Volunteers corps, possessed of rather more zeal than knowledge. These young men sent a report of our proceedings to the editor of the "Glasgow Courier", blending truth and falsehood in such a manner as was intended to bring the gentlemen who attended the meeting into contempt. This, however, proved abortive; and the answer given to that ungentlemanly and illiberal attack was well received by the publick, and turned the tables against the libellers, whose names we procured from the editor of the "Courier".¹³³

Even so, the matter did not end there. Carlile makes no secret of his view that what happened next was contrived by outside influences – "friends of despotism or tyranny or prerogative" in his thinly disguised coded language – and he just stops short of attributing the nastiness *directly* to government provocation:

This triumph produced those private exertions of baneful influence which are fed or produced by that base and diabolical disposition of malice. Every exertion in their power was made by the friends of despotism or tyranny or prerogative, to ruin the individuals selected as the active agents in supporting or forwarding petitions to the Legislature to preserve the Bill of Rights inviolated.¹³⁴

Worse was to follow. The "diabolical disposition of malice" knew no bounds such that an attempt was made to discredit Carlile and his fellow liberals – in both a metaphorical and literal sense. However, the plan backfired -

... the publick credit of some of the gentlemen was attempted to be undermined, and the Paisley Bank¹³⁵ refused to discount their bills or drafts on London. Immediately a resolution was taken to demand gold for such of their notes as came in their way, which was done with such effect, that the partners became alarmed, and sent a kind of apology for their conduct, which being deemed insufficient, further demands were made, and appearances of a general run on the Bank

¹³¹ *ibid.*, p. 21

¹³² The full text of the Paisley Petition is included in Niel Douglas's *Thoughts on Modern Politics*, 1793, pp. 220-222. See chapter 3.7 (b) below.

¹³³ Carlile, *Autobiography*, p. 23.

¹³⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 23-4.

¹³⁵ There were two Paisley banks in operation at this time – the Paisley (Old) Banking Co. (1783), to which Carlile refers, and the Paisley Union Bank (1788). One of the founders of these banks was William McDowall III of Garthland and Castlesemple. See Stuart M. Nisbet, "The Making of Scotland's First Industrial Region: the Early Cotton Industry in Renfrewshire", *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*, 29.1, 2009, pp. 1-28.

beginning to take effect, the writer considered it proper to give up any further demands, to prevent that inconvenience to the publick that must have resulted from the suspension of Bank payments, convinced that the end in view was gained, and that this Banking Company was now satisfied that they depended as much on publick favour as those in trade on them, and that it would be a long time before they attempted such another revenge on those they considered their political foes.¹³⁶

In other words, the people had won the day. At the same time, while some kind of accommodation was reached between the petitioners and the Paisley Bank, the latter doing the government's dirty work for them, the taint of treachery still doggedly clung to Carlile and his friends in the town:

From this time recourse was had to private slander to whisper away the writer's character, and those who had gone along with him in petitioning the Legislature. We were accused of being disloyal subjects, because we disapproved of the origin and continuance of the war. We were called Democrats, because we avowed ourselves to be the friends of constitutional liberty. We were deemed enemies to our country, because we wished that other nations might enjoy civil and religious liberty in an equal or superior degree to ourselves.¹³⁷

It is strange that these excerpts have remained unpublished since the Victorian age on the discovery of the Carlile manuscript. Carlile's *Autobiography* is clearly an important document in the history of the reformist movement in Scotland in the mid 1790s. For one thing, this episode quoted from the *Autobiography* displays the lengths to which an anxious government would go to contain and suppress opposition to its policies during the war with France and the concurrent reform movement in Scotland. Perhaps even more significant, however, is the revelation that William Carlile, a man of upright character and high Christian principles, an influential cotton thread manufacturer and eminent local magistrate (and Chief Magistrate of Paisley on numerous occasions into the 1820s), was himself by no means immune from the harshest and most devious treatment the Dundas administration could contrive to secure their ends. Above all, the incident confirms once and for all that it is far too simplistic to think of 1790s reformism - in the west of Scotland at least - as belonging exclusively to the world of operatives and the 'lower orders'. In that regard alone, Carlile's *Autobiography* deserves to be better known.

(c) James Kennedy - "shadowy" friend of the people

¹³⁶ Carlile, *Autobiography*, p. 24

¹³⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 24-5.

There is no monument to James Kennedy in Paisley Abbey – and it is inconceivable that there should be. Historians are fond of attaching the adjectives “shadowy” and “clandestine”¹³⁸ to describe the later, more extreme phase of radicalism. What had started as a clamour for parliamentary reform in the early 1790s, by the closing years of the decade had evolved into something altogether more disturbing and even sinister, but at the same time frustratingly *elusive*. All three words can appropriately be applied to the extreme radical, James Kennedy. He has no entry, however, in the *Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals*.¹³⁹

James Kennedy was a journeyman weaver in Paisley who had gone to Edinburgh in the early 1790s where he had become a ‘manufacturer’, specialising in fancy goods such as lacewear, handkerchiefs and gowns. In modern parlance he would have been described as an entrepreneur, turning an honest penny wherever the opportunity arose. He was an intimate friend and correspondent of the poet Alexander Wilson and it is likely that their friendship started when they had shared the same trade in Paisley. It is even possible that Wilson served his weaving ‘apprenticeship’ under Kennedy to whom, in his letters, he always respectfully defers. In Edinburgh Kennedy originally lived at the “back of the fountain well” and later at the “Morocco’s Close” [Mid-Common Close] in the Lawnmarket. We shall return to the Wilson/Kennedy connection in greater detail later in this study.¹⁴⁰

Kennedy served as an assistant secretary at the third (British) Convention of the Friends of the People in October/November 1793. Meikle notes that on this occasion the government spy was unable to take shorthand notes and had to be content with borrowing the minutes from one of the assistant secretaries and “making a hasty copy”. Whether or not it was our man Kennedy who loaned him his manuscript we don’t know. We can be sure that Kennedy fled Edinburgh after the collapse of the so-called Watt or ‘Pike Plot’

¹³⁸ e.g. T. M. Devine in “The Failure of Radical Reform in Scotland in the late Eighteenth Century: the social and economic context”, in *Conflict and Stability in Scottish Society 1700-1850*, p. 51 and Michael Lynch, *Scotland a New History*, London, revised edition, 1992, p. 389.

¹³⁹ Vol. 1, 1770-1830, ed. Joseph O. Baylen and Norbert J. Gossman, Hassocks, Sussex and Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey, 1979.

¹⁴⁰ Chapter 6 *passim* – but especially pp. 331-337.

and ‘fugitated’ to London. It was there that he ended up under the care and protection of the radical London bookseller and publisher, Daniel Isaac Eaton.¹⁴¹

Harris speculates that Kennedy

may well be the unnamed Scottish radical who, visiting a meeting of the London Corresponding Society in June 1794, was described as a “violent democrat”. This individual talked, apparently, of “the Scotch to be in great force, and resolved in obtaining a reform and redress of their grievances, that would long ago have proceeded to violent measures, but had been induced to wait from favourable reports they had heard of the London Corresponding Society ... ”¹⁴²

However, Harris (who is, throughout, clearly unaware of the Wilson connection, as is Elaine McFarland) seems to have missed a report in the *Glasgow Courier* for 31st May 1794 which unintentionally adds an altogether gentler, almost family-man dimension to the ‘official’ image of James Kennedy as an alleged man of violence:

Glasgow, May 31

The Sheriff-Depute of the County of Edinburgh has offered a reward of 100 guineas¹⁴³ for apprehending Martin Tod, blacksmith, and James Kennedy, merchant, Edinburgh, active Members of the Societies called “The Friends of the People”, and charged with certain treasonable and seditious practices. Kennedy was formerly a journeyman weaver in Paisley, and is the same person who, a few months ago, presented a child for baptism in the Canongate church of Edinburgh, under the name of CITIZEN; and upon the Minister’s declining, turned round and called the congregation to witness that the child’s name was Citizen Kennedy.

The next issue of the *Courier* (3rd June) reports the apprehension of Tod; he was given up by his wife (with his own concurrence) who “claims the reward”. In the same issue of the paper it is reported that on the previous day, 2nd June, David Downie, Robert Watt and Robert Orrock “who have for some time been prisoners in the tollbooth, accused of seditious practices, were conveyed to the Castle.” The public beheading of Watt, a former government agent, was one of the lowest points in the period known as ‘Pitt’s terror’ in Scotland and contributed to the decision of several active radicals, including Kennedy, to flee the law rather than entrust their fate to biased judges and packed juries. Kennedy’s role in the Watt trial is further discussed in Chapter 6 below where I am able to reveal new light on his life and career.

¹⁴¹ See chapter 3§5, 147-153 below.

¹⁴² *The Scottish People and the French Revolution*, p. 105 and note 204 on p. 266.

¹⁴³ The advertisement of this reward was published in the *Edinburgh Evening Courant* of May 29, 1794. See also chapter 6§ 5(c), 331-37 below.

The bizarre anecdote of the baptism of “Citizen Kennedy” is well enough known and related in Sylvia Clark’s popular history of Paisley.¹⁴⁴ But Clark too fails to make the Kennedy connection with Wilson as, much more surprisingly, does Clark Hunter who, while he mentions Kennedy in the context of Wilson’s jail sentence following the publication of his libellous poem *The Shark* a year earlier in 1793 - and, of course, at length in Wilson’s correspondence - does not connect him at all with the Kennedy of the real-life radical movement, least of all with the man cited in the *Courier* ‘wanted’ notice. Kennedy himself refers to son Citizen and daughter (the conventionally named Margaret or “Peg”) in his poem *The Exile’s Reveries*, one of eight poems in his 1795 pamphlet *Treason!!! or, Not Treason!!!*¹⁴⁵ Intriguingly, the child who became the Reverend Citizen J. Kennedy went on to distinguish himself in his own right as “a life-long Radical” [sic], Methodist minister and early champion of the Chartist cause in the west of Scotland.

Kennedy was in exile in London for almost three years from 1794 to 1797. It is likely that he resided with Eaton there and at that time published two or three pamphlets of verse intended as occasional serial pieces under the generic name *The Weaver’s Budget*. On page [iii] of the extremely rare *The pitiful plaint of a hen-pecked prodigal: dedicated to the daughter of Duke Bobadil Manifesto*, a crude satire on the Prince of Wales (the future George IV) and his women, the following autobiographical note reveals much about Kennedy’s immediate past history. It is especially significant on account of the date and address: “No. 5, Angel-court, Top of Surry-street [sic], Strand, London, April 24, 1797”. -

J. Kennedy who, upon the Suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act, was unjustly charged with SEDITIOUS and TREASONABLE PRACTICES, and who, after the Suspension had expired, was, upon his return to Scotland, illegally apprehended, and above ten weeks wrongfully imprisoned in the Tolbooth of Edinburgh, upon a false charge of having “*Connected* himself with the *Disaffected* and *Conspirators* against our *Happy Constitution* in *London*” respectfully informs his Friends and the Public, that he is again attempting to enter into Business, and has now ready for Sale a few Muslin Gown Pieces of his own Manufacture.

The Patterns are entirely new.

*** Notwithstanding the innocence of J.K. was so apparent, that *even the Crown Lawyers of Scotland* did not venture to bring him before the LORD JUSTICE CLERK, and an EDINBURGH JURY; yet he received no indemnification for the losses he had sustained, and the

¹⁴⁴ *Paisley, a History*, Edinburgh, 1988, p. 94.

¹⁴⁵ See the bibliography of Kennedy titles at the beginning of chapter 6 below, including my notes on each of the three titles constituting his extremely rare “Weavers Budget” series.

distress his family had endured. Indeed, the reverse was the case. Oppression was exercised to the last. When he was discharged from the Tolbooth of Edinburgh, his bed and trunk were detained upon an unjust claim of Gaol fees, which he deemed it his duty to resist.

N.B. As J.K.'s stay in London depends entirely upon "*Existing Circumstances*", it is requested that those who are disposed to favour him with their Orders, will apply soon.

"Apply soon", was sound advice. Bewley informs us that when Muir made it to France via Cadiz in December 1797 he was joined there a few months later by the extreme radical, Robert Watson - "a former member of the Corresponding Society, who had been held without trial for two years in Newgate before fleeing to France" - who told Muir that Kennedy, now described as a member of the United Scotsmen,¹⁴⁶ would be a useful agent. Bewley states that

Muir very much wanted to see James Kennedy ... in Paris. ... Kennedy he hoped was on his way to Paris with important information. ... Scotland was organized and ready to revolt.¹⁴⁷

Later in September 1798 Muir left Paris to stay in the sleepy little suburb of Chantilly, a mere twenty five miles from the French capital. He died there early in 1798.

The last word on Kennedy - at least for the present in this study - belongs to Professor Andrew Hook. And it, too, is tantalisingly brief yet wonderfully suggestive. In his fascinating essay *Scottish Liberalism and America, 1793-1802*¹⁴⁸ Hook quotes from an obscure travel book by James Stuart who recalls his visit in 1830 to the shop in Washington of one 'Kennedy', a "theological bookseller". He meets Mr. Kennedy and is told something of his swashbuckling past:

I found he was from Paisley. When he was a young man he was attached to those political principles which sent Gerrald, Muir, Palmer, etc. to Botany Bay; and which were at that time (about the years 1793-4) sufficiently unfashionable. He had been induced to attend the meetings of the Edinburgh Convention, though not as a member; but Mr Kennedy's brother, now a senator in Maryland, was a member of the Convention; and they both thought it prudent, during the then reign of terror in Scotland, to emigrate to the United States.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ A good account of this late period of the Scottish radical movement can be found in C. M. Burns's unpublished M.Sc thesis, *Industrial Labour and Radical Movements in the 1790s*, University of Strathclyde, Department of Politics, 1971.

¹⁴⁷ Bewley, *Muir of Huntershill*, pp. 169-170.

¹⁴⁸ Appended to the Second Edition of Hook's *Scotland and America - a study of cultural relations, 1750-1835*, Glasgow, 2008, pp. 240-1.

¹⁴⁹ James Stuart, *Three Years in North America*, 2 vols., New York, 1833, vol. II, p. 41.

Hook proceeds to relate similarly the story of other Scottish emigrants around this time, including John Craig Millar and Alexander Wilson. Again, however, the crucial link between Kennedy and Wilson goes undetected.

Chapter Three

Denial of Liberty: freedom of the press and the assault on the book trade

“It is a dangerous attempt in any government to say to a nation, ‘Thou shalt not read’”.

Thomas Paine, *Letter addressed to the Addressers on the Late Proclamation*, 1792.¹

“... we have heard no language to sooth the irritation of our minds, and taken us even into a cold admiration of our government; but we have heard the language of menace, and we have felt the force of rigorous indictments and prosecutions, that tend more to sour and alienate the affections, than compose the refractory spirits of the people”.

Henry Redhead Yorke, *These are the Times that try Men’s Souls!*, 1793.²

Bibliographical note

The Scottish sedition trials of the early 1790s are fertile soil for the bibliographical historian. The trials discussed in this chapter involved indictments that specifically turned on the accused having “wickedly and feloniously” published and/or printed and circulated books, pamphlets and writings held to be seditious, or constituting a seditious libel.

Of course, the book that scandalised and frightened the government³ most of all was Paine’s *Rights of Man* [to be precise, the second part] which Brims has correctly described as the “ideological handbook” of the radicals⁴ - in much the same way, it has to be said, as his *Common Sense* had “universalized the American cause as the ‘cause of all

¹ *The Thomas Paine Reader*, p. 368.

² London, from the colophon, 1793. The sub-title is *A letter addressed to John Frost, a prisoner in Newgate by Yorke* [sic]. The title is, of course, a quotation from the famous opening lines of Paine’s *The American Crisis*, paper 1 (1776). [*The Thomas Paine Reader*, p. 116.]

³ Nevertheless, A. J. Ayer is probably right when he remarks that it was only after the publication of the second part of *Rights of Man* that the government “showed any interest.”, *Thomas Paine*, Chicago, 1988, p. 115.

⁴ “The *Rights of Man* played a central, and probably crucial, role in politicising the ‘lower orders’ in late 1792 and in providing the radicals with an ideological handbook ... It was the bible of Scottish radicalism”, - although Brims is correct to qualify its impact by adding “but it was a bible in which some of the contents were more acceptable than others.” - J. S. Brims, unpublished Edinburgh University Ph.D thesis, *The Scottish Democratic Movement in the Age of the French Revolution*, 1983, p. 228.

mankind” in 1776.⁵ But *Rights of Man* was by no means the only publication to be named in the High Court of Justiciary in Edinburgh as a seditious book. Most of these titles have been ignored by conventional historians and to describe them as ‘obscure’ is an understatement. Apart from academic specialists, who today, for example, has heard of Volney’s *Ruins* or of the periodical calling itself *The Patriot*? And yet the publication and circulation of certain books and pamphlets constituted a real threat in the eyes of government to the security and good order of the country. Using these publications to spread the message of reform to others helped seal the fate of Muir *et al* and accounts for their harsh sentences. These ‘crimes’ were also held by the authorities to be irrelevant to any threat to the liberty of the press. The severity of the sentences meted out was intended to deprive printers and booksellers, for a time at least, of their means of livelihood. In that policy, the government was largely successful in the longer term, though there were exceptions.

More positively, and aside from the trials, the second half of the eighteenth century was like no other time in British history when books, pamphlets and newspapers came into their own as vehicles of information and enlightenment for the ‘lower orders’. It was, of course, genuinely the age of “The Enlightenment and the Book”, such that it is not an exaggeration to claim that the intellectual flowering of polite society cannot be fully understood outside, and in the absence of an understanding of, the world of printing, publishing and bookselling. This section of my study concentrates, however, not on the grandees of that world – Andrew Millar (with his roots in Paisley), the Dilly brothers, the Cadells and the Strahans, Archibald Constable and their like, whose great publishing houses Professor Sher has marvellously revealed to us – but rather focuses on the little men who inhabited the altogether sleazier, more shadowy and dangerous world of the radical book trade at that time and who were among the most potent conduits of political dissent in the final decade of the century. This was truly the age of “Radical Enlightenment”.

⁵ Sean Wilentz, “The Cause of All Mankind: Liberty & the American Revolution” in *Liberty & the American Revolution*, catalogue of an exhibition of selections from the Sid Lapidus Collection, Princeton, 2009, p. xl.

1 Introduction: the issue of the freedom of the press in the late 18th century

Freedom of utterance is one of the most ancient of what used to be thought of as man's 'natural' rights. Yet even in classical times it could not be taken for granted. In Greece and Rome laws were passed to control atheism and libel; even so, *risqué* poets such as Catullus appeared to escape the censor whereas more overtly political historians like Livy and Tacitus had to take care and not overstep the mark. However, drastic action against the worst offenders had sometimes to be taken, as John Milton reminds us -

Naevius was quickly cast into prison for his unbridl'd pen, and releas'd by the Tribunes upon his recantation. We read also that libels were burnt, and the makers punisht by *Augustus*. The like severity no doubt was us'd if ought were impiously writt'n against their esteemed gods.⁶

Nevertheless, avers Milton, apart from those exceptions

... how the world went in Books, the Magistrat kept no reckoning.

In Milton's day - the world of the English Civil War and the Commonwealth - Parliament proposed the licensing of 'objectionable' printed materials. A supporter of the Presbyterian Parliament, the Commonwealth and Cromwell, Milton deplores the proposals which he sees as a denial of all the gains made by "our Reformation":

... liberty of Printing must be enthrall'd again under a Prelaticall commission of twenty, the privilege of the people nullifi'd, and which is worse, the freedom of learning must groan again, and to her old fetters; all this the Parliament yet sitting.⁷

How is it, he wonders, that such licensing and control is thought to be necessary? Because, of late, there has been a profusion of expression that we are unaccustomed to and have not seen before:

What should ye do then, should ye suppress all this flow'ry crop of knowledge and new light sprung up and yet springing daily in this city ... ?

And there follow the great monumental lines of Miltonic prose amounting to one of the most ringing endorsements of freedom of expression and the liberty of the press in the whole of the English language:

If it be desir'd to know the immediate cause of all this free writing and free speaking, there cannot be assign'd a truer than your own mild, and free, and human government; it is the liberty, Lords and Commons, which your own valorous and happy counsels have purchast us, liberty which is the nurse of all great wits ... Ye cannot make us now lesse capable, lesse knowing, lesse eagerly

⁶ John Milton, *Arcopagitica*, Liberty Fund edition, Indianapolis, 1999, p. 9.

⁷ *ibid.* p. 34.

pursuing of the truth, unless ye first make your selves, that made us so, lesse the lovers, lesse the founders of our true liberty. ... Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties.⁸

In eighteenth century Edinburgh, David Hume, writing in the early 1740s, is in no doubt that Britain enjoys a liberty of expression that is the envy and wonder of the civilised world:

Nothing is more apt to surprise a foreigner, than the extreme liberty, which we enjoy in this country, of communicating whatever we please to the public, and of openly censuring every measure, entered into by the king or his ministers.⁹

Hume poses the question: How has that come about? The answer lies in the “mixed form of government” that we enjoy in this country –

... as the republican part of the government prevails in England, though with a great mixture of monarchy, it is obliged, for its own preservation, to maintain a watchful *jealousy* over the magistrates, to remove all discretionary powers, and to secure every one’s life and fortune by general and inflexible laws. No action must be deemed a crime but what the law has plainly determined to be such: No crime must be imputed to a man but from a legal proof before his judges; and even these judges must be his fellow-subjects, who are obliged, by their own interest, to have a watchful eye over the encroachments and violence of the ministers. From these causes it proceeds, that there is as much liberty, and even perhaps, licentiousness, in Great Britain, as there were formerly slavery and tyranny in Rome.¹⁰

Accordingly, Hume argues in his conclusion:

These principles account for the great liberty of the press in these kingdoms, beyond what is indulged in any other government. It is apprehended, that arbitrary power would steal in upon us, were we not careful to prevent its progress, and were there not an easy method of conveying the alarm from one end of the kingdom to the other. The spirit of the people must frequently be roused, in order to curb the ambition of the court; and the dread of rousing this spirit must be employed to prevent that ambition. Nothing is so effectual to this purpose as the liberty of the press, by which all the learning, wit, and genius of the nation may be employed on the side of freedom, and every one be animated to its defence. As long, therefore, as the republican part of our government can maintain itself against the monarchical, it will naturally be careful to keep the press open, as of importance to its own preservation.¹¹

⁸ *ibid.* p. 44

⁹ David Hume, *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, Liberty Fund, Indianapolis, 1987, pp. 29-30 – Essay II, *Of the Liberty of the Press*. The essay first appeared in *Essays Moral and Political* (1741-2) and was reprinted in the posthumous 1777 edition of the *Essays*.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ As quoted by Thomas Erskine in his defence of Thomas Paine at his trial on a charge of seditious libel on 18 December 1792 – Howell, *State Trials, XXII, 1783-94*, London, 1817, 441-2 – and reiterated (from Erskine’s speech) by the Defence Counsel, Haggart, in the trial of the Reverend Thomas Fyshe Palmer at Perth Circuit Court on 12-13 September 1793 – Howell, *State Trials, XXIII, 1792-3*, London, 1817, 280.

In his *The Scottish Enlightenment*, Alexander Broadie concludes that this *idea* of liberty (though he is careful not to assign it exclusively to Hume) is synonymous with, and inseparable from, the entire spirit of the Enlightenment; indeed, it can be used as a metaphor to define and interpret the “light” (as, that is, in the term “enlightenment”), to distinguish it from “darkness”:

... it is freedom of speech, not freedom of thought that characterises an enlightened country. ... It might be thought that it is easier to suppress freedom of speech than of thought, that however much we are constrained by authorities who simply terrorise people into public verbal acquiescence, people can still, in the solitude and privacy of their own heads, think what they want. ... Thinking, though it seems to go on essentially in our own heads, is in fact a social or communal activity. In that sense, an attack on freedom of speech is also an attack on freedom of thought. Freedom to put ideas into the public domain is therefore requisite for enlightenment.¹²

Broadie then quotes from George Turnbull (1698-1749):

Liberty or a free constitution is absolutely necessary to produce and uphold that Freedom, Greatness and Boldness of Mind, without which it cannot rise to noble and sublime Conceptions. Slavery soon unmans and dispirits a People; bereaves them of their Virtue and Genius, and sinks them into a mean, spiritless, enfeebled Race that hardly deserves to be called “Men”.¹³

It is not an exaggeration to claim that in Enlightenment Britain freedom of speech, and of the press in general, was regarded as ‘the cornerstone of all others’. That, certainly, was the belief of the anonymous writers of titles such as *Essay on the Liberty of the Press* (1755)¹⁴ and *The Freedom of Speech and Writing upon Public Affairs, considered* (1766).¹⁵ The great jurist, William Blackstone, called it “the great palladium of British freedom”¹⁶ and the anonymous author of the Junius letters (1769-72) went even further,

¹² Alexander Broadie, *The Scottish Enlightenment*, Edinburgh, 2001, p. 23.

¹³ *ibid.*, p. 24. The Turnbull quotation cited by Broadie is from Turnbull’s *A Treatise on Ancient Painting*, London, 1740.

¹⁴ Thomas Hayter (1702-62), Bishop of Norwich and of London. His pamphlet is: *An Essay on the Liberty of the Press Chiefly as it respects Personal Slander. London: Printed for J. Raymond.* n.d., but ESTC suggests 1755.

¹⁵ William Bolland. I have been unable to find out anything about Bolland’s background or career. His pamphlet is: *The Freedom of Speech and Writing upon Public Affairs, considered; with Observations on the proper Use of the Liberty of the Press, ... London Printed; and Sold by S. Baker, in York-Street, Covent-Garden. MDCCLXVI.*

¹⁶ The term *Palladium* in its classical sense meant that as long as the graven image of Pallas survived in its place in Troy the prosperity of the city was guaranteed. Later, a *palladium* was set up in Rome and other Italian towns for the same purpose.

This 18th C. use of the word “palladium” became, after its employment by Blackstone (1769) and ‘Junius’ (1769-72), a kind of hackneyed term to denote “anything on which the safety of the nation ... is believed to depend; a safeguard, protecting institution” (OED) with special reference to freedom of speech and of the press. In fact, it was used, admittedly in a more general context, by David Hume (1761) *before* Blackstone and others - “This stone ... was carefully preserved at Scone as the true palladium of their monarchy.” (*History of England*, I, xiii, p. 321).

insisting it was “the palladium of all the civil, political, and religious rights of an Englishman”. The reformist parliamentarian and dramatist, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, declaimed:

Let me but array a free Press, and the liberties of England will stand unshaken.¹⁷

2 The publication of *Rights of Man* : 1791-1792

In the last decade of the eighteenth century, however, it was a wholly different scenario. Even before the passing by Parliament of Pitt’s two notorious ‘gagging’ Acts – the Treason and Seditious Writings Acts of 1795 – a Royal Proclamation of May, 1792 “against wicked and seditious writings” made it inevitable that *Rights of Man* and its author would become leading contenders for government ‘attentions’. However, what guaranteed *Rights* becoming a number one government target was its cheapness and, consequently, its general accessibility. As C. H. Herford succinctly put it, its appeal lay in the fact that whereas William Godwin’s *Enquiry concerning Political Justice* (1793) was a book “for the study”, Paine’s masterpiece was one “for the streets”.¹⁸ The printing history of *Rights of Man* illustrates the lengths to which an anxious government was prepared to go to safeguard its defined interests which in this case meant, in its eyes at least, nothing less than the survival and preservation of constitutional monarchy in Britain in the face of the growing republican and Jacobin menace.

After the publication of *Rights 2*, there followed years of dissent and unrest reflected in the shoal of radical and loyalist books and pamphlets, almost ceaselessly flowing from booksellers in both England and Scotland (often operating out of back-street premises) who continued to defy the government crack-down by satisfying a seemingly unquenchable thirst for political pamphlets and cheap reprints. All this was managed under the malevolent gaze of Pitt’s repressive regime, bolstered as it then was by the passing of the two infamous gagging Acts at the end of 1795¹⁹ and enforced by an ‘army’ of ubiquitous spies, agents and informers. For the bibliographer, it can be a difficult task

¹⁷ The quotations in this paragraph relating to freedom of the press are taken from Roy Porter’s *Enlightenment Britain and the Creation of the Modern World*, London, 2000, p. 192.

¹⁸ C.H. Herford, *The Age of Wordsworth*, London, 1897, p. 8.

¹⁹ Though, in practice, the vast majority of prosecutions continued to be based on the common law crime of seditious libel.

disentangling the printing history of these titles, frequently pirated and reprinted many times in as many different editions.

In Scotland, an unravelling of the Pitt/Dundas assault on the radical book trade is overdue. Bob Harris has tackled it in a limited way, having largely confined his efforts thus far to newspapers.²⁰ Within the narrow scope of this present study, by contrast, I shall focus on a number of printers, publishers and booksellers, most but not all Scottish, who fell foul of the law at this time. It is crucial, however, not to exclude the London book trade, mainly on account of the role of certain radical London printers and booksellers as regular suppliers to sympathetic members of the trade who were known radical activists in Edinburgh and Glasgow, but also out of the historical need to preserve the ‘all-British’ dimension necessarily important to radical studies of this last decade of the eighteenth century.

Since the works of Thomas Paine must form a central locus in any consideration of the popular book trade in the late eighteenth century in both England *and* Scotland, the best starting point, in relation to the issue of liberty of the press, is the publishing history of both parts of *Rights of Man*. The iconic eighteenth century ‘prince of London publishers’, Joseph Johnson, had contracted with Paine for the printing of the first part of *Rights*. Johnson, a printer as well as a publisher, had withdrawn from the arrangement because, in the words of Paine’s best modern biographer to date, John Keane:

he sensed, correctly, that Paine’s manuscript would attract far more attention and bitter controversy²¹

- more, that is, than the aggregate of his several previous involvements in politically charged *genres de livres*, which had already included his publication of other replies to Burke’s *Reflections* by Thomas Christie, Mary Wollstonecraft and Capel Lofft.²² It is also

²⁰ As, for example, in his *Politics and the Rise of the Press*, London and New York, 1996, and his journal contribution, “Scotland’s Newspapers, the French Revolution and Domestic Radicalism (c. 1789-1794)” in *The Scottish Historical Review*, LXXXIV, 1: No. 217, April 2005, pp. 38-62.

²¹ John Keane, *Tom Paine A political life*, New York, 1995, p. 305.

²² i.e. in probable chronological order of publication - (i) *A Vindication of the Rights of Men, in a Letter to the Right Honourable Edmund Burke; occasioned by his Reflections on the Revolution in France*. London: Printed for J. Johnson, No. 72, St. Paul’s Church-Yard. M,DCC,XC ; (ii) *Remarks on the Letter of the Rt. Hon. Edmund Burke, concerning the Revolution in France, and on the Proceedings in Certain Societies in London, relative to that event. ... By Capel Lofft*. London: Printed for J. Johnson, No. 72, St. Paul’s Church-Yard. M,DCC,XC.

likely that Johnson had been got at as a result of “repeated visits by government agents”. The odds favour that likelihood and Keane concludes:

Fearing the book police, and unnerved by the prospect of arrest and bankruptcy, Johnson suppressed the book on the very day of its scheduled publication.²³

Paine reacted quickly, however, and, just three weeks later than he had originally planned, *Rights of Man* [Part One] came out under the imprint of J. S. Jordan of Fleet Street on 13th March 1791.²⁴ Before his hasty but planned departure for France, where he proposed to arrange a French edition and translation, Paine gave a few copies of the aborted Johnson first edition to some close friends. Not surprisingly, only a very few of the Johnson ‘ur’ *Rights* edition have survived, barely four copies in Britain and five in the United States.²⁵

The publishing history of *Rights of Man Part the second* is even more bizarre. While the story is undoubtedly well-known, it remains strange that in most modern popular editions of Paine the author’s four-page *Appendix* to ‘Part Two’, in which he explains the extraordinary background to the book’s printing history, is omitted. Yet, for the bibliographer, it is a fascinating story Paine tells. *Rights 2* was published on 17th February, 1792, almost exactly eleven months after ‘Part One’. With his usual clarity of expression, Paine apologises for delay in the publication of *Rights 2* which he attributes to the printer declining to proceed after page 257, “all at once, without any previous intimation, though I had been with him the evening before.” He explains:

... though I had been with him the evening before, he sent me, by one of his workmen, all the remaining copy from page 257, declining to go on with the work *on any consideration*. To account for this extraordinary conduct I was totally at a loss ... still more especially as he had, at the time of his beginning to print, and before he had seen the whole copy, offered a thousand pounds for the copy-right, together with the future copy-right of the former part of the *Rights of Man*.

(iii) *Letters on the Revolution of France, and on the New Constitution established by the National Assembly: occasioned by the publications of the Right Hon. Edmund Burke, M. P. and Alexander de Calonne, Late Minister of State. ... by Thomas Christie. ... London: Printed for J. Johnson, St. Paul’s Church-Yard. M,DCC,XCI.*

²³ *Tom Paine A Political Life*, p. 305.

²⁴ Astonishingly, Edward Vallance in his *A Radical History of Britain*, London, 2009, gets it all wrong and asserts that Jordan published the book “in March the following year” (p. 230).

²⁵ ESTC lists the following locations of the nine extant copies as in the UK – the British Library (2 copies), Cambridge University Library, and Reading University Library; and in the USA – the American Philosophical Society, and the libraries of Boston Athenaeum, Huntington, University of Indiana and the University of Texas.

The news of the offer had been brought by an unknown person and it's clear that Paine smelled a rat – a rat in the form of a government agent offering the printer government money:

I told the person who brought me this offer that I should not accept it, and wished it not to be renewed, giving him as my reason, that though I believed the printer to be an honest man, I would never put it in the power of any printer or publisher to suppress or alter a work of mine, by making him master of the copy, or give to him the right of selling it to any minister, or to any other person, or to treat as a mere matter of traffic, that which I intended should operate as a principle.

Paine clearly regarded the attempt to bribe the printer at the eleventh hour as dirty work at the crossroads:

Whether that gentleman, or any other, had seen the work, or any part of it [that is, in sheet form in the print shop – RLC], is more than I have authority to say. But the manner in which the work was returned, and the particular time at which this was done, and that after the offers he had made, are suspicious circumstances.

Warning to the theme of subterfuge, conspiracy and shady deals, Paine further explains:

A ministerial bookseller in Piccadilly who had been employed, as common report says, by a clerk of one of the boards closely connected with the Ministry (the Board of Trade and Plantation of which Hawksbury is president) to publish what he calls my *Life*²⁶ ... used to have his books printed at the same printing office that I employed; but when the former part of *Rights of Man* came out, he took his work away in dudgeon; and about a week or ten days before the printer returned my copy, he came to make him an offer of his work again, which was accepted. This would consequently give him admission into the printing-office where the sheets of this work were then lying; and as booksellers and printers are free with each other, he would have the opportunity of seeing what was going on. – Be the case however as it may, Mr. Pitt's plan, little and diminutive as it is, would have had a very awkward appearance, had this work appeared at the time the printer had engaged to finish it. ... If all the gentlemen are innocent, it is very unfortunate for them that such a variety of suspicious circumstances should, without any design, arrange themselves together.²⁷

All of this is tortuous and unclear without an understanding of the background to the printing of Part Two which is helpfully explained in some detail by Keane. Both Johnson and Jordan, having been approached by Paine, declined to handle the second part for fear of prosecution and imprisonment. Paine's friend, Thomas Christie²⁸ suggested

²⁶ A reference to the 'commissioned' life of Paine that came out in 1791 and was the work of George Chalmers, *alias* "Francis Oldys".

²⁷ All extracts from the Appendix to *Rights of Man* Part Two are from the Penguin Classics edition of the complete work with an introduction by Eric Foner and notes by Henry Collins, London, Penguin Books, 1985, pp. 275-8. Curiously, however, the Appendix is omitted from the Penguin Classics 'sister' volume, *The Thomas Paine Reader*, ed. Michael Foot and Isaac Kramnick, London, Penguin Books, 1987.

²⁸ See note 22 above.

Thomas Chapman. Chapman, like Jordan, also operated in Fleet Street and had published John Ryland's *A Tribute of Honour to the Great and Good Men in France* in 1790 (and would bring out editions of Thomson's *The Seasons* and Young's *Night Thoughts on Life* in 1793). Having clearly been put up to it by external influences, Chapman tried to bargain with Paine for the copyright. Paine's reaction was hotly to deny he ever willingly surrendered copyright to any printer or publisher.

How did Chapman then respond? And how was the matter resolved? In the words of Keane -

Chapman later claimed that when he finally found time to read carefully through the proofs one afternoon, he was suddenly struck by "a dangerous tendency" in the work and that he became convinced that it would be treated a seditious libel by the authorities. "I therefore immediately concluded in my mind not to proceed any farther in the work."²⁹

Keane tells the rest of the story in some detail which need not be iterated here. Not for the first time in his life Paine quarrelled violently with a printer. In this case accusations and counter accusations flew between the two thick and fast. The final parting of the ways came when, according to Keane, Paine realised that he had been 'double crossed' by Chapman:

Chapman's later story that he had suddenly been struck by the "dangerous tendency" of the text ... seemed fraudulent to Paine, who drew the conclusion that the book police had leaned on Chapman, threatening to ruin his livelihood if he proceeded any further with the publication.³⁰

In other words, the clear implication is that government agents were behind the attempt to buy out the copyright with a view to strangling the child at birth.

However, as in the case of the first part, and faced with an almost identical eleventh-hour decision he desperately needed to resolve, Paine moved swiftly to forestall any attempt by the agents to confiscate the manuscript or the sheets Chapman had already printed. A deal was struck with Jordan - who had obviously had second thoughts, possibly seduced by the tremendous commercial opportunities of the book or, as is perhaps more likely, moved by Paine's genuine predicament - and *Rights of Man* Part Two was finally released only a week or two later than Paine had intended. Within the next two weeks, the book would go through a total of five editions. As Keane graphically puts it:

²⁹ *Tom Paine A political life*, pp. 325-6.

³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 326.

The brightest and most powerful political skyrocket in English history had been launched.³¹

3 The trial of Thomas Paine: the role of Thomas Erskine, ‘Counsel for the radicals’

The most celebrated trial of all involving seditious “writings” is, of course, that of Thomas Paine himself. When Paine was put on trial *in absentia* on 18th. December, 1792 (he had gone to Paris with two friends from the London Corresponding Society in September), the charge read out against him by the Hon. Spencer Perceval, prosecuting for the Crown, was that

Thomas Paine late of London, ... being a wicked, malicious, seditious, and ill-disposed person ... and ... most seditiously and maliciously ... contriving and intending to ... traduce and vilify the late happy revolution providentially brought about ... under ... His Highness William, heretofore Prince of Orange, and afterwards King of England ... did write and publish ... a certain false ... seditious libel of and concerning the said late happy revolution ... and ... our present Lord the king ... and ... the parliament of this kingdom, entitled *Rights of Man, Part the Second*.³²

Paine was defended by Thomas Erskine, personal attorney to the Prince of Wales.³³ In John Keane’s words, Erskine’s task was “virtually impossible”.³⁴ The Court was palpably hostile to Paine and Erskine himself had been roundly (but unfairly) condemned throughout the Tory press as a soul mate of Paine’s and an enthusiast for the French Revolution. Erskine chose to defend Paine on the grounds that the charge of seditious libel was inappropriate since it flew in the face of one of the cornerstones of the Constitution – the ‘right’ of freedom of the press. To this day, Thomas Erskine – born in Edinburgh and later Lord Chancellor – is regarded as the ‘Counsel for the radicals’ and one of the founding fathers of the Friends to the Liberty of the Press; his speeches at meetings of the latter organisation in December 1792 and January 1793 are classic defences of the principle of freedom of the press in this country. Appendix C provides insight into the early activities of the Friends and, in particular, their *Declaration* – written by Erskine himself – dated January 1793, of which ten thousand copies were printed for circulation “throughout the country”.

³¹ *ibid.*, p. 327.

³² All quotations from the trial are from Howell’s *State Trials, XXII, 1783-94*, London, 1817, 357-472. Erskine’s celebrated speech for the defendant *in absentia*, Paine, is at pp. 410 – 472, at the end of which the Foreman of the Jury rose to say that a reply from the Attorney General “is not necessary for them”, whereupon the Attorney General, having risen, sat down again “and the jury gave in their verdict – GUILTY.”

³³ Erskine was deprived of this office shortly after the trial. For an account of Erskine’s life and achievements see the excellent 18 page contribution by David Lemmings to the Oxford DNB, online edition, 2004-10.

³⁴ *Tom Paine a Political Life*, p. 347.

The substance of Erskine's defence of Paine lay in his contention that, in the first place, the charge was *ultra vires* since it assaulted the time-honoured and legally acknowledged principle of freedom of the press :

Every man [he began], not intending to mislead and to confound, but seeking to enlighten others with what his own reason and conscience, however erroneously, dictate to him as truth, may address himself to the universal reason of a whole nation, either upon the subject of governments in general, or upon that of our own particular country. ...³⁵

We may not agree, continues Erskine, with all that is set forth in *Rights of Man*, and we certainly would, correctly, seek to punish anyone who urged popular risings and unrest in support of his case:

Let me not ... be suspected to be contending, that it is lawful to write a book pointing out defects in the English government, and exciting individuals to destroy its sanctions, and to refuse obedience³⁶

But that is scarcely the point, Erskine asserts:

But, on the other hand, I do contend, that it is lawful to address the English nation on these momentous subjects ... If no man could have awakened the public mind to errors and abuses in our government, how could it have passed on from stage to stage, through reformation and revolution, so as to have arrived from barbarism to such a pitch of happiness and perfection, that the Attorney General considers it as profanation to touch it any further, or to look for any future amendment?³⁷

And what has ensured this system of "perfection"? It is because

a free press has examined and detected its [meaning "government's"] errors, and the people have happily reformed them: this freedom has alone made our government what it is, and alone can preserve it; and therefore, under the banners of that freedom, today I stand up to defend Thomas Paine.³⁸

Before he sat down, Erskine makes a point of great significance for bibliographers and Paine scholars regarding the extent to which *Rights of Man* became accessible to the public at large:

The First Part of the Rights of Man, Mr. Attorney General tells you, he did not prosecute, although it was in circulation through the country for a year and a half together, because it seems it circulated only amongst what he styles the judicious part of the public, who possessed in their capacities and experience an antidote to the poison; but that with regard to the Second Part now before you, its circulation had been forced into every corner of society; had been printed and

³⁵ *State Trials*, XXII, 414-5.

³⁶ *ibid.*, 416.

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ *ibid.*, 416-7.

reprinted for cheapness even upon whited brown paper, and had crept into the very nurseries of children, as a wrapper for their sweetmeats.³⁹

Erskine's four-hour speech on behalf of the absent Paine cut little ice with a prejudiced Court, the foreman of the jury having interrupted the Attorney General, who was on the point of beginning his reply to Erskine, to say that no reply was necessary. The jury's minds were already made up and the verdict was "Guilty" - so much for the liberty of the press in the eyes of a sceptical and hostile Court.

Thomas Erskine, however, became a hero overnight in the eyes of reformists everywhere. His name alone guaranteed huge sales of any pamphlet on the issue of freedom of the press. The radical press brought out cheap reprints of his Guildhall speech in defence of Paine. Other more informal speeches he made later on the same theme were similarly run off in cheap reprints and circulated in quantity far and wide. The radical London printer and publisher, Daniel Isaac Eaton, was one of many who would have worked long hours to satisfy the demand for Erskine reprints.⁴⁰

Following their successful assault on the 'seditious' *Rights 2*, the government mobilised a press campaign to discredit Paine and recruited men like John Bowles and John Reeves, so-called 'placemen', to organise and initiate the loyalist counter-attack on Paine and his supporters. It was Reeves who was the guiding hand behind the establishment of the "Association for Preserving Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers" in November, 1792 - later known simply as "the Association" and instantly recognised for what it was, a government-funded organ of repression. The main argument in the pamphlet publishing the Crown and Anchor speech attributed to Erskine, and published barely one month after the Paine trial, is that

... these objections to popular associations, or the prosecution of crimes, apply with double force when directed against the Press, than against any other objects of criminal justice which can be

³⁹ *ibid.*, 419.

⁴⁰ Another was C. Stalker of Ludgate Street, with R. H. Wesley of the Strand and W. Stewart of Piccadilly. One of Stalker's titles, rushed out after the Paine trial verdict, is *An Address to the Public from the Friends of the Liberty of the Press; assembled at the Crown and Anchor, on Saturday, Jan. 19, 1793; containing a Declaration of their Principles, and a Protest against the late Associations. Written by the Hon. Thomas Erskine.* (London, C. Stalker, R. H. Wesley and W. Stewart, 1793). The 12pp. pamphlet is a demonstrable illustration of the practical truth of Erskine's assertion in his Paine trial speech in relation to the second part of *Rights* - that is, that its cheapness ensured its accessibility into "the very nurseries of children" since the price of the Crown and Anchor pamphlet was "Three Pence, or 18 Shillings per Hundred."

described or imagined ... The Press ... as it is to be affected by associations of individuals to fetter its general freedom ... is a very different consideration; for if the nation is to be combined to suppress writings, without further describing what those writings are, than by the general denomination *sedition*; and if the exertions of these combinations are not even to be confined to suppress and punish the circulation of books *already condemned by the judgment of courts*, but are to extend to whatever does not happen to fall in with their private judgments; -- if every writing is to be prosecuted which they may not have the sense to understand, or the virtue to practise; -- if no man is to write but upon their principles, nor can read with safety except what they have written, lest he should accidentally talk of what he has to read; -- No man will venture either to write or to speak upon the topics of government or its administration -- a freedom which ever has been acknowledged by our greatest statesmen and lawyers to be the principal safeguard of that constitution which liberty of thought originally created, and which a FREE PRESS for its circulation gradually brought to maturity.⁴¹

There is an important, ironic and little-known footnote to the Paine trial affecting the crime of sedition and the issue of the freedom of the press, this time in the context of events in the United States only a few years later. In his periodical *The American Annual Register, or, Historical Memoirs of the United States for the year 1796* the exiled extreme Scottish radical, James Thomson Callender,⁴² expressed his cordial detestation of Vice-President John Adams who himself was one of Paine's sternest critics. In the same year that saw John Quincy Adams's father's election as second President, referring to an edition of the proceedings of Paine's trial reprinted by John Parker of Philadelphia in 1794, Callender quotes from Quincy Adams's pamphlet *An Answer to Paine's Rights of Man*. Quincy's response to *Rights* took the form of a series of ten letters, signed by

⁴¹ *An Address to the Public* (Stalker/Wesley/Stewart ed.), p. 10. Published in the same year as *Proceedings of the Friends to the Liberty of the Press on December the 22d, 1792 and January 19th, and March 9th, 1793. Printed by Order of the Committee. 1793.* [n.p.] For extracts from the widely circulated *Declaration of the Friends to the Liberty of the Press*, written by Erskine, see Appendix C below.

⁴² Callender, a notorious 'hothead' and, in the words of James D. Young (who clearly hero-worships him), a "carnaptious" radical, seems to attract either loathing or admiration on the part of historians, depending on which side of the Atlantic they call home. For example, Young not only sees Callender as a genuine proto-Marxist but is in no doubt that he was "simultaneously a 'stay-at-home' Red and a Red 'outward-bound' Scot who deserves his place in the Pantheon of Scottish-International radicalism". - *The Very Bastards of Creation*, privately printed, n.d., n.p. p. 101. To the doyen of American historians of the early Republic, Gordon S. Wood, on the other hand, Callender, by contrast, warrants his place but on the dubious ground he was at bottom no more than "a Scottish refugee and one of the new breed of unscrupulous journalists who were spreading scurrility everywhere". - *Empire of Liberty A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815*, Oxford and New York, The Oxford History of the United States, 2009, p. 237. See also Michael Durey's *With the Hammer of Truth: James Thomson Callender and America's Early National Heroes*, Charlottesville, 1990.

“Publicola”, originally published in the Boston paper *The Columbian Centinel* [sic] from June to July 1791.⁴³

According to “Publicola’s” (Quincy’s) version of events, Paine’s enemies in England had sought to discredit him for having allegedly

called on the citizens of America, to rally round him, in order to afford assistance to Great Britain, in the completion of a revolution.

Callender hotly (and rightly) denies that Paine had ever expressed such a view. But nevertheless, in the year of publication of the first part of *Rights* - dedicated by Paine to George Washington - it was a serious charge from which it was easy to make political capital back in the old country. In that sense, therefore, Callender was shrewd enough to recognise that it could have been a potential gift to the Pitt government, eager to pin the crime of treason on Paine on top of everything else.

Ironically, however, in the year after Quincy’s father’s inauguration as second President of the United States (1798) President John Adams signed four of the most contentious pieces of legislation in the history of the United States⁴⁴ - collectively known as the Alien Friends and Sedition Acts. It was not enough for Adams later to protest that these laws never enjoyed his support; nor is it enough for sympathetic historians to claim that they were really the idea of Abigail Adams, his “chief domestic minister without portfolio” - which, in truth, they probably were. The reality is, however, that it was Adams who signed them. Vice-President Jefferson said that the Sedition Act was designed for the “suppression of the whig presses”. The Act made it a crime to

write, print, utter or publish ... any false, scandalous, and malicious writing or writings against the Government of the United States.

⁴³ Callender clearly believed, mistakenly, that they were the work of Vice-President John Adams himself - as many others did at the time, including even Jefferson and Madison. An edition of the Publicola letters was published by Brash and Reid in Glasgow in 1792 - *Observations on Paine’s Rights of Man, in a series of letters, by Publicola. ... Glasgow: printed by A. Duncan and R. Chapman. Sold by Brash and Reid, Booksellers, Trongate*, [Price Sixpence], [1792]. An Edinburgh edition printed by J. Dickson and J. and J. Fairbairn came out in (probably) the same year.

⁴⁴ The Naturalization Act of June 18, the Alien Friends Act of 25 June, the Alien Enemies Act of July 6 and the Sedition Act of July 14, all 1798.

The punishment was a fine not exceeding two thousand dollars and imprisonment not exceeding two years. As Gordon S. Wood puts it -

Compared to the harsh punishments Britain had meted out in its sedition trials of 1793-1794 ... the American punishments for seditious libel were tame.⁴⁵

Nevertheless, the U.S. Sedition Act flew in the face of, and arguably even exploited, the noble sentiments behind Alexander Hamilton's reasoning that specific reference to freedom of the press in any future (the 1791) Bill of Rights did not need to be expressly incorporated, on the ground that protecting free speech seemed to imply that some power existed somewhere to limit or deny it. For Hamilton, it was enough that securing liberty of the press was ultimately dependent on public opinion, "the general spirit of the people", which, after all, Hamilton believed, must constitute "the only solid basis of all our rights":

On the subject of the liberty of the press ... in the first place, I observe that there is not a syllable concerning in the constitution of this State; in the next, I contend, that whatever has been said about it in that of any other State, amounts to nothing. What signifies a declaration, that "the liberty of the press shall be inviolably preserved"? what is the liberty of the press? Who can give it any definition which would not leave the utmost latitude for evasion? I hold it to be impracticable; and from this I infer, that its security, whatever fine declarations may be inserted in any constitution respecting it, must altogether depend on public opinion, and on the general spirit of the people and of the government. And here, after all, as is intimated upon another occasion, must we seek for the only solid basis of all our rights.⁴⁶

Nevertheless, despite Hamilton's views -

Between 1798 and 1801, in the midst of the threat of war with France, at least twenty six individuals were prosecuted in US federal courts on charges of publishing false information or speaking in public with the intent to undermine support for the federal government. The accused ranged from the editor of the most influential opposition newspaper in the nation to a New Jersey resident who drunkenly jeered President John Adams. All of the defendants were political opponents of the Adams administration. All prosecutions under the Sedition Act of 1798 provoked debates on the meaning of a free press and the rights of the political opposition.⁴⁷

4 Bibliographical aspects of the Scottish sedition trials of the 1790s

We now turn to the impact of the Pitt administration's assault on the book and newspaper trade in Scotland in the 1790s. The trials are of special interest to the

⁴⁵ *Empire of Liberty, a history of the Early Republic, 1789-1815*, p. 259.

⁴⁶ Alexander Hamilton, paper 84, *The Federalist Papers - Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay*, edited and with an introduction by Ian Shapiro, Yale, 2009, p. 434.

⁴⁷ "The Sedition Act Trials", Bruce A. Ragsdale, Federal Judicial Center, Federal Judicial History Office online paper, 2005, p. 1 - paper available at <http://www.fjc.gov/history/home.nsf>

bibliographical historian for two reasons. First, they show the extent to which fear of the written word on the part of government had become very real at a time when levels of literacy among the working class were fast increasing, especially in the towns and cities. For example, Harris cites a series of letters published in the Whiggish *Scots Chronicle* over several issues in the first half of 1797 describing the proliferation of reading rooms and societies amongst the labouring classes in Scotland. He summarises the information provided in the letters to the paper as follows:

... they were formed in the image of the more famous subscription libraries which emerged in urban Scotland from this period. A key difference, however, was their membership was smaller and their charges lower. Between eleven and twelve such societies existed in Paisley,⁴⁸ for example, with thirty to forty members each drawn from the ranks of the 'working people'. The societies met monthly, members contributing between 6d. and 9d. [Meetings] lasted for a fixed duration, after which the books were auctioned off to the members, and the proceeds divided equally between them.⁴⁹

Harris believes that at least some of these societies may have clandestinely engaged in – or “were even a cover for” – radical political activity.

Secondly, a number of the trials clearly reveal, often in graphic detail, the perceived threat of *specific* books and pamphlets in the eyes of a jittery administration and, as such, demonstrate what the term 'sedition' actually meant - in the context of the political atmosphere of the time - in relation to the allegedly seditious content of those titles. Additionally, the reportage of the trials, benefitting from vastly improved techniques of shorthand developed by the Gurney family,⁵⁰ constitutes a dependable reference source for historians of the book, bookselling, publishing and newspaper trades at a time of crucial importance to the development of these trades in the later eighteenth century. For these reasons, it is all the more surprising to discover that the key bibliographical aspects of the trials have not before now been systematically examined.

⁴⁸ The 1789 catalogue of one such Paisley circulating library Harris has in mind will be found in my checklist in Appendix A, 105-89.

⁴⁹ *The Scottish People and the French Revolution*, pp. 165 and 227. The letters appeared in *The Scots Chronicle* for 20, 24 and 31 January, 10 and 24 February, 4 April, 19 and 30 May and 7 July 1797. See note 129 on p. 284 of Harris's book.

⁵⁰ See note 87 below.

Although the two ‘gagging Acts’ had entered the statute book in December 1795,⁵¹ prosecutions were still conducted for years afterwards under the terms of the old common law procedures, bolstered by the provisions of the Royal Proclamation of December 1792. Emsley points out that:

Most of the overtly political trials of the decade involved prosecutions for publishing seditious libels or uttering seditious words. ‘Publishing’ in the legal definition of the day included the distribution, as well as the organizational and technical aspects of book or handbill production. The majority of the prosecutions for seditious libel came in the first part of the decade and reflect the determination of both central and local authorities to stop the circulation of radical pamphlets, particularly Paine’s *Rights of Man*.⁵²

In Scotland the government clampdown on sedition was particularly repressive. Henry Dundas, Pitt’s Home Secretary,⁵³ comfortably manoeuvred his nephew, Robert, Lord Advocate,⁵⁴ into ensuring that those deemed the worst offenders should not be allowed to get away with it and that an example should be made to deter others. As we have already seen in chapter 2, the indictment of Thomas Muir, read to the Court of Justiciary in Edinburgh by the Lord Advocate, Robert Dundas, on 30th. August, 1793, on the first day of his trial, specifically charged Muir with circulating seditious publications - *Rights of Man*, the Paisley *Declaration and Address*, an excerpt entitled *Dialogue between the Governors and the Governed* from Volney’s *Ruins*,⁵⁵ and *The Patriot*.⁵⁶ We shall return to this aspect of Muir’s trial later in this chapter.

⁵¹ Only 45 members of the House of Commons voted against the Treasonable Practices Bill and 51 against the Seditious Meetings Bill. The two Acts received royal assent on 18th December 1795.

⁵² Clive Emsley, “An Aspect of Pitt’s ‘Terror’: Prosecutions for Sedition during the 1790s”, in *Social History*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (May, 1981), 155-184, p. 157.

⁵³ Henry Dundas, first Viscount Melville (1742-1811). Michael Fry notes that “partnership with Pitt proved the key to Dundas’s career”. Within Pitt’s cabinet, Dundas was able “to reach a powerful informal position as friend, adviser, and factotum.” Dundas succeeded Grenville as Home Secretary in 1791, and continued in office to July 1794 when Pitt moved him sideways as Secretary of State for War. (Oxford DNB article by M. Fry, online version, 2004-10).

⁵⁴ Robert Dundas of Arniston (1758-1819). Henry Dundas’s nephew, Robert became Lord Advocate in 1789 and from 1790 to 1801 was MP for Edinburghshire. Henry Cockburn [*Memorials*, 151] describes him as a “little, alert, handsome, gentleman-like man, with a countenance and air beaming with sprightliness and gaiety, and dignified by considerable fire: altogether inexpressibly pleasing.”

⁵⁵ (i) This was a key radical text at this time. Constantin-François de Chasseboeuf, Comte de Volney, was a friend of Franklin, Condorcet, d’Holbach and C. A. Helvétius. After the Revolution, Volney was a member of both the Estates-General and the National Convention. The first English edition of what was termed simply *The Ruins* (first published in Paris in 1791) was *The Ruins: or a survey of the revolution of empires: by M. Volney, ... Translated from the French. London: printed for J. Johnson, 1792*. This is an extremely rare book; apart from the British Library copy, the ESTC lists copies existing elsewhere in just the Library Company of

Chronologically, the first case of any note to come before the Court of Justiciary in Edinburgh involving the circulation of a seditious publication relates to **James ('Balloon') Tytler**.⁵⁷ His trial came before the court on 7th January 1793.⁵⁸ Tytler's was the first of a

Philadelphia (where I inspected it), the library of the College of William and Mary and the University of Witwatersrand library, South Africa. Interestingly, it is almost certainly the Johnson edition of 1792 that is listed for sale in the 1792-3 catalogue of the loyalist Edinburgh bookseller, Peter Hill (catalogue, p. 158, book number 4051). Joseph Johnson brought out a second edition in 1795. The same title is listed as "Volney's Ruins of Empire" (n.d., n.p.) in the printed list of books and pamphlets sold by Alexander Leslie, dated (in autograph by the Sheriff's officer) 13 November 1797. [NAS, WRH JC26/293]. I believe that the edition sold by Leslie would have been the A. Seale (London, 1795) version, since Leslie corresponded with Seale who sold books to "all political booksellers", as noted in his Volney imprint. The radical publisher, D. I. Eaton of London, published Volney's *The Law of Nature* in 1795.

(ii) It is important to note that the terms of Muir's indictment point to an extract from *The Ruins* entitled *A Dialogue between the Governors and the Governed*. ESTC lists a quarto sheet, *Extract from a late publication entitled Les Ruines, by M. Volney, author of Travels in Syria and Egypt, A fragenmt [sic], supposed to be found in the ruins of Palmyra*. [London?, 1792?] Only one copy has survived and is in the National Archives but I have not seen it. Is this perhaps the extract referred to in the Muir indictment? The date postulated by the British Library would certainly fit.

(iii) In 1797 Joseph Priestley published *Letters to Mr. Volney, occasioned by a work of his entitled Ruins, and by his letter to the author*, Philadelphia, Dobson, 1797. [See chapter 1, §5, b above.] *Volney's Answer to Doctor Priestley* was printed by Benjamin Franklin Bache in Philadelphia "for the author" in the same year. William A. Davis of New York printed *The Ruins* in 1796 and James Lyon brought out an edition of the same work in Philadelphia in 1799.

⁵⁶ Theoretically, there are several possible candidates for the identification of this title. Harris seems to think it could have been the Sheffield radical periodical *The Patriot* "which was being sold in Edinburgh by Alexander Guthrie from April 1792 ...". (*The Scottish People and the French Revolution*, p. 98, citing an advertisement placed by Guthrie in the *Edinburgh Evening Courant* for 30 April 1792). But, in fact, it is quite clear from the record of the trial evidence that the publication was *The Patriot : or, political, moral, and philosophical repository. Consisting of original pieces, and selections from writers of merit, ... By a society of gentlemen. ... London: printed for G.G.J. and J. Robinson, and sold by all the booksellers in the country, [1792/1793]*. Guthrie also specifically advertises this title in the very first number of the *Edinburgh Gazetteer* - i.e. without naming any *other* books for sale - for 16 November 1792. Extracts from specific numbers cited during the trial were from V, VI, XI and XII. It is almost certainly this periodical ("in numbers not complete") that is listed in the Leslie inventory of printed books etc. for sale in his catalogue impounded by the Sheriff's officer in November 1797. [See previous note immediately above]. Understandably, there is also confusion with Thomas Hardy's *The Patriot. Addressed to the People, on the present state of affairs in Britain and in France. With observations on Republican Government, and Discussions of the Principles advanced in the writings of Thomas Paine. Edinburgh: printed for J. Dickson, Edinburgh, and G. Nicol, Pall-Mall, London. 1793* and reprinted later in the same year.

⁵⁷ (1747?-1805). Tytler was an unsuccessful surgeon and apothecary at Edinburgh and Leith who edited and wrote large sections of the second and third editions of William Smellie's *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. He also printed several works in the debtors' refuge at Holyrood on a press which he himself built. Harris says of him that "His radicalism ... may simply have been born of a sense of cumulative frustration." (*The Scottish People and the French Revolution*, p. 26). Famously, Burns writes about him to Frances Dunlop in November 1788 : "... an obscure, tippling but extraordinary body of the name of Tytler : a mortal, who though he drudges about Edinburgh as a common printer, with leaky shoes, a sky-lighted hat, & knee buckles as unlike as

total of twenty two sedition trials in Scotland between 1793 and 1820. The crime of which Tytler was charged was that he had delivered to William Turnbull (an Edinburgh jobbing printer) a “seditious libel or writing, addressed “To the People and their Friends”, that Turnbull had “thrown off five hundred copies, or thereby”, and that Tytler had then proceeded to distribute and circulate them “amongst the inhabitants of Edinburgh and its suburbs, ... inciting them to break the public peace” and “usurping them with sentiments hostile to our happy Constitution”.

Tytler did not appear in Court to answer the indictment, however, and in his absence was sentenced to fugitation and outlawry, the usual verdict meted out by the High Court of Justiciary under Scots law at that time in cases where the accused failed to appear. Tytler was “ordained to be put to his Majesty’s horn, and all his moveable goods and gear to be escheat, and inbrought to his Majesty’s use”. Here, then, was an example of a ‘minor’ radical suffering the full force of the law on account of the “inflammatory” content of a *handbill* - nothing as substantial as a pamphlet - where he, *qua* author and publisher, was found to have committed the crime of sedition, one of the most heinous in the statute book.

Three days after Tytler’s trial - on 10th January to be precise - there came on the trial of **John Elder and William Stewart**.⁵⁹ John Elder was a well-known and respected bookseller and stationer at North Bridge Street in Edinburgh. To describe Elder as a radical bookseller is a shade misleading, for he was much more than that, even though Harris convincingly believes him to have been almost certainly a member of the Friends of the People and “a key figure in the dissemination of Paine’s writings in Scotland” for some months in 1791-2.⁶⁰ William Stewart is described simply as a “merchant in Leith”.

George-by-the-grace-of-God, & Solomon-the-son-of-David, yet that same unknown drunken Mortal is author and compiler of three-fourths of Elliot’s pompous Encyclopaedia.”

Like so many at the time, Tytler fled the law, first to Belfast, then to the United States. Hook states that “he lived out his life in Salem, Massachusetts.” (*Scotland and America*, p. 240). See also Stephen Brown, “James Tytler’s Misadventures in the Late Eighteenth-Century Edinburgh Book Trade” in *Printing Places - Locations of Book Production & Distribution since 1500*, ed. John Hinks and Catherine Armstrong, London, The British Library, 2005, pp. 47-63.

⁵⁸ *State Trials, XXIII, 1793-1794*, 1-7.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, 25-33.

⁶⁰ *The Scottish People and the French Revolution*, p. 80 and note 28 on p. 259. Harris cites Elder’s declaration of December 1792, in which he affirms that he had imported “many copies” of the *Rights of Man* from London, which he had sold in Edinburgh, and around the country, as

The ESTC lists some 135 imprints containing Elder's name as a bookseller between 1792 and 1797: these include, in the year before his trial, the complete works of *Horace* and an eight-volume set of Hume's *History of England*. Other titles he sold over the period before and after his trial up to and including 1797 include William Robertson's *The History of Scotland* (1791), John Millar's *Letters of Crito, on the causes, objects, and consequences of the war* (1796)⁶¹ and numerous works by the sisters, Hannah and Sarah More, including the hugely popular series of *Cheap Repository/Sunday Reading* tracts (1795-8), enormous bestsellers in their day and a veritable goldmine for the dozens of booksellers throughout Britain who happily retailed them in their shops.

The charge against Elder was that he had composed or written "or at least did wickedly and feloniously cause to be printed a seditious libel or writing intituled 'Rights of Man delineated, and the Origin of Government'

whereof the tenor follows, DECLARATION of the Rights of Man and of Citizens, By the National Assembly of France: which is agreeable to Sound Reason and Common Sense."⁶²

The text was given by "one or other" of Elder or Stewart to the Edinburgh printer, John Darling, who proceed to 'throw off' "3,000 copies or thereby,

some of which copies were put up in packages, each containing several hundreds of the said copies, and directed to different booksellers in Glasgow, Paisley, Port-Glasgow and Anstruther".⁶³

The indictment then goes off on a different tack and accuses Elder and Stewart of "composing or writing inscriptions for medals, of the following tenor" -

"Liberty, Equality and an end to Impress Warrants"

well as "many copies" of a cheap edition printed in Edinburgh. Almost certainly, the latter would have been the edition found on Thomas Muir and referred to in his indictment.

⁶¹ The London edition is "printed for and sold by" J. Debrett, J. Johnson and G.G. and J. Robinson (1796). Two Edinburgh editions of the same title came out also in 1796 - one calling itself the "Second Edition". Both were "printed and sold, at the office of the Scots Chronicle", but only the second edition carries the names of the booksellers. In addition to Elder, Robertson and Berry in Edinburgh, two Glasgow firms are named in the imprint: Brash & Reid and Cameron & Murdoch.

⁶² I have succeeded in tracing this key Crown production in the Stewart-Elder trial. The format is a half sheet of 4 pp. and the title (which is to be found only in the docket) is indeed *The Rights of Man delineated, and the Origin of Government* (n.p., n.d.). ESTC suggests that it was printed in Edinburgh in 1793; that is, in the same year as the trial. That is obviously unlikely given the early January date of the trial: it is more likely for that reason to have been published in 1792. The British Library has no holding of this title, the only extant copies available in any major library in this country being located in the NLS and the National Archives.

⁶³ *State Trials, XXIII*, 30.

“The Nation is essentially the Source of all Sovereignty “
“Liberty of conscience, Equal Representation and Just Taxation”
“For a nation to be free it is sufficient that it wills it”.⁶⁴ -

all determinedly Paineite and republican sentiments. The medals were cast by James Bell, “tinman, or white iron smith” in Leith, whom the accused employed, it was alleged, to “throw off several thousands of the said medals bearing the said inscriptions”. Elder and Stewart then arranged for the medals to be “transmitted” to different persons in the same places already cited previously in the indictment. Stewart, who had fled in advance of the Court proceedings, was pronounced to have fugitated and was declared an outlaw with the usual sentence of being declared escheat of all moveable goods. Of the case against John Elder, Howell notes that no further proceedings appeared on record.⁶⁵

I do not propose to consider here the trial of **Captain William Johnston** for contempt of Court,⁶⁶ not on account of its lack of relevance to the freedom of the press issue - for it *is* certainly relevant in that context - but simply because (a) it has been exhaustively dealt with already (by Harris and others), and above all, (b) it was not conducted on the basis of the much more serious charge of sedition; nor was the Johnston trial of special bibliographical interest, except in a general way. In January-February 1793, William Johnston, the proprietor and founder of the *Edinburgh Gazetteer*, was successfully prosecuted, together with the paper’s printer, Simon Drummond, for publishing a report in their paper of a recent political trial involving three journeyman printers for “allegedly attempting to suborn the loyalties of soldiers in Edinburgh Castle”.⁶⁷ The trial’s outcome, according to Harris, “appears to have reinforced Johnston’s essentially cautious outlook”, such that from then on under his direction the paper tended to draw back from printing all radical addresses in the way they had formerly done, thereby earning for itself conspicuous notoriety as the premier organ of Scottish radicalism in the eyes of government.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, 31.

⁶⁵ Elder later became, with Walter Berry and James Robertson and the Dundee bookseller, Edward Leslie, agents for the *Scots Chronicle* from its inception in March 1796.

⁶⁶ *State Trials, XXIII, 1793-94*, 43-79.

⁶⁷ *State Trials, XXIII, 1793-94*, 7-25. [See also *The Scottish People and the French Revolution*, p. 65.]

By contrast, the Berry-Robertson-Callender trial of 28th January 1793⁶⁸ is of particular bibliographical significance. It is also a key trial in relation to the specific issue of freedom of the press. **Walter Berry**, bookseller, South Bridge Street, Edinburgh, **James Robertson**, bookseller and printer in the Horsewynd of Edinburgh, and the writer **James Thomson Callender**, the man behind the ‘seditious’ periodical *The Political Progress of Britain*, were accused of “writing, printing, publishing and circulating a seditious pamphlet”. Young notes that in the precognition – the preliminary examination of the defendant – a Scottish judge, Lord Gardenstone, had acknowledged that he had been friendly with Callender, originally a junior clerk in the office of sasines, then a messenger at arms, and had

conceived a favourable opinion of his genius after perusal of some poetry composed by him.⁶⁹

However, after part of *Political Progress* had been serialised in James Anderson’s *The Bee*, government agents set about trying to identify the anonymous author. Callender was suspected and, on being examined by the sheriff, denied all knowledge of it and, incredibly, responded by attempting to incriminate Gardenstone, whose reputation, ironically, was at that time “unique among the judges of the Court of Session as a reformer.”⁷⁰

James D. Young makes no secret of his hero worship of Callender and quotes extensively from his works, both in this country and in America where he had gone to escape the attentions of the law in 1792. He fled in the nick of time, it seems, for there is no doubt that had he stayed in Edinburgh and confronted the full fury of his prosecutors he would have been dealt with harshly, despite (and conceivably because of) his friendship with Gardenstone, Kames and other notables among the Edinburgh *literati*. Callender was sentenced in his absence to fugitation and outlawry with the usual harsh consequences of that crime being enforced.

The indictment of Walter Berry, bookseller, South Bridge Street, Edinburgh and his business partner at the same address, James Robertson (whose independent printer’s

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, 79-117.

⁶⁹ *The Very Bastards of Creation*, chapter two, “James Thomson Callender (1753-1803): a Scottish-International Jacobin”, pp. 67-101.

⁷⁰ H. W. Meikle, *Scotland and the French Revolution*, p. 114.

shop was located in the Horsewynd⁷¹ of Edinburgh), was grounded on the familiar charge that they had written, printed, published and circulated a seditious pamphlet. The pamphlet in the case was already – as subsequently admitted by the Crown in the course of their prosecution – one of the most successful and popular of all radical titles at this time in Scotland, James Thomson Callender’s *The Political Progress of Britain*.⁷² Three passages from the work were cited in the indictment, as follows:⁷³

pp. 19-20

“There is a cant expression in this country, that our government, is deservedly ‘the master and envy of the world’. With better reason it may be said, that parliament is a mere out-work of the court, a phalanx of mercenaries embattled against the reason, the happiness, and the liberty of mankind. The game laws, the dog act, the shop tax, the window tax, the pedlar tax, the attorney tax, and a thousand others, give us a right to wish that their authors had been hanged.”

p. 73 (Note)

“What our most excellent constitution may be in theory, I neither know nor care. In practice it is altogether a conspiracy of the rich against the poor.”

p. 58

“The German princes, and among others, the elector of Hanover expressed their highest disapprobation of the projected peace. The arguments of George, if such they may be called, are too frivolous for confutation, or insertion here. Portugal and Savoy seconded the German corps. The emoluments derived from war, were greater than their expectations from peace. The money of the maritime powers and chiefly that of England, more than the territories of the House of Bourbon, was the grand object of those petty tyrants ‘who fed on the blood of subjects whom they let out for slaughter.’ Compared with merchants of this description, an ordinary offender is a paragon of innocence. When a nation sends for sovereigns from such a school, there appears but a melancholy presage of the prospect before it.”

A thousand copies “or thereby” of the pamphlet were “thrown off” and sent to the South Bridge bookshop owned and operated by Robertson and Berry. The Court was informed that the defendants had sold “many copies” of the title. The main issue of principle to concern the Court, however, was the freedom of the press. The outcome of the trial

⁷¹ N.B. Not “House wynd” as given by Young, *The Very Bastards of Creation*, p. 85.

⁷² The full title is *The Political Progress of Britain, or an Important Account of the principal Abuses in the Government of this Country, from the Revolution in 1688. The Whole tending to prove the ruinous consequences of the Popular System of War and Conquest. “The World’s Mad Business” Part First* Edinburgh: printed for Robertson and Berry, No. 39, South-Bridge; and T. Kay, No. 332, Strand, London. [1792]. Eaton brought out a London edition in 1795, the same year that saw two different editions in Philadelphia, one “printed for J.T. Callender” and the other “printed by and for Richard Folwell, No. 33, Mulberry-Street.” By that time (1795), the subtitle has been changed to *An Impartial History of Abuses in the Government of the British Empire, in Europe, Asia, and America*.

⁷³ The passages from *The Political Progress* cited in the indictment are to be found in Howell, *State Trials, XXIII, 1793-94*, 85-6.

turned on whether or not the booksellers were party to the crime of sedition in printing, publishing and circulating (in their case, *selling* in their shop in South Bridge Street) a pamphlet that, though it contained seditious material, was not *of itself* a seditious publication. Moreover, in part, it had already been published in another serial publication - Dr. James Anderson's *The Bee*. Much of the tedious closing stages of the trial was, in fact, consumed by legal technicalities arguing toward that conclusion.

Apart from its bibliographical interest - that is, the importance of the Callender pamphlet within the context of Scottish radical literature in the 1790s - the historical significance of the trial lies in the extent to which it should be viewed as a war of legal words surrounding the issue of liberty of the press. At one point in the proceedings, for example, Archibald Fletcher, counsel for the defendants, states:

[That] the case now before the Court, involves in it no less than the liberty of the press, and, if the tendency of this prosecution shall strike at that privilege, it must be infinitely more injurious to the happy constitution of this country than fifty publications such as that now under discussion. If the liberty of the press is affected, a total darkness in political knowledge must ensue, the constitution must receive a mortal stab, and may, at last, perish.⁷⁴

Fletcher - himself a reformer who would later in 1793 unsuccessfully defend Joseph Gerrald and other Friends of the People - went on to argue that, in judging the nature of the pamphlet, the whole contents must be taken together to decide on the character of the book: and, as for the role of Robertson and Berry -

They only received the copy, printed and sold it in the way of their business.

Moreover, a great part of Callender's production had already been published before in *The Bee*, and was not then considered seditious. So, Fletcher concluded, -

The panels [i.e. defendants] sold it with no such view, but merely for gain, and not by stealth, but openly and fairly, and *the same was sold by almost every other bookseller in Edinburgh*. [RLC's italics]

However, James Montgomery, counsel for the prosecution, disagreed with that line of defence. His counter-argument was

[That] the liberty of the press can only be supported, by suppressing publications such as that now labelled on; for, if such licentiousness is not curbed, the liberty of the press, and the liberty of the people, must fall together.

⁷⁴ *State Trials, XXIII, 1793-94, 87.*

Montgomery had caught the mood of the Court. Despite the presence of three well-known exculpatory witnesses, all of them from the book trade – William Creech, James Dickson and John Bell (of Bell and Bradfute) – in support of the claims of the defendants, it seems that they were never called. The verdict, therefore, was inevitable. They were found guilty on all charges: Robertson was sent to the Tollbooth for six months and Berry for three. They were allowed to appeal but the appeal, predictably, was summarily dismissed.

The trial of the advocate **Thomas Muir** – regarded as the doyen of the main players in the *dramatis personae* of the Scottish radical movement in the age of the French Revolution – came on in the High Court of Justiciary, Parliament Hall, Edinburgh on 30th August 1793⁷⁵ and was concluded late on the next day. Muir’s trial has become a veritable *cause célèbre*. Reference has already been made in chapter 2 of this study to the terms of the indictment, read out by the Lord Advocate, Robert Dundas, at the opening of the trial. The indictment is virtually unintelligible without an understanding of the significance of the book and pamphlet titles from which specific ‘offending’ passages were cited by Dundas, and ‘explicated’ by Muir, in the course of the trial’s proceedings. In chapter 2 the Paisley *Declaration of Rights* and its companion piece, the *Address to the People* were discussed and those extracts read out in Court are printed as Appendix C. We have also considered the political and bibliographical significance of the Volney title and of *The Patriot*.

But what are we to make of Muir’s several references to Paine’s *Rights of Man* in the trial process? On several occasions throughout his cross examination, as well as in his long speech in defence of his professed innocence, Muir goes out of his way to minimise the importance to the cause of reform of Paine’s allegedly seditious work. In the last analysis, of course, it is perfectly possible that Muir is prevaricating about the impact of *Rights of Man* on the Friends of the People. If, however, that is not the case, then something interesting emerges. If we are inclined to believe him, then we can safely conclude that Muir, desperately trying to secure his very future, is in fact bearing his breast to the court and confiding in his accusers his own *private* view of Paine’s book; and that is, that its undoubted impact among the rank and file, desirous of a better deal in this world, is

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, 117-238.

ultimately attributable to unrealistic expectations and a certain political naivety on their part, rather than that the book should necessarily be held up as the great rallying-cry to lovers of liberty and reform. For my own part, having studied Howell's transcript, I believe that Muir was probably speaking the truth when he claimed at several points in the trial that he could not recommend Paine's works to the societies [i.e. of the Friends of the People] on the grounds that Paine was a republican, his writings on the constitution were "speculative" and that, consequently,

the principles contained in them might mislead the people ... and might misguide weak minds. I will tell you the reason I did not recommend Mr. Paine's books to the societies in Scotland, and why I declared them foreign to their purpose. - Mr. Paine is a republican, and the spirit of republicanism breathes through all his writings. This is his darling system. ... I did not present to them the splendid fabrics of ancient or of modern republics; I wished them to keep their eyes confined at home, to repair their own mansion rather than pull it down. ... All the witnesses who speak of my conduct in the societies tell you, that I recommended none but constitutional measures; ... ⁷⁶

Whatever the sincerity of Muir's evidence in regard to the influence of Paine on his own political philosophy, the trial is also important for two other reasons. First, from a strictly bibliographical point of view it deserves to be remembered as much for its references to specific books championed by the radical movement at that time, as for its legal travesty culminating in Braxfield's terrible sentence. Secondly, it is often overlooked that Muir, citing Thomas Erskine, had something important to say about censorship and freedom of the press generally. The fact that he took the opportunity to cite specific titles in the course of his speech is doubly important in a bibliographical context. For example, the bibliographical references outwith the precise terms of the actual indictment have never been explored. Yet they speak volumes for the extent to which government sensitivity harboured prejudicial opinions on contemporary publications *beyond* the immediate and more obvious context of the writings of Thomas Paine.

In the course of his long speech in explanation of his attitude to *Rights of Man* and to other works of Paine, Muir refers to works by Hume (unspecified), Benjamin Flower, James Thomson Callender and the Reverend Robert Henry. The only work he admits he did recommend to the society at Kirkintilloch - as a witness, William Muir, had testified - was Henry's bland, and now totally obscure, *History of England* [sic] -

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, 212.

as the best calculated, by its accuracy and plainness, to give them insight into the nature and progress of their constitution⁷⁷

Muir goes on to explain that a witness, Robert Weddell, vice-president of the Kirkintilloch Friends of the People, had then mentioned that at the meeting someone called Boyd proposed that Paine's Works should be purchased and recommended. What had been his (Muir's) response on that occasion?

I said, it was foreign to their purpose; and foreign, surely, indeed it was. Without approving of Mr. Paine's principles, without condemning them, I shall afterwards more fully show you, that the advice was such as became them and we in our situation at the time.

The witness mentions, that he purchased for the society three or four copies of the Political Progress. Does he say that it was at my desire, or on my recommendation? No. - That he purchased for his own use and that of his neighbours, three or four copies of the Paisley Declaration of Rights: that he got a copy of Paine's pamphlet, but knows not from whom: that he never saw the Dialogue betwixt the Governors and the Governed ... and that a Mr. William Muir showed him a number of the Patriot. In the name of common sense, what connexion have I with this extraneous matter? How does it tend towards my crimination? The witness swears positively, that the only book which I recommended to be purchased by the society, was Henry's History of Britain.⁷⁸

Muir then discourses on the works of Paine more generally and seeks to clarify for the Court his own attitude to them. Far from sitting at Paine's feet and hanging uncritically on his every word, he recounts (in words that are still of considerable historical and bibliographical interest) the extraordinary and unparalleled popularity, and commercial success, of Paine (and, into the bargain, of his great political and literary opponent, Edmund Burke) and, as an advocate himself, he perspicaciously points out that the proclamation against seditious writings had not specified Paine's works - or the works of any other author for that matter:

⁷⁷ *ibid.*

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, 203. The reference to Henry's work is to *The History of Great Britain from the first invasion of it by the Romans under Julius Caesar. Written on a new plan. By Robert Henry, D.D. One of the Ministers of Edinburgh. Volume the First. London: Printed for the Author, and sold by T. Cadell in the Strand. M DCC LXXI.* Henry's *History* was published in six volumes from 1771 to 1793 so that it would have been fresh in the minds of the *literati* attending Muir's trial. The t.p. in Volume Six describes the author as *Late one of the Ministers of Edinburgh, Member of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, and of the Royal Society of Edinburgh.* The imprint on the t.p. of vol.6 reads - *London: Printed for A. Strahan, and T. Cadell in the Strand. M DCC XCIII.* Hume wrote in 1770 in a letter to Strahan, "I believe this is the true historical age and this the historical nation: I know no less than eight Histories on the stocks in this country." Henry's *History* was highly popular in its day, having brought its author £3,300 and a crown pension of £100. It was also translated into French.

The Works of Mr. Paine had been published and sold every where. The papers of the day teemed with successive advertisements, declaring where they were procured. ... The Works of Mr. Burke and of Thomas Paine flew with a rapidity to every corner of the land, hitherto unexampled in the history of political science. Is there a single man among you, who has not read the Works either of Paine or of Burke? Is there a person upon the bench, upon the jury, or in this audience who has not either purchased or lent the Treatise upon the Rights of Man? ... I then was guilty of offending no existing law. ... Was there a judgment of any Court in England or in Scotland against this book at that time? No. Then I had no cause for alarm. But some months before, a proclamation against seditious writings had been issued. ... But was there any mention of Mr. Paine's Works in the proclamation? None. What were the consequences of this proclamation? You know them well. If there had been a demand before for political books, that demand increased in a ten-fold proportion.⁷⁹

And at another point -

I would direct your attention to what Mr. Paine's writings are, and to the particular manner in which they are presented in accusation in my trial. I will allow that any writing which calls upon the people to rise in arms, to resist the law, and to subvert the constitution, is something worse than sedition, - that it is treasonable; but do the writings of Mr. Paine stand in that predicament? Can you point me out a single sentence where he provokes insurrection? Mr. Paine's writings are indisputably of a speculative nature. He investigates the first principles of society; he compares different forms of government together; and where he gives the preference, he assigns his reasons for so doing.⁸⁰

Finally, when he is winding up his defence:

Let us see then what Mr. Barclay [John Barclay, witness for the Crown, an elder at the parish church of Cadder] says against me. That he asked my opinion concerning Paine's books, and that I told him he might purchase them if he chose, as they were printed; but that I afterwards said, it [presumably *Rights of Man*] was not a book for us. ... Does Mr. Barclay's evidence support the criminal charge in the libel, of my advising people to read seditious books, and of my circulating them over the country? Does not Mr. Barclay's evidence corroborate the testimony of every other witness? That for the reasons which I fully explained, I never recommended Mr. Paine's Works; but that even that work excited the greatest attention of the country; when mention of it was introduced into every company, and into every conversation, I uniformly expressed myself that it was not a book for our purpose; -- for our purpose, who were engaged in the cause of a parliamentary and constitutional reform.⁸¹

Muir also addresses the issue of the growing popularity of "political books" in general and the informal conversations he had had with Weddell and others at the Kirkintilloch meeting. It is at this stage in the trial, it has to be said, that parts of Muir's speech are palpably inconsistent with statements he makes towards the close. For it turns out that he *did* recommend another work besides Henry's innocuous *History* - Benjamin Flower's *French Constitution*,⁸² a contentious work if ever there was one. It is often argued that

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, 205-6.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, 207.

⁸¹ *ibid.*, 222.

⁸² Benjamin Flower (1755-1829) spent six months in France in 1791 and on his return to England edited the *Cambridge Intelligencer* which was launched with the help of his brother, Richard. The

Muir was at times throughout his trial a little foolish and incautious in some of the things he said.⁸³ Here is one such example to support that point of view:

What passed after the meeting was over, in private company, in the unguarded hour, when the mind dreads no danger, and when vigilance is asleep. Can anything prove more strongly than the deposition of this man, the innocency of my conduct? The conversation related to politics, and to new publications; ... He remembers my speaking of Mr. Flower's book upon the French Constitution; a book which the Lord Advocate, although not specified in the libel, wished to insinuate as being seditious, and consequently an aggravation of my crime. Of the truly respectable author of this book I know nothing; but if from writing, a true idea may be formed of the heart which guides the pen, there is no man I would more fondly call my friend. It is true, I recommended his principles every where. - I will do still; I will do so in your presence, in the presence of the Court, and to this great audience.⁸⁴

However, the high point of the trial, and its major significance for this chapter, is Muir's able defence of the principles of liberty of the press:

By the FREEDOM OF THE PRESS I understand the INALIENABLE RIGHT OF PUBLISHING TRUTH [Howell's capitals]; of presenting to the world whatever may tend to public good, and may not hurt the feelings of individuals, morals, nor established laws. ... You have read the history of the British constitution, and what is it, but the history of a continual progress? You will next ask, what has been the impelling course of this progress? I answer, the right of the universal diffusion of information by means of the liberty of the press. If you destroy that liberty, you accomplish one of two things. - The people will be buried in ignorance: the iron

Oxford DNB article on Flower (by Richard Garnett, revised by Adam I. P. Smith) says of it that: "It was almost the only provincial newspaper in Britain that denounced the war with France as 'absurd and wicked', and advocated the removal of the grievances of the dissenters on the broad grounds of religious liberty." (online version, 2004-2010). Flower quickly became notorious as a leading anti-government publicist and his hostility to the war was vigorously expressed in *National Sins Considered in Two Letters to the Rev. Thomas Robinson* (Cambridge, 1796). His most famous work, however - and the book that became widely known in his day as simply 'Flower on the French Constitution' is: *The French Constitution; with Remarks on some of its Principal Articles; in which their importance in a Political, Moral and Religious Point of View, is illustrated; and the necessity of a Reformation in Church and State in Great Britain, Enforced. By Benjamin Flower. [quotation from Burke] London: Printed for G. G. and J. Robinson, Pater-Noster-Row; W. and A. Lee, Lewes; M. Falkner, Manchester; and S. Woolmer, Exeter. MDCCXCII. [1792].* A second edition came out in the same year. Flushed with the success of *The French Constitution*, a year later Flower published anonymously *The Principles of the British Constitution Explained; and the Right, Necessity, and Expediency of Reform, Asserted. In a series of Letters to the Author of a late Publication, entitled "The British Constitution Invulnerable." By A Friend to the Constitution. [quotations from Reeves and Blackstone] London: Printed for G. G. J. and J. Robinson, Pater-Noster-Row; MDCCXCIII. [1793].* In 1799 Flower was summoned before the House of Lords for an alleged libel upon Richard Watson, Bishop of Llandaff. He was found guilty of a breach of privilege and sentenced to six months imprisonment in Newgate prison and a fine of £100.

⁸³ e.g. - Though Bewley describes Muir's three-hour long speech as "a noble defence of reform" and "impassioned", she concludes that it was "totally unsuitable as a legal defence" and that he "should have confined himself to the facts of the case which were overwhelmingly in his favour.", *Muir of Hunterhill*, p. 77.

⁸⁴ *State Trials, XXIII, 1793-94, 202.*

throne of despotism will be erected, and the silent -- I cannot, will not contemplate the picture. If you destroy the liberty of the press, you may perchance do something else, which is horrible to think upon ... By undermining its best prop, its most solid and massy pillar, -- I repeat it, and never shall cease to repeat it, -- the liberty of the press -- you expose this holy fabric to a blow, which shall shake it from its foundation. Let us then apply this argument to the case of Mr. Paine. This work [*Rights of Man*] is merely of a speculative nature upon the principles of government. ... Let Mr. Paine then be considered as the bitterest enemy to our constitution, yet as long as he confines himself to speculation, we should be grateful. ... Shall the lending of a single copy of the works of this writer be held criminal? When was there ever such a violation of the rights of Britons? Mr. Paine has composed no model of a perfect commonwealth, as Mr. Hume has done; yet the political works of Mr. Hume you have all read, and you have all applauded. If you condemn a man for lending Mr. Paine's Works, you do what even was not attempted to be done in the reign of Henry 8th. ... If you condemn books for being seditious, upon account of passages culled from this page, and from that page, and artfully combined together, you have it in your power to award a proscription against books and universal literature.⁸⁵

Muir's trial is a sorry episode in the judicial history of Scotland. At the very end of his speech, after his defence of freedom of the press (in the course of which he quotes from Erskine's great Guildhall speech of December 1792), Muir draws attention to the ultimate inconsistencies of the law in vaguely approaching the issue of charges of sedition levelled against booksellers, printers and publishers, and he concludes:

We have seen juries one day condemning the author and the publishers and upon the succeeding day, we have heard other juries pronounce a verdict of acquittal.

To that, Howell – the editor of *State Trials* and a man clearly sympathetic to Muir – adds a footnote:

* See the trials of Thomas Paine, of Daniel Isaac Eaton, and of Daniel Holt, *ante*. Vol. 22. For publishing Paine's writings, many other persons were prosecuted and brought to trial, whose cases I have omitted, not having met with any report of them worth preserving.⁸⁶

No other trial in Scotland after Muir's holds quite the same interest for bibliographical historians. It is true that there were later sedition trials that did involve references to the possession and circulation of seditious writings but, generally, these tended to be restricted to either newspaper articles or manuscript notes and/or resolutions of local branches of the Friends of the People and similar organisations. The later trials – especially those in 1794 – were of men such as Joseph Gerrald, Maurice Margarot and William Skirving where the indictments were not so much concerned with the authorship, publication and circulation of seditious writings as the alleged involvement of the accused in the *active* crime of sedition. In that regard, the burden of evidence against

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, 208-211.

⁸⁶ *State Trials*, *XXIII*, 214.

the accused now tended to consist of verbatim accounts of the British Convention of the Friends of the People, taken down in shorthand⁸⁷ by hired government agents. The weight of evidence, therefore, had begun to shift away from the *written* in favour of the *spoken* word.

Of considerable interest to the bibliographical scholar, however, is the trial of the radical Edinburgh publisher **Alexander Scott**⁸⁸ which came on at the High Court in Edinburgh on 3rd February 1794. Scott, who had worked as a clerk for the radical Edinburgh bookseller Alexander Guthrie, had succeeded Captain William Johnston as editor and proprietor of the *Edinburgh Gazetteer* from April 1793. Harris observes that “the cautious, moderate tone and content” of the paper lately adopted by Johnston (after his own trial in January-February 1793) would continue under Scott, who announced in the first number of the paper for which he was responsible (2nd April):

We are anxious not to be regarded as the organ of faction, or the trumpet of sedition. To foster the spirit of Patriotism, to encourage the virtue of good citizens, to afford a just delineation of public measures, to stimulate and encourage a taste for political enquiry; and to contribute to the extension of political knowledge, are the purposes of the *present undertaking*.

Even so, the mere fact that the paper published full reports of meetings of the British Convention was a painful thorn in the government’s flesh. The indictment against Scott was that he “wickedly and feloniously” printed and circulated three numbers of a paper

intituled ‘The Edinburgh Gazetteer’, being Nos. 78, 79 and 80, and bearing the respective dates ... the 26th November, 3d and 10th of December 1793 ... and which papers contained a variety of seditious and inflammatory speeches, motions, and resolutions, said to have been spoken,

⁸⁷ Shorthand (or *brachygraphy* as it was sometimes then known) had become a skill much in demand at this time, especially in courts of law, largely through the efforts of the Gurney family. The Gurney system which was orthographically based, (in contrast with much later systems, such as Pitman and Gregg, which were phonologically based) was invented by Thomas Gurney (1705-70). His engagement at the Old Bailey was the first official appointment of a shorthand writer. Thomas’s work was carried on by his son, Joseph Gurney (1744-1815), his grandson, William Brodie Gurney 1777-1855) and Brodie’s son, also Joseph Gurney (1804-79). Among those who employed the Gurney system were Sir Henry Cavendish and Charles Dickens.

⁸⁸ Scott was not just editor and printer of a newspaper but operated at the *Gazetteer* shop at South Bridge Street, Edinburgh as a general bookseller where he published his own titles. Thus, the issue of the paper for 25 January 1793 (no. 16) carries an advertisement for both his own version of Erskine’s Guildhall speech of 18 December, 1792 and for *The Patriot No. 20* - and, we are informed, “in a few days will be published, No. 21”. These adverts are repeated (in a slightly different form) in the paper for 8 February 1793 (no. 20).

proposed, and passed, in the ... meeting, styling itself “The British Convention of Delegates of the People, associated to obtain Universal Suffrage and Annual Parliaments.”⁸⁹

Scott failed to appear in Court to answer the charges and received the customary sentence of fugitation and outlawry, with “all moveable goods and gear to be escheat” – a harsh sentence indeed for a printer whose livelihood was immediately terminated, with the confiscation of his press and all the materials that would have been necessary to produce a newspaper at regular intervals. Predictably, the paper was forced to close early in 1794.

Before his flight, however, Scott, almost impudently, set up and printed a broadsheet setting out the reasons for his ‘fugitation’. Copies have survived, presumably because he took care to circulate them in some quantity. The paper, dated *Edinburgh, February 1, 1794* – just two days before his trial – is a rare example of a printer and newspaper proprietor defending his cause against the wiles of government and setting out his stall for the noble principle of the liberty of the press:

As the Editor of a Newspaper, I gave only to the World what the World had a right to know – the arguments which had been urged in support of Universal Suffrage and Annual Parliaments. If those arguments are ill grounded I have committed no injury; for, as Reason is omnipotent, they will fail in their intended effect; but, if they are just, who will assert that they ought not to be communicated?

... men supported by integrity and enabled by talents to defend those principles which they spoke, and which I only printed, have fallen victims to a brutal and ignorant Bench, and a corrupt, trembling, and packed Jury. ...

... as we are born for society, we should not incur pains and penalties without an equivalent benefit to the cause in which we are engaged. BRITONS, remember, that the Liberty of the Press, that great Palladium of our rights, has been attacked in my person, and that it is not ALEXANDER SCOTT, but Truth, Justice, and Freedom of discussion which have been assailed by the process that has driven me from my country ...

... To that country I will return to take my trial, as soon as the period arrives, when the mandate of Dundas shall not be the sentence of a Scottish court of judicature, and when innocence can appear with confidence before an honest and impartial Jury.⁹⁰

5 Daniel Isaac Eaton – the ‘godfather’ of radical publishing

As Michael Davis has pointed out,

⁸⁹ *State Trials*, XXIII, 387.

⁹⁰ The sheet is headed “Reasons Justifying The Departure Of A. SCOTT” and is addressed “Friends & Citizens”.

much of the government's attention in making examples of radicals focused on those working in the book trades.⁹¹

And Davis highlights the reason why that should have been so. It was simply a recognition that those working in the book trades had it within their power to disseminate radical ideas much more effectively and widely even than those who had composed such ideas in the first place; accordingly, in the eyes of government, theirs was the greater offence. And Davis goes on to quote the Attorney General at Eaton's second trial in July 1793 for having published Paine's *Letter addressed to the Addressers on the late Proclamation* (1793):

The man who mixes the poison, and does not distribute it, is less guilty than he who lends his hand to the distribution of it.⁹²

In the course of his long career Daniel Isaac Eaton came to be acknowledged as the veritable 'godfather' of radical publishers. Eaton operated from premises in London at, successively, 81 Bishopsgate Street (1792), then at 74 Newgate Street (1793-97), and finally - on his return in 1801 from an ill-fated three-year period of self-imposed exile in Philadelphia - at 3, Ave Maria Lane, Ludgate Street. His shop and home became 'safe' houses for reformers and radicals from all over the country, including Scotland, most of them (like his protégé James Kennedy) desperate men fleeing the law.

Eaton constantly defied the authorities and, for a time at least, succeeded in challenging them. Daniel Lawrence McCue Jr. - citing J. M. Wheeler in 1883 - hails Eaton as

one of the many sturdy champions to whose courageous labours and sufferings we owe the right of a free press.⁹³

Eaton was brought to trial - usually charged with printing,⁹⁴ publishing and selling seditious materials - on four occasions, first in 1793 (twice), in 1794 and, finally, in 1812.⁹⁵ To the

⁹¹ Michael T. Davis, "Good for the Public Example: Daniel Isaac Eaton, Prosecution, Punishment, and Recognition, 1793-1812", in *Radicalism and Revolution in Britain, 1775-1848, Essays in Honour of Malcolm I. Thomis*, ed. Michael T. Davis, Basingstoke, 2000, p. 113.

⁹² *ibid.*, p. 115, note 50. *State Trials XXII*, 818.

⁹³ Article on Eaton, Oxford DNB, online version, 2004-10.

⁹⁴ Eaton acquired his own press in 1793.

⁹⁵ Eaton's trial in 1812 - which does not concern us here - was for printing, publishing and selling a blasphemous libel in the famous *Ecce Homo* case, when Eaton was found guilty and sentenced to 18 months in jail and to stand in the pillory. William Cobbett, writing eight years after the event,* recalled how Eaton's appearance in the pillory attracted "an immense crowd of people [who] cheered him during the whole hour: some held out biscuits, as if to present him with: others held him out glasses of wine, and others little flags of triumph and bunches of flowers.

authorities he was as slippery as an eel, being found technically guilty in both 1793 trials but in each case without any further proceedings taking place; in 1794 he was acquitted for a seditious libel, largely as the result of the ingenuity and expertise of his barrister, (Sir) John Gurney. In the following year, he was found guilty *in absentia* for publishing Charles Pigott's *A Political Dictionary* (1795)⁹⁶ and Edward Iliff's *A Summary of the Duties of Citizenship!* (1795) and had to go into hiding while his wife and family minded the business in his absence. He fled to Philadelphia and was there for three unhappy years from 1797 to 1800 until, ironically, he fell foul of the new American alien and sedition laws already referred to in this chapter. On returning to Britain, Eaton, now bankrupt, was arrested and found guilty of the charges originally brought against him in 1795. He was sentenced (at the age of 50) to fifteen months' solitary confinement and c. £3,000 worth of his books packed for the American market were publicly burned.

It is clear that Eaton was a resourceful man. To get round the law, his great trick was to publish – after, for example, each of the three trials in 1793-94, when he was effectively able to walk away and resume his business – his own personal account of the proceedings which, of course, included a full transcript of the indictment.⁹⁷ Eaton's version of the

While the executioner and officers of Justice were hooted! ... They [the crowd] were not ignorant of the cause of his being in the pillory ... and yet, they could not give their assent to a punishment inflicted for a *matter of opinion*."

* Cobbett's *Political Register*, 27 January 1820. Cited by E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 1991 edition, London, p. 662.

⁹⁶ Charles Pigott (d. 1794) was a kind of literary Gillray whose most famous, and popular, political satires were *The Jockey Club, or a Sketch of the Manners of the Age*, London (H.D. Symonds), 1792, *The Female Jockey Club*, London (Eaton), 1794, *A Political Dictionary: explaining the true meaning of words. Illustrated and Exemplified in the Lives, Morals, Character and Conduct of the following Most Illustrious Personages, among many others* [list of 62 names follow, including those of the Prince of Wales, Pitt, Fox, Burke, Dundas and Reeves.], London (Eaton), 1795, and the four *Rights* pamphlets of 1795 – *The Rights of Man*, *The Rights of Princes*, *The Rights of Priests* and *The Rights of Nobles* – all “consisting of extracts from Pigott's *Political Dictionary*”. Pigott's brother, Robert (1736-1794) was, like Charles, “enraptured by the French Revolution, and while living in France cultivated Voltaire, Brissot and Franklin”. See article by J.G. Alger, rev. Stephen M. Lee, on the Pigott brothers in the Oxford DNB, online edition, 2004-2011.

⁹⁷ For example, in *The King against Daniel Isaac Eaton* (London, n.d., no t.p.) [1793], Eaton simply reproduces the text of the indictment which includes specific quotations, as found most objectionable by the prosecution, from his “*scandalous, malicious, inflammatory, and seditious*” weekly entitled *Politics for the People; or, Hog's Wash* – a pamphlet that ceased publication with vol. 2, no. 30 in January 1795. Eaton also changed the title from time to time to confuse the authorities who would have tried to trip him up, citing a given title, only to find Eaton responding that this was **not** the title of the offending pamphlet. Thus, the sub-title of his short-running but hugely popular *Politics for the People* (1793-5) was at one time *A Salamagundy for Swine* (e.g.

indictment and trial proceedings, using the latest shorthand expertise now being substantially used in the Courts of law, incorporated extensive extracts from the books or pamphlets that provoked his arrest in the first place. Publishing them in this way, however - that is, in the form of a verbatim account of the trial itself - guaranteed that he would not fall foul of the Court on the same charge since he was simply, he argued, reproducing Court proceedings. It was a clever stratagem and he resorted to it whenever he thought he could get away with it. The technique meant, of course, that he could sometimes get away with effectively 're-publishing' outrageous lampoonery of the king, as, for example, in the following from *The King against Daniel Isaac Eaton* of 1793 -

I had a very fine majestic kind of animal, a game cock [meaning thereby to denote and represent our said LORD THE KING] a haughty, sanguinary tyrant, nursed in blood and slaughter, from his infancy; fond of foreign wars and domestic rebellions, into which he [meaning our said LORD THE KING,] would sometimes drive his subjects by his oppressive obstinacy, in hopes that he might increase his power and glory by their suppression.

From then on, Eaton's imprints often read "Printed for D. I. Eaton, at the Cock and Hog-Trough, Newgate-Street" (or, in another variant, the "Cock and Swine")⁹⁸ and he delighted in using a picture of a cockerel as his logo on many of his pamphlets.

Ingeniously, Eaton also chose on occasion to alter the names of some of the booksellers who sold his titles. A good example of this is to be found on the title page of one of his trial proceedings series published in 1793 where he amusingly changes the name of the well-known Glasgow booksellers, Brash and Reid, to "Mash and Read" and, perhaps more subtly, the name of the Edinburgh firm "Berry and Robertson" to "Berry and Robinson".⁹⁹ The resultant title page is a bibliographical curiosity. Why he did this is not

vol. 1, 1794) and at another time *Hog's Wash* (e.g. vol. VII - IX, 1793) or, alternatively, omitting the former main title altogether as *Hog's Wash or A Salamagundy for Swine* (n.d., but likely to be 1793) - all very confusing for the bibliographer but, then, it was deliberately, and cleverly, designed to be confusing by Eaton, knowing that the book police would similarly be tearing their hair at the bewildering complexities of the title concerned! Despite that, *Politics for the People* succeeded as "a sort of cut-and-paste radical history book." (Marcus Wood: "Radical Publishing" in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, vol. 5, 1695-1830, p. 839.

⁹⁸ As in the title page of Eaton's edition of Paine's *Age of Reason* ("Paris", i.e. London, 1794).

⁹⁹ Title page of *The Trial of Daniel Isaac Eaton, before Lord Kenyon, and a special jury, in the Court of King's Bench, Guildhall, London, July the tenth, 1793; for selling a supposed libel, A letter, addressed to the addressers. By Thomas Paine. London: printed and published by the defendant, Daniel Isaac Eaton; and [sic] sold by H. D. Symonds; James Ridgway; Rio [sic] Rickman; T. W. Hawkins; I. S. Jordan; J. Gale, Sheffield; R. Phillips, Leicester; Benjamin Flowers [sic], Cambridge; Messrs. Berry and Robinson [sic], Edinburgh; Mash and Read, [sic] Glasgow. [1793]* "Rio Rickman" is a deliberate error for Thomas Clio Rickman (1761-1834),

fully clear. Perhaps he conceived of the idea as an effective device to bamboozle the book police in order that, if they decided to proceed against members of the trade on the simple grounds that any associate of Eaton's was fair game as likely radical suspects - a reasonable proposition, one might think - they would be made aware of the need to be absolutely 100% scrupulous in terms of getting names right within the wording of an indictment. Or did he just enjoy fooling around with words? Was it all simply a prank? Eaton does appear to have enjoyed acting the clown, as his *Hog's Wash* series amply demonstrates. He could never resist any opportunity to twist the tail of authority.

In 1795 Eaton published a catalogue of his own printed titles for sale in his shop. Reading the list is like taking a guided tour of the radical literature of the 1790s. It's all there - from the great names of Paine, William Godwin and Algernon Sidney to lesser figures such as James Thomson Callender and John Thelwall and even evanescent, shady characters like James Kennedy.¹⁰⁰ Eaton spoke French fluently and translated into English French editions of Helvétius, Volney and Freret. According to the British Library ESTC, from the early 1790s to the end of the decade Eaton published nearly 500 titles, by far the majority being titles germane to the reformist and radical cause, many of them classics in that rarefied context.

For the contemporary radical movement in Scotland, the phenomenon that was Daniel Isaac Eaton is important bibliographically and historically in a number of ways. First, as observed by Harris, Eaton's London bookshop

seems to have acted as a magnet to quite a few Scottish radicals who sought refuge in the British capital in this period.¹⁰¹

James Kennedy, for one, almost certainly lodged with him during his years of exile from 1794 to 1797 and while there brought out at least three verse pamphlets in his *The Weaver's Budget* series. Secondly, Eaton was probably the most important supplier to the radical Scottish book trade. As we shall see later in this chapter, the radical Edinburgh

another bookseller and radical who wrote under the sobriquet of "Clio". Rickman was a member of the Paine London coterie and, having been found guilty of selling Paine's works in 1793, fled to Paris where he met up with Paine and mixed in with the English émigré community centred on White's Hotel in Paris where Paine and others resided. (See Keane, *Tom Paine A Political Life*, pp. 320-321 and 370).

¹⁰⁰ However, Harris errs in believing that Eaton published only one volume of Kennedy's verse. See the bibliographical note on Kennedy at the beginning of chapter 6.

¹⁰¹ *The Scottish People and the French Revolution*, p. 104.

bookseller Alexander Leslie was himself an important supplier and distributor of radical titles throughout the central belt of Scotland, including Glasgow and Paisley in the west. Leslie's daybook, which was impounded by the Sheriff in 1797 on his being charged in his absence on conducting treasonable activities, represents an important and fascinating source of information on members of the Scottish book trade operating at this time who, while not necessarily themselves sympathetic to the cause of reform, were still prepared to offer radical titles for sale in their shops.¹⁰² Had he not fled, there is no doubt that he would have faced trial and would doubtless have received a stiff sentence. The daybook shows that Leslie dealt with Eaton on a regular basis.

For the bibliographical scholar, one of the most interesting of Eaton's pamphlets is the wickedly satirical *The Pernicious Effects of the Art of Printing*.¹⁰³ The anonymous author signs as "Antitype" on the last page of the 16 page pamphlet but it is clearly the work of Eaton himself. It is an entertaining and often outrageous piece of writing :

The lower orders begin to have ideas of rights, as men - to think that one man is as good as another ... that every man has a right to a share in the government ... that laws should be the same to all ... that freedom of speech is the equal right of all; and that the rich have no right to dictate to the poor what sentiments they shall adopt on any subject - or in any wise prevent investigation and inquiry. This with a great deal more such stuff, is called the rights of man - blessed fruits of the art of Printing - the scum of the earth, the swinish multitude, talking of their rights! ... With similar mistaken notions of liberty, even many women are infatuated; and the press, that grand prolific source of evil - that fruitful mother of mischief, has already favoured the public with several female productions on this very popular subject - one in particular, called the Rights of Women [sic], and in which, as one of their rights, a share in legislation is claimed and asserted - gracious heaven! to what will this fatal delusion lead, and in what will it terminate!

Eaton can't resist a satirical swipe at the sedition trials -

The late motions in the Lower House respecting the legality of Messrs. Muir and Palmer's sentences is another evil arising from the art of Printing; for had it not been for that infernal

¹⁰² Examples in that context are Brash and Reid of Glasgow and John Neilson of Paisley who, though they are named in Leslie's daybook as having bought titles from him, would certainly not have seen themselves, nor would have wished to be regarded as 'radical' publishers - nor should we term them so.

¹⁰³ *The Pernicious Effects of The Art of Printing upon Society, Exposed. A short essay. Addressed to the Friends of Social Order. London: Printed for Daniel Isaac Eaton, No. 74, Newgate-Street Price Two Pence.* [n.d., but ESTC suggests 1794]. In a preliminary page Eaton - as usual - advertises items from his book catalogue, at the end of which is the statement "A PERFECT LIKENESS of D. I. EATON will be given with his THREE TRIALS; and any Person sending [for] the former Two may have One gratis." Probably also in 1794 Eaton published in the same style the satirical *The Pernicious Principles of Tom Paine exposed in an address to Labourers and Mechanics, by a Gentleman. ... London: Printed for D. I. Eaton, no. 74, Newgate Street. Price One Penny.*

invention, the Commons, most probably would never have existed – the people, happy in their ignorance, would never have had any chimerical notions of liberty, but obedient to their superiors, things would have glided smoothly and calmly on, and the crime of sedition been unknown in this happy land.

Objectionable writers, too, would never have come to the fore to stir up discontent had not printing been discovered –

Had mankind remained ignorant of the use of types, those outcasts of society, Paine and Barlow, would not have been able to publish their wicked inflammatory books – miscreants that treat with ridicule the most antient establishment

What is to be done? Eaton asks. The only logical resolution of the problem is to get rid of the printing press completely –

Let all Printing-presses be committed to the flames – all letter foundries be destroyed – schools and seminaries of learning abolished – dissenters of every denominations double and treble taxed – all discourse upon government and religion prohibited – political clubs and associations of every kind suppressed, excepting those formed for the express purpose of supporting government; and lastly, issue a proclamation against reading, and burn all private libraries.

Finally, and more generally, it is important to emphasise that throughout the 1790s relatively few radical pamphlets of any note were actually published in Scotland and only two non-loyalist newspapers, each of very short duration. That meant that there was really no option open to Scottish radical booksellers keen to satisfy the appetite for the better-known radical titles (the most renowned consistently being the numerous individual works of Paine), than to deal themselves *direct* with London shops – such as Eaton’s. The alternative was to order their stock through some other bookseller in Scotland with strong London contacts in the trade. The most notable figure exploiting that kind of arrangement was Alexander Leslie of Edinburgh.

6 New light on Alexander Leslie and the Scottish radical book trade

Alexander Leslie was in business as a bookseller in Edinburgh from 1795 (Harris says 1796 but see note below).¹⁰⁴ Leslie’s daybook is a revelation to bibliographers. Not only does it afford an insight into the often clandestine world of radical books and printed

¹⁰⁴ Harris cites the Francis Place papers of the London Corresponding Society (*The Scottish People and the French Revolution*, p. 161 and p. 283, note 97). But this is at odds with the NAS manuscript* headed “Declaration of Alexr. Leslie 13th Novemr 1797” which is signed by Leslie himself on each page and opens with the statement in the Sheriff officer’s hand: “He has carried on business as a Bookseller at Nicolson Street for two years past ...”.

* NAS, West Register House, folder JC26/293.

ephemera – their selling and procurement – in the 1790s in Scotland, but it also brings to life the real world of the book trade in relation to actual named books and pamphlets which, as we have already seen in the context of the sedition trials, were especially risky to possess and riskier still to stock, sell and distribute throughout Scotland at the time. The Leslie daybook and associated papers are unusually important because they confirm a perceived demand for specific titles, as well as revealing the extent to which Leslie was himself dependent on supplies from the London book market, in most cases supplied by his friend and fellow radical, Daniel Isaac Eaton. Further, Leslie’s daybook reveals important details of contemporary methods of supply and distribution to which, as a radical book distributor operating in Edinburgh, he would have conformed. This practice consisted of, first, acquiring ready supplies of specific titles listed in his “Political Catalogue”, most of them from London printers such as Robinson, Seale and Eaton, then proceeding to distribute them to other Scottish booksellers, particularly throughout the west and the central belt, from whom he records taking (and fulfilling) regular orders for the most popular titles. All this would, of course, have been undertaken by Leslie against a backdrop of government harassment, subterfuge and repression. He was one of the unlucky ones to be pursued and prosecuted under the law.

From the NAS papers cited above it is clear that Leslie’s shop was raided by the Sheriff’s agents on 6th January 1797, the date at the top of a copy of his printed catalogue which is signed by one of the Sheriff’s officers, “Andrew Miller”. At the foot of the second page of the same catalogue, the following note appears, signed by another official:

“Edin 13th Nov 1797

This relates to Alex Lesleys [sic] Declaration of this date.

James Clerk”

The Declaration itself is attached to the manuscript daybook. Part of the deposition refers to an “Inventory of Books” found in Leslie’s possession and presumably confiscated.

Apart from stocks of named titles of individual works by Tom Paine, most notably, 20 copies of *Rights of Man*, 14 copies of *The Age of Reason* (in all probability, the Eaton 1794 ‘Paris’/London edition),¹⁰⁵ and (presumably) single copies of *Agrarian Justice*¹⁰⁶ and

¹⁰⁵ *The Age of Reason; being an Investigation of True and Fabulous Theology. By Thomas Paine, ... Paris: printed by Barrois. London: Sold by D. I. Eaton, at the Cock and Swine, No. 74,*

the *Letter to George Washington*¹⁰⁷ (both 1795), the Inventory of works seized by the Sheriff's men also includes such radical 'standards' as Hog(g)'s *The Blessings of Monarchy* (Dublin, 1796),¹⁰⁸ *Watson's* [sic] *System of Religion Refuted* (Portsmouth, 1796 and usually referred to at this time as simply *Watson Refuted*),¹⁰⁹ Merry's poem, *The Wounded Soldier* (date uncertain but probably 1796 or 1797),¹¹⁰ the Reverend James Murray's *Sermons to Asses*¹¹¹ and *Seven New Sermons to Asses* (the latter in the 1796 Paisley edition)¹¹² and, last but not least, the great contemporary favourite in taverns and

Newgate-street. 1794. Price Two Shillings. It should be noted that this was the first 'official' English edition sanctioned by Paine himself. See Eaton's advert in the *Morning Chronicle* for December 19, 1795 republishing Paine's letter. (Keane, *Tom Paine A Political life*, pp. 599-600, note 18).

¹⁰⁶ The ESTC lists no less than nine editions of this title with a London imprint dated or assumed to be 1797. However, this would have been Leslie's own Edinburgh edition which is also dated 1797: *Agrarian Justice, opposed to agrarian law, and to agrarian monopoly; being a plan for meliorating the condition of man, by creating in every nation a national fund, ... By Thomas Paine, ... Edinburgh: printed for and sold by Alexander Leslie, 1797.*

¹⁰⁷ The ESTC lists seven editions of Paine's infamous Washington Letter with a London imprint dated or assumed to be 1797, of which Eaton's is one. However, again, this would have almost certainly been Leslie's own Edinburgh reprint of the same year, described as the "seventh edition": *A Letter to George Washington, on the subject of the late Treaty concluded between Great Britain and the United States of America. Including other matters. By Thomas Paine, ... The Seventh Edition. Philadelphia printed. Edinburgh: reprinted for A. Leslie, 1797.*

¹⁰⁸ *The Blessings of Monarchy; a sermon. For the National Fast, to be Appointed by His Majesty, For the Year 1797. With notes, and an occasional prayer. By Alexander Hog, A. M. Dublin: Printed by P. Macdonnell, King-Street. 1796.* Attributed to Daniel Humphreys (1740-1827).

¹⁰⁹ *The Bible needs no apology: or, Watson's System of Religion refuted; and the advocate proved an unfaithful one, by the Bible itself: ... A Short Answer to Paine: in four letters, on Watson's Apology for The Bible, and Paine's Age of Reason, Part the Second. Printed by Charles Peirce, for Samuel Larkin, at the Portsmouth Bookstore. Market-Street, 1796.*

¹¹⁰ *The Wounded Soldier, a poem. By Mr. M ---y. London: Printed for T. G. Ballard, No. 3 Bedford Court; Covent Garden. ...* [n.d. but ESTC postulates 1795?]. ESTC also lists the following NLS copy as being a likely Edinburgh production: if that is an accurate indication of provenance, then it seems logical to suppose that this is the title sold by Leslie - *The Wounded Soldier, a poem by Mr M ---. To which is added, The holy war - a new song.* [n.d., n.p., Edinburgh?, 1795?]. The author, Robert Merry (1755-1798) is described as a "dilettante" and sympathised with the French Revolution. He visited Paris three times - in 1789, 1791 and 1792 - and in 1796 went to America where he wrote several unsuccessful plays. Merry died in Baltimore in 1798.

¹¹¹ I have been unable to locate an edition of this work that fits with Leslie's book-stock and the date of the Inventory. It was, however, a well-known and popular title in its day. The author, the Reverend James Murray (1732-1782), was minister at Alnwick, then at Newcastle. He opposed the American War. There was a Boston edition (Mein & Fleeming) of *Sermons to Asses* in 1768 and in 1783 Robert Bell published the same title in Philadelphia.

¹¹² See Appendix A, 187-96 for a bibliographical description of this Paisley title. Robert Smith of Paisley seems to have liked Murray's works which must have sold well in the town for in 1798 William Paton printed in Glasgow for R. Johnston (described in the imprint as "the publisher") and for Smith, Murray's *Lectures to Lords Spiritual*. In the same year Smith arranged with the same Glasgow printer to reprint Murray's *Sermons to Doctors in Divinity*.

reformist meeting halls, the various editions of *Patriotic Songs* (from 1793).¹¹³ All of these titles would have appeared in the shops of every bookseller in Scotland with radical leanings and, as we shall see, perhaps surprisingly, even in some shops whose proprietors would have hotly denied any such tendencies.

If Leslie's printed "Political Catalogue" – a copy of which is included as evidence in the Sheriff officer's file on him – is a treasure-trove of popular radical titles in the late 1790s, what is of even greater importance for students of the Scottish book trade in this period is his daybook. Leslie's daybook is a unique record of a radical bookseller *cum* publisher's regular business dealings with named booksellers in Edinburgh, as well as furth of the capital. Harris provides a valuable summary list of these (without naming them individually), noting that he did business with booksellers and printers from Leith, Glasgow, Paisley, Hamilton, Muirkirk, Alloa, Kelso, Hawick, Jedburgh, Dunbar and, from south of the border, Newcastle – apart, of course, from his dealings with other booksellers in Edinburgh. Harris does not name the three Paisley booksellers in the daybook with whom Leslie traded: but the NAS manuscript shows they were John Neilson, Robert Smith and 'D.' Weir [sic].¹¹⁴ Nor does Harris make clear that Leslie bought titles supplied by Eaton (though he does refer to some Eaton titles cited in the Sheriff's Inventory). Thus, on 1st December 1796 it is recorded that he bought (or ordered, or received – the entry is not clear) from "D. I. Eaton London" –

24 Blessings of Monarchy
50 Paine on finances¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Though it would almost certainly not have been the precise title cited in Leslie's Inventory. I think this ephemeral publication was *based on A Tribute to Liberty: or, a new collection of Patriotic Songs; entirely original ... Sacred to the Rights of Man. ... London: Printed for and sold by Thomson, No. 4, Bell Yard, Temple-Bar; and Hamilton, Holborn. 1793.* The odds are in favour of the Inventory item having been printed *either* in London by/for Eaton *or* in Edinburgh for Leslie.

¹¹⁴ *The Scottish People and the French Revolution*, p. 162. I do not imply criticism of Harris in that regard but make the point simply because of the importance of the Paisley connection throughout this study. The "D. Weir" is almost certainly a slip for "J. Weir" – see Ronald L. Crawford, *Literary Activity in Paisley in the Early Nineteenth Century*, pp. 53-54.

¹¹⁵ Paine wrote his *Decline and Fall of the English System of Finance* in Paris. Keane, noting its extraordinary success, states that in the year it came out, it ran to "more than a dozen London editions" – *Tom Paine A political life*, p. 428. In fact, ESTC lists no less than *twenty* London editions (including some London/*Paris* editions) in 1796 alone, apart from four American (two in New York, two in Philadelphia) and two Dublin editions in the same year. The copies Leslie bought from Eaton would, of course, have been one of the many Eaton 'Paris-London' editions of 1796.

24 Patriotic Songs
12 Age of Reason
50 Wounded Soldier
Etc.

The total bill came to £4.1.0.

In 1797 (the date is unclear) Leslie supplied to “Mr Neilson Bookseller Paisley”

12 Convention¹¹⁶
12 Song
24 Divine Progress¹¹⁷
12 Wounded Soldier
9 Paine on finances

Leslie appears to have done particularly good business with Robert Smith, the Paisley publisher and bookseller. From 1796 to 1797, on various dates, the daybook records five separate transactions with Smith, including some sizeable orders as follows (in chronological order):

12 Blessings
24 Political Mis¹¹⁸
24 Paine to Washington
24 Scent (?) of Freemasons¹¹⁹
100 Agn. Justice
100 P. to Jourdan¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ From Eaton’s various advertisements it is clear that this title is his - *A Convention the only means of saving us from ruin. In a letter, addressed to the people of England. By Joseph Gerrald. London: printed for D. I. Eaton, No. 74, Newgate-Street, MDCCXCIII.*

¹¹⁷ Not traced.

¹¹⁸ do.

¹¹⁹ do.

¹²⁰ See Appendix A, 201-97. This is an extraordinarily rare title. It is also one of the least known of Paine’s pamphlets. The *Letter to Camille Jordan* is not mentioned at all, for example, in Keane. Bibliographically, it is also of considerable interest. Two different editions of the title are listed in the ESTC: a London edition and an edition printed for Robert Smith with a Paisley imprint. Both editions are dated 1797. In each case, only one copy has been traced: the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia has the only extant copy of the London edition, and the only extant copy of Smith’s Paisley version is in the University of Cambridge library. The copies ordered by Smith would, I think, have been the London version for it seems scarcely credible that he would have ordered his own publication from Leslie, unless, that is, Leslie had had it done for him by an Edinburgh printer which seems to me unlikely. Also, the format of the two editions is quite different, though they are both 8 page pamphlets: the London title is octavo and the Paisley title duodecimo.

Paine’s letter is of interest to members of the Quaker faith and this, in part, could explain its appeal in the west of Scotland with its strong dissenting traditions. He writes: “The only people, as a professional sect of Christians who provide for the poor of their Society, are the people known by the name of Quakers. These men have no priests. They assemble quietly in their places of meeting and do not disturb their neighbours with shows and noise of bells. Religion does not

90 Agr. Justice 'my copy'

12 Erskine View¹²¹

12 Burkes letters¹²²

Other Scottish booksellers with whom Leslie seems to have enjoyed a brisk trade include such well-known names as Brash and Reid of Glasgow, Edward Leslie of Dundee, John Elder of Edinburgh and James Palmer, the Kelso printer and publisher of the *Kelso Chronicle*.

Arguably one of the most revealing aspects of the Leslie daybook is that not all the booksellers named were small-time and, above all, not all were of a radical turn of mind. John Neilson of Paisley, for example, can scarcely be termed a radical printer and publisher and, indeed, is more frequently associated with the loyalist cause. Neilson not only printed official and semi-official materials but was the printer of almost all of the productions of the extreme loyalist versifier, James Maxwell, self-styled "poet in Paisley", whose antipathy of all things anti-monarchical – especially the works of Paine – has already been noted in this study. Maxwell's relationship with the radical poet Alexander Wilson is further discussed in chapter 6.

Perhaps, however, the greatest surprise in the Leslie papers is the discovery of a letter from the young Archibald Constable to the Sheriff Clerk of Edinburgh, in which he admits to having an account with Leslie for the supply of certain 'questionable' books. It is a little strange to conceive of the man we have been accustomed to regard as Sir Walter Scott's "prince of booksellers" being associated with a man like Leslie.¹²³ Leslie's account

invite itself to shew and noise. True religion is without either. Where there is both there is no true religion. ... I am a descendant of a family of that profession; my father was a Quaker. ...".

¹²¹ By the time an Edinburgh edition of this celebrated work came out later in the same year in its first London edition (1797), this title had reached its 18th. edition. It seems likely that Smith's order was for the Edinburgh version but one cannot, of course, be sure. The Edinburgh title is *A view of the causes and consequences of the present war with France. By the Honourable Thomas Erskine. The eighteenth edition. Edinburgh: printed for G. Mudie & Son, South Bridge, and Cameron & Murdoch, Glasgow, 1797.*

¹²² *Strictures on Mr. Burke's two letters, addressed to a member of the present Parliament. Part the first. London: printed for G. G. J. and J. Robinson, Pater-Noster Row, 1796.* The author was William Roscoe (1753-1831), Whig M.P. for Liverpool (1806-7). Roscoe later turned to writing stories for children.

¹²³ Archibald Constable (1774-1827). Sir Walter Scott describes him in his *Journal* (pp. 376-7, 7/23/27), as "a prince of booksellers". David Hewitt describes him as "the grand Napoleon of the realms of print" – Oxford *DNB*, online edition, 2004-2010. Constable was in business in Edinburgh from 1795 to 1815 as an antiquarian bookseller and in 1815 retired from that line in

to Constable, dated 25 March 1797 – when Constable was just 23 years old – is for £1.10s and includes copies of Callender’s *Political Progress* (by that time an unequivocally ultra-radical publication), two works by Paine, *The Age of Reason* and *The American Crisis*, and *Patriotic Songs No. 1*. In his letter addressed to “Mr. Joseph Mack”, dated 20 February 1797, a clearly embarrassed Constable is at pains to assure the Sheriff Clerk of his purely arms-length business relationship with Leslie:¹²⁴

[Spelling and punctuation normalised by RLC]

I have looked into my account with Alexr.: Leslie. I find that on the 17th of August 1796 I got from him a copy of a Pamphlet entitled *The Age of Reason* and another of the same, or two, on the 19th of Janry. following - as also Paine on America [*The American Crisis*] on the same day - but the *Political Progress* in his Acct: on the 6th January does not appear in my Books. : It may however have been got, as I have some recollection [of it] having been applied to by a particular customer for a copy of it. Enclosed I send you his Account &c.¹²⁵

In stark contrast, at the very opposite end of the book trade spectrum I have found within the same bundle of papers, constituting part of the case against Leslie, a letter to him dated April 19, 1797 from one J. [Joseph] Smith. The letter incorporates a bill made out to Leslie for the sum of £1 1s. 0 for the supply of the following publications :

25 of my Trial ¹²⁶ (sells for 1/0 each)	0 ..18.. 0
25 Reformers no Rioters ¹²⁷	0..1 .. 6
24 Two pennyworth of truth ¹²⁸	0.. 1.. 6
	<u>£1 ..1 .. 0</u>

order to concentrate on publishing. His publishing business crashed spectacularly in January 1826, ruining not just himself but the firm of James Ballantyne into the bargain, as well as Robert Cadell, Ballantyne and Scott as individuals. See also Edgar Johnson, *Sir Walter Scott The Great Unknown*, London, 1970, vol.2, pp. 1020-1. Cadell loathed him, declaring on Constable’s death: “... thus has gone one of the vainest and most absurd men you have known. ... Originally ill-educated he picked up from his intercourse with others a smattering of passable letter-writing, which with a knowledge of books made a great show to ordinary persons ...”.

¹²⁴ The letter is in the same parcel of papers relating to the Edinburgh Sheriff’s 1797 investigation of Leslie’s effects - resulting in his being charged with seditious activities - and his subsequent fugitation. [NAS : in JC 26 (293)]

¹²⁵ *ibid.*

¹²⁶ Not traced.

¹²⁷ *Reformers no rioters. Printed by order of the London Corresponding Society* [n.p., London, no imprint, 1794? - ESTC]

¹²⁸ *Two penny-worth of truth for a penny; or a true state of facts: with an apology for Tom Bull in a letter to Brother John. London: printed for the booksellers, 1793.* The author of this curious piece was Ann Jebb (1735-1812) who contributed to the *London Chronicle* under the pen name ‘Priscilla’. Her husband, John Jebb M.D., F.R.S. (1736-1786), was a Unitarian clergyman in Suffolk and a theological and political writer.

It is only when we read the address of the sender - *House of Correction Clerkenwell "Solitary Cell"* - that it dawns that Smith is a political prisoner, receiving correspondence addressed to his wife in Portsmouth Street, London and smuggling out his own letters, doubtless through a venal prison officer, but, astonishingly, apparently still able to continue operating (of course, illicitly) as a bookseller trading in radical pamphlets. His bill is truly a most remarkable document viewed within the context of the bibliographical history of this torrid time. His accompanying letter to Leslie relates a moving and pathetic tale of resilience and defiance, in the teeth of a desperate situation facing himself and his family. It is, I think, worth quoting in its entirety:

Dear Citizen

The above is all I can send you of your order -- I have sent you 25 of my trial which contain the Greatest part of the "Citizenships" which may be sold with safety - The parcel you sent me came safe to hand. "Volneys Ruins", not being my own publication I cannot send them - but Mr. Seale, Printer no. 11 Cumberland Street Middlesex Hospital London, says he can send you them if you can send him some "Age of Reason" in lieu of them, theirfor [sic] you will communicate with him, if you think proper - In the above Parcel I have Returned 130 copies of No. 1 of the Songs - I have yet remaining for sale, some of each number as many as I think will sell.

[New page] I presume you are not unacquainted with my cruel sentence - I am entirely deprived of being of any assistance to my family whose situation I am sorry to say is truly [sic] distressing - All letters going from and coming to me are inspected by the Keeper of this prison - if you should have occasion to write do not direct to me here, but to my wife in Portsmouth Street Lincolns Innfields, this letter is with great difficulty conveyed out, without inspection. excuse the inaccuracy of this letter, as I have no convenience [sic] to write - Adieu Health & Fraternity I remain your fellow sufferer -----

J Smith

House of Correction

Clerkenwell

"Solitary cell"

Smith's reference to "Seale" is interesting. A. Seale was a fairly well-known, but small-scale radical printer and bookseller, operating in the late 1790s at Cumberland Street. His name appears in a few imprints dating from 1795 through to 1800. Thus - *A Congratulatory epistle to the London Corresponding Society, on their late meeting, In St. George's Fields. By a friend to liberty. London: printed for the benefit of the swinish multitude, and sold by A. Seale, No. 11 Cumberland Street, 1795.* By 1798 his premises

are elsewhere in London: in Jackson's *The Mirror of Time* the address in the imprint is "No. 34, Goodge Street." But it is from a title Seale printed in 1800 that we learn the identity of our poor friend in solitary confinement in the Clerkenwell - *The speech of Earl Stanhope, in the House of Lords, On Thursday the 20th of February, 1800, in support of his motion for peace with the French Republic ... London: printed for J. Smith, No. 11, James-Street, Covent Garden, by A. Seale. Goodge-Street, Middlesex-Hospital, M,D,CCC.*

The story of Joseph Smith, a small-time radical bookseller and occasional publisher, and his business relationship with Alexander Leslie, is an important discovery in a number of ways. First, Smith's letter to Leslie demonstrates the extreme, often desperate measures radical booksellers would sometimes be forced to resort to in order to eke out a living. Further, the letter is another example in confirmation of the regular flow of radical books and pamphlets between London and Edinburgh at this time, in defiance of the best efforts of government to stifle such trade. We know that Leslie had regular dealings with the London Corresponding Society for which organisation he had offered to act as agent for its publications in Scotland, "an offer which was duly accepted".¹²⁹ Seale, clearly, was one of the printers serving the publishing needs of the L.C.S. Joseph Smith was a radical bookseller whose stock included Seale's productions, as well as, doubtless, those of the other better-known London radicals in the capital's book trade.

Leslie's own fate was only a shade happier than Smith's. Lying low for a time, he jumped bail and fled to London where it is safe to say Eaton may have provided sanctuary, as he already had done to numerous other radicals in fugitation before Leslie. We don't know for certain what ultimately happened to Leslie, but at least we know that in time his prison correspondent, Joseph Smith, on release from the Clerkenwell was able to rejoin his family and resume his old trade.

7 Liberty of the press and the views of two Scottish secession church ministers

¹²⁹ *The Scottish People and the French Revolution*, p. 161 and notes 99-100 on p.283 where Harris cites BL, Add. MS 27,815, fols 74-75; and M. Thale (ed.), *Selections from the Papers of the London Corresponding Society, 1792-1799* (Cambridge, 1983).

(a) Archibald Bruce's *Reflections on Freedom of Writing* (1794)¹³⁰

We have already seen how the established church unambiguously sided with the government and remained resolutely loyalist throughout the troubles of the 1790s. At the same time, we have also observed that that was *not* the case with some individual ministers, in the main from secessionist congregations. In radical Paisley, for example, it was noted that 20% of the total population of the town at the time belonged to secessionist churches and worshipped there regularly – twice the comparable figure for the whole of Scotland as estimated by no less a figure than Robert Dundas, Lord Advocate.

Patrick Hutchison of the Paisley Canal Street Relief church, for example, was only one of several in Scotland at the time who regularly mixed politics into his sermons to a degree that some of the members of his congregation could not accept. Moreover, several individual secessionist churches and their dissenting ministers played a participative role in the proceedings of their local Friends of the People and were in attendance at some of the national conventions. Of these, the best known are a group of Dundee ministers including, most notably, Thomas Fyshe Palmer, Unitarian Minister at Dundee who was sentenced to seven years' transportation to Botany Bay in 1793. Others from Dundee included Niel Douglas, poet, author and Relief church minister there and a delegate to the third and British conventions, James McEwan, an Antiburgher minister and delegate to the second general convention and James Donaldson, Berean minister, former shoemaker and delegate to the second and third general conventions. The Berean church hall in Dundee was used for numerous meetings of radicals and possibly the best known Dundee radical of all, the weaver George Mealmaker (who, in 1798, would also suffer a similar fate as Palmer but, in his case, receiving a much stiffer sentence of fourteen years, the same as Muir received) was himself an elder of the Relief church there.

In terms of the written word, too, secessionist church ministers made their anti-government views known. Among these, one of the most vociferous and prolific was

¹³⁰ Two separate editions appeared in 1794. My references are to the following: *Reflections on Freedom of Writing; and The Impropriety of Attempting to Suppress it by Penal Laws. Occasioned by a Late Proclamation against Seditious Publications, and the measures consequent upon it; viewed chiefly In the aspect they bear to Religious Liberty, and Ecclesiastical Reform. By A North British Protestant. ... M.DCC.XCIV. To be sold by W. Berry, South Bridge, and J. Guthrie, Nicolson's Street, Edinburgh: Brash and Reid, J. Duncan and Son, Glasgow; and other Booksellers.*

Archibald Bruce (1746-1816), a graduate of the University of Glasgow, minister to the local Antiburgher congregation at Whitburn and professor of divinity to the Antiburghers for twenty years from 1786. Bruce is an important contemporary source not only because of his vigorous defence of the liberty of the press, but, much more, on account of his caustic commentary on the gulf that had discernibly opened up between the Moderate wing of the established clergy, members of the secession and the ordinary citizenry. Bruce's words are worth quoting *in extenso* -

There is, perhaps, no order of men more thoroughly tainted with corruption, and that stand more in need of a speedy reform, than the ministers of the church in both kingdoms. In Scotland, in particular, none have departed more from the principles and deviated farther from the spirit of their religious constitution; and there are none whose public measures, for more than half a century past, have uniformly contributed more to excite and continue alive popular discontents, even among those disposed to be most dutiful and peaceful, than theirs have done. ... *They, as well as the nobility, have almost completely ruined their influence with the common people of Scotland, such of them, especially as are still attached to their religion. ... They are no longer the ministers of the people;* [R.L.C's italics] the people for whose benefit surely an established ministry is designed and supported; who are in fact the only class at present who make any great account of ministers of any denomination, mitred or hatted, dressed in lawn sleeves or in plain coats and gowns.¹³¹

The Moderate clergy, instead of striving to understand the grievances of working folk - *I don't necessarily expect them to join the ranks of the reformers*, Bruce says - have simply provoked the people's anger by stepping in heedlessly to condemn them:

But though the established clergy might not be inclined to turn reformers themselves, why did they, forgetful of their proper business, so early and publicly strike in to enflame, instead of alloying, the rising political disputes? ... Why have they imbibed the spirit, and vented the language of those who paint one half of the community as turbulent enemies, and who have set one society, family or person, as an odious spy to watch and harass another?¹³²

And their palpable, open support of the government's assault on the liberty of the press is especially disgraceful, says Bruce:

Should gentlemen who have made such high pretensions to liberality, and who in a manner would appropriate to themselves the name of Moderate, bring such an indelable [sic] stain upon themselves, as to become avowed enemies to the liberty of the press, and advocates for coercive measures?¹³³ ...

... If the system lately adopted by the British administration of opposing certain opinions by legal pains, and next by fire and sword, shall be long persisted in, it is easy to foresee [sic] that our boasted palladium, the freedom of the press, must soon be destroyed.¹³⁴

¹³¹ *ibid.*, pp. 136-7.

¹³² *ibid.*, p. 138.

¹³³ *ibid.*, p. 139.

¹³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 154.

In a long footnote to this tirade Bruce then turns his attention specifically to the plight of printers and booksellers under this repressive regime. It is a fearless riposte and it is odd that it has been overlooked by historians of the period. Bruce's comments on the nightmare world of neighbours informing on neighbours, whispering campaigns, deliberate distortion of text on the part of publishers to sanitise it of any seditious import, the whiff of libel clinging even to scholarly books that happen to deal with contentious subject matter, and, finally and worst of all, the shocking instances of biased judges refusing to uphold acquittals when these are seen as going against government determination to secure a conviction, are all – as it seems to Bruce – examples of a national malaise sweeping the country and destroying its traditional liberties:

How many printers and booksellers, for serving the public in the way of their profession, have been of late distressed, imprisoned, ruined? Are not all of them under alarm and restraint? Are not all the channels of public intelligence, industriously blocked up by the busy tools of the ministry, when they do not convey pure and palatable court-water? How many have been constrained to suppress their sentiments about public affairs and disputes altogether, while others who have ventured to do it without disquiet, have had their declarations curtailed, mangled and adulterated, before they reached the public, otherwise no press would have received them? Sometimes publishers, though professed friends of freedom, have thought they acted a prudent part for themselves and their correspondents, when they made them speak nonsense that they might escape the more dangerous charge of what is called sedition. Have not private papers and property been invaded in the eager cause after latent sedition: and some made criminal for not producing such papers in evidence against themselves or their friends, even before any crime was found? In the scarcity of legal evidence against obnoxious promoters of political information and reform, are there not instances of summons executed against their neighbours and acquaintances to compel them to answer general questions declaring all they knew against the conduct of such persons in public or private, even before they were regularly accused, put on trial, or arrested? “Did you ever hear him speak such words, or did he disperse or recommend such books?” have been some of the usual interrogatories. Has not the reading or giving away of such books, as Flower on the French Revolution,¹³⁵ been imputed to some even in N. Britain (strange to tell!) as a crime? For such new coined crimes as these, have not some been made to fly their country, or laid fast in jails? To crown the whole, have not verdicts of acquittal [sic], when given by juries on trials for libels been challenged by judges and reluctantly received, if not totally set aside?¹³⁶

(b) Niel Douglas's *Thoughts on Modern Politics* (1793)¹³⁷ and *Britain's Guilt* (1795)¹³⁸

¹³⁵ See note 82 on Flower above.

¹³⁶ Bruce, *Reflections on Freedom*, p. 155.

¹³⁷ *Thoughts on Modern Politics* London, Sold by Button, Newington Causeway. MDCCXCIII.

¹³⁸ *Britain's Guilt, Danger and Duty; Several Sermons, preached at Anderston, near Glasgow; Aug. 23, 1795. With large notes, and an Appendix. By N. Douglas, V.D.M. Dundee. Dundee, Printed in the year M,DCC,XCV. Price two shillings.*

Another, slightly better known critic of the government than Bruce who, like Bruce, was a serving minister of a secessionist congregation, is Niel Douglas, a Glasgow University graduate, poet and Relief church minister in Dundee who himself was an active reformer and attended the third general convention of Scottish radicals in 1793 as a delegate from the Dundee Friends of the Constitution. Douglas's verse and prose writings are of special importance given his own background of direct personal involvement in the politics of the period. As Harris puts it:

Douglas is the only minister who was a member of a radical society who has left a significant body of writing from which to reconstruct his views [i.e. on the contemporary radical political scene in Scotland at this time - RLC].¹³⁹

Today Douglas - if he is remembered at all - is remembered more for his vigorous promotion of abolitionism as (usually) expressed in his all too turgid verse.¹⁴⁰ Later in his life, in 1817, he was arraigned before the High Court of Justiciary in Edinburgh for comparing George III to Nebuchadnezzar, but was acquitted.

In his near 1500 line epic in three parts - *Thoughts on Modern Politics* (1793) - Douglas intones

... let not pow'r presume in chains to bind,
The free-born issue of the human mind.
Let reason speculate unconfin'd and free,
And all our thoughts be left at liberty. *

And in the asterisked footnote, Douglas explains that:

*The author here alludes to the freedom of the Press, that palladium of British liberty, to restrict which several bold attempts have of late been made. These seem to argue a consciousness of something amiss, that cannot bear investigation; for where this is not the case, there is nothing to be dreaded from paper-shot. This privilege, no doubt, like every other, may be, and hath been abused; but the evils arising from its abuse, are not once to be compared with those must flow from its restriction or disuse. But thanks to the trial of a Paine for producing such an able

¹³⁹ Harris, *The Scottish People and the French Revolution*, p. 112.

¹⁴⁰ The student of abolitionism in the 18th century will find much of interest in Douglas, for example:

"Inhuman traders in man's flesh..." (*Thoughts on Modern Politics*, Part I, line 75).

"Ye sons of traffic, who this trade defend" (ibid. I, line 91).

"Who can describe their horrid floating jail,
Where chains and torture, pest and death prevail;
Where petty tyrants the dread scene commence,
Inflicting pains not earned by offence." (ibid. I, lines 252-255) etc., etc.

defence of the liberty of the Press, as we must have a friendly influence on the genuine principles of British freedom.¹⁴¹

And later in the same vein –

To none can truth a noxious Libel prove,
Whose deeds are sanction'd by the Pow'r above;
Who wills that men should all their pow'rs employ,
T'assert her rights, would they her fruits enjoy.
Her sanction Truth from earthly Courts ne'er draws,
Nor can be fetter'd – no, by human laws,
Which ne'er should fix a padlock on the mind, ---
'Tis God's alone the inner man to bind.¹⁴²

However, despite these poetic strictures on the muzzling of free speech, in his prose Introduction to *Thoughts on Modern Politics* Douglas seems to urge a cautious approach to the whole reform question:

With regard to the political contests of the day, we can scarce form a better wish for our Country, than that our Rulers may be directed, in the present critical conjuncture, to adopt and observe such measures as may be best calculated to ascertain and promote a good understanding with foreign Powers, and good order, prosperity and subordination in the State; and that subjects may be induced to live quiet and peaceable lives under them in all godliness and honesty. This may be attained without attempting to overturn the radical form of our Constitution, could any be found mad enough to desire this.¹⁴³

Despite his appeal for caution in political reform, Douglas's *Thoughts on Modern Politics* is of considerable historical interest, partly because it is the only example of a book by a secessionist Scottish minister that *explicitly* deals with the political issues of the 1790s – first, and in the main with abolitionist sentiment, but also with the broader issue of constitutional and parliamentary reform. Thus, Douglas prints¹⁴⁴ the whole text of the “Address of the Society of United Irishmen, of Dublin,¹⁴⁵ to the Irish Nation”, dated “January 9th, 1793”. This is, of course, the organisation whose parallel Address “to the Delegates for Promoting a Reform in Scotland” formed part of the indictment against Thomas Muir whose trial took place in the same year as the publication of *Thoughts on*

¹⁴¹ *Thoughts on Modern Politics*, pp. 65-6.

¹⁴² *ibid.*, p. 66.

¹⁴³ *ibid.*, p. x.

¹⁴⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 167-178.

¹⁴⁵ “Founded 9 November 1791”. The Society of United Irishmen is described by Devine* (“rightly” according to Harris**) as the “most formidable revolutionary body in the British Isles”.

* T. M. Devine, *The Scottish Nation, 1700-2000*, London, 1999, p. 210.

** Harris, *The Scottish People and the French Revolution*, p. 2.

Modern Politics. Muir, it will be recalled, was accused of having read the Address of the United Irishmen at the first Convention of the Friends of the People in Edinburgh in December 1792 - described in Robert Dundas's indictment as a work "of a most inflammatory and seditious tendency" - and Muir himself provocatively read from it at length in the course of his long speech in his own defence.¹⁴⁶ Douglas's decision to include the Address of the United Irishmen to the Irish Nation in his book - a work he frankly admits is "partly original, partly selected" - is in itself of considerable bibliographical and historical significance.

Towards the end of his long poem Douglas optimistically takes comfort from the image of a heroic figure from a nation enshrining, as it seems to him, the very basic principles of liberty -

Ye Statesmen, hear, who at the helm preside,
Let Truth and Justice be your constant guide;
Nor more persist in what gives just offence,
Lest you 'gainst us should arm Omnipotence. ... ,

the last line of the quotation being of particular interest with its emphasis on the word "us" connoting, as it surely does, the "People" (as in "Friends of the People"). That said, in his *Thoughts on Modern Politics*, Douglas's desire for reform is expressed as a message of cautious optimism. Those who advocate anything more extreme than that, and indulge in "a licentious or disorderly spirit", prevailing at it is at the present time "among the lower classes", will discover to their and everyone's cost that such behaviour can only - as "the bane of Society" - be counter-productive:

Such then as oppose reform, from whatever motives, should they succeed in their opposition, will sooner or later find they are cherishing, in existing abuses, a viper that will one time or other sting even themselves, or their children to the heart. ... A licentious or disorderly spirit, prevailing among the lower classes of mankind, is the bane of Society; and instead of promising a beneficial, or permanent reform, makes a people ripe for ruin, and paves the way for it. The Apostolic direction applies here, Let all things be done decently and in order.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ E.W. McFarland makes the good point that Muir's "open organisational role in the democratic movement made him a splendid catch" and that "Muir's championing of the piece now offered [Robert Dundas] the prime opportunity to secure him on a charge of treason", though Dundas's view was based purely on eyewitness reports of government spies of the potentially treasonable content of the Address, the text of which he had never read for himself. - *Ireland and Scotland in the Age of Revolution, Planting the Green Bough*, Edinburgh, 1994, p. 95.

¹⁴⁷ *Thoughts on Modern Politics*, p. 11.

Only two years later, however, in *Britain's Guilt* (1795) Douglas has perceptibly changed his tune and is now of a completely different persuasion:

At this inauspicious period, when the very term Reform is become odious to many ... he [the author] openly avows himself one of those, who wish for reform in these lands, convinced of its necessity, as well as its utility. In the place where Providence hath cast his lot [i.e. in Scotland or perhaps even in Dundee], many respectable characters, at an early period, espoused that cause; and, among these, some Clergymen, who are an ornament to their profession, an honour to their Country, and a blessing to society. Induced by reasons which appeared to him weighty, he became a member of the Society here, instituted for the purpose of obtaining, by legal means, Constitutional reform; frequently attended their meetings, and assisted at their deliberations. ... The Author has been told, that he was marked out as an object of prosecution; but conscious of the rectitude of his motives, and of the uprightness of his conduct, so far concerned in the business of reform, he felt not a moment's alarm on the head¹⁴⁸

Then, by way of 'stop press', as it were, he feels it necessary to add a few paragraphs at the end of his introduction in the light of information he has just received that is highly relevant to his theme. People's rights and liberties are threatened by legislation about to be laid before Parliament and he begs the question: surely it can't be applied retrospectively, - can it? -

While this is transcribing for the press, certain Bills pending in Parliament, give general alarm, as meant to infringe in the freedom of discussion, when any thing may be construed to the prejudice of rulers and their measures; of which a single interested individual may be sole judge. As the sermons here offered to the Public, were delivered from the pulpit, and the impression almost wholly thrown off, before these Bills were heard of, whatever be their intention, or operation in future, they surely can have no retrospective power.¹⁴⁹

As Britain entered a new century, the country embarked on a period of continuing political turmoil and uncertainty when the words "Reform" and "Radical" - from now on each dignified with capital letters - would assume somewhat different meanings, while still clinging to their traditional identity with, and insistence on, the selfsame ideas of liberty that had steadily gathered momentum throughout the 1790s. Even as late as the 1820s men were still being put in prison for publishing the works of Tom Paine¹⁵⁰. The great issue of liberty of the press was to remain a painful thorn in the government's side for a considerable time to come.

¹⁴⁸ *Britain's Guilt*, p. v.

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. vii.

¹⁵⁰ e.g. See the editors' introduction to the Penguin edition of *The Thomas Paine Reader* p. 31: "Richard Carlile was sentenced to imprisonment for publishing *The Age of Reason* in 1819, but he was sentenced again in 1823 for publishing *Rights of Man*." (M. Foot and I. Kramnick).

PART TWO

The making of three Americans

Chapter Four

John Witherspoon (1723-1794), Kirk minister, college president and American statesman: liberty as ‘regeneration’

“As high a son of Liberty as any man in America.”

John Adams on Witherspoon, *Diary*, September 1774¹

Bibliographical and source note

(a) The ‘missing’ Witherspoon pocketbooks [see also Appendix E]

In his introductory note to the Appendix listing Witherspoon’s writings his finest biographer, Varnum Lansing Collins, ruefully observes that:

The President’s commonplace books, two little volumes of extraordinary interest containing memoranda, notes, outlines of sermons, etc., were seen by James W. Alexander (*Familiar Letters*, I, p. 83) in the Princeton Library in 1825; they are there no longer.²

Elsewhere in his biography, Collins writes of Witherspoon’s February 1768 excursion to London, the purpose of which was “to visit eminent teachers and get hints as to methods and textbooks”:

His private memorandum book, seen by Ashbel Green, contained the notes of his itinerary, but Dr. Green does not quote from it and the book has disappeared.³

¹ Cited by Varnum Lansing Collins in *President Witherspoon*, 2 vols., Princeton & Oxford, 1925, vol. I, p. 166 [from John Adams, *Life and Works*, vol. II, p. 355.]

² *ibid.*, vol. II, p. 235

³ *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 90. J. Bennett Nolan in his *Benjamin Franklin in Scotland and Ireland* (Philadelphia and London, 1938), p. 117, states that the purpose of Witherspoon’s visit was “to

It is clear that these “commonplace books” – the alternative description I prefer is simply “pocketbooks” – were, therefore, not available to Collins at the time he wrote his biography (1925). They were also, it seems, not available to L. H. Butterfield when he carried out research for his then ground-breaking study *John Witherspoon Comes to America* in 1953.

These two ‘missing’ pocketbooks have now turned up. Extraordinarily, in the course of my study visit to Princeton University in May, 2010, my attention was drawn by Stephen Ferguson, Curator of Rare Books in the Firestone Library, to two MS. ‘pocketbooks’ belonging to Witherspoon in the Firestone’s Rare Books and Manuscripts division.⁴ One (MS. 1140) is Witherspoon’s copy of *The Edinburgh Almanack* for 1768, containing his notes relating to his London visit of that year, as seen by his early biographer, Ashbel Green. It is in this pocketbook that Witherspoon notes his engagement with “Dr. Franklin”. The second pocketbook (MS. 1141) is his copy of the earlier *Universal Scots Almanac* (1763) which sheds light on Witherspoon’s routine life as a minister and pastor in Paisley and is especially, and intriguingly, important for, among other things, revealing his relationship to the Reverend William Thom of Govan. Details of both pocketbooks are given in Appendix E.

Jeffrey H. Morrison certainly knew about the 1768 pocketbook – the one seen by Ashbel Green and noted by Collins (who, of course, never saw it) – but, unfathomably, in both his book and his 1999 Georgetown University doctoral dissertation upon which his book is based, Morrison fails to quote anything from it, omits any mention of it in the bibliography of works consulted and does not even provide a footnote catalogue reference. Morrison, of course, makes no reference at all to the 1763 pocketbook which would not have been listed at Princeton at the time he carried out his doctoral research. Imprecisely, Morrison refers to the 1768 MS. as a “diary” and creates the impression – at least for this reader – that, late in the day for his purpose, he was told about it but failed to

buy books and scientific equipment for his new charge in America”, but that “the diary recording his movements on this trip existed up to 1868 and was seen by his biographer, Ashbel Green, but has been lost.”

⁴ They are not specifically listed in the online Witherspoon finding aid. My information on their provenance was supplied by the Manuscripts Librarian, Firestone Library, Princeton University, where I inspected both pocketbooks in the course of my Carnegie Trust funded visit to Princeton and Philadelphia for purposes connected with this study in May, 2010.

read it for himself: either that, or he merely skimmed through it without at all realising the importance of its contents:

While many of his more famous peers were scrupulous diarists, the only extant Witherspoon diary consists of a printed almanac from 1768 (the year of his removal to America) with a few pages of expenses in his none-too-legible hand at the beginning and end.⁵

To be fair to Morrison, his excellent study avowedly excludes the events relating to Witherspoon's career in Britain prior to his departure for America so he would have regarded the manuscript notes in the 1768 pocketbook as of only peripheral interest. Nevertheless, his description of the manuscript content of the 1768 almanac as "a few pages of expenses" is a travesty. Morrison's failure to note its enormous historical importance – especially Witherspoon's detailed schedule of London engagements – is, I fear, nothing less than a monumental blunder.

As to the scholarly use made of the two pocketbooks since their re-appearance at Princeton, I have been unable to find any bibliographical reference to these two MSS. in any modern published Witherspoon study, with the sole exception, that is, of the fleeting reference by Morrison to MS. 1140 already mentioned. The two best known Witherspoon scholars in recent years, Ned C. Landsman and Mark A. Noll, do not cite them in any of their published writings on Witherspoon; nor does the author of *The Piety of John Witherspoon*, L. Gordon Tait (2001), who might have been expected to exhibit special interest in Witherspoon's fascinating notes on projected sermons he was planning in the course of his Paisley ministry that year (1763). The existence of the pocket books is not referred to in any of the three latest Witherspoon studies listed in my bibliography of works consulted for this study – i.e. those by Matthew Phelps (2002), Daniel W. Howe (2008) or Gideon Mailer (2010). So it would appear that this thesis is the first Witherspoon study to cite and discuss *both* pocketbooks and to consider their historical significance.

The earlier pocketbook (MS. 1141) deals with the daily routine of Witherspoon's life as a minister and pastor in Paisley in the years 1763-64. It is arguably no less important than the later, since not only does it reveal Witherspoon's selection of scriptural texts for his weekly sermons in those years but fascinatingly provides a unique insight into the daily life

⁵ Jeffrey H. Morrison, *John Witherspoon and the Founding of the American Republic*, Notre Dame, Indiana, 2005, p. 15.

and commitments of a distinguished late eighteenth century Scottish Evangelical minister in Paisley at a time of great industrial and social change in that part of the west of Scotland. From my own point of view, perhaps the greatest discovery within MS. 1141 – just as the highlight of MS. 1140 is unquestionably the meeting with Franklin in London – is that it can now be shown that Witherspoon and the Reverend William Thom of Govan were, clearly, not only firm friends but were likely to have shared a common theology.⁶

The evidence of Witherspoon's choice of Thom as visiting preacher in his absence in Edinburgh on "Sabbath Feb. 27" [1763] lies in his diary entry for that day :

That day my Charge [that is, pulpit supply in the Laigh Church, Paisley] supplied by Mr Thom of Govan.

The significance of Thom's visit to the Laigh Church, Paisley in February 1763 can hardly be overstated. Witherspoon would have chosen Thom to stand in for him while he was preaching elsewhere that Sunday. The important point, I suggest, is that – as still happens today in the Church of Scotland with what is termed 'pulpit supply' – the choice of exchange minister would have been Witherspoon's alone. That tells us much about the relationship between the two men which must have been, on a personal basis, warm and friendly, but above all, the theologies shared by the two ministers must have been mutually compatible. Witherspoon would never have run the risk that Thom's preaching might conceivably have alienated his Laigh Church congregation. Above all, with the pocketbook note in mind, we have a further important dimension to reckon with when considering Landsman's claim that the "iconoclastic" Thom shared with Witherspoon a view of America that on the one hand identified it with civil and religious liberty, and, on the other, offered emigrants from Scotland a refuge from "British degeneracy", as well as

a repository of their hopes for economic, political and religious prosperity, extending far into the future.⁷

Most intriguing of all, however, is, I suggest, the need to address the distinct possibility that William Thom's name may now need to be added to the already long and

⁶ Witherspoon calls him "the ingenious Mr. T--- of Gowan" [sic] in his *Speech in the Synod of Glasgow, when I was accused of being the Author of the Ecclesiastical Characteristics* (WJW, IV, p. 251).

⁷ Ned C. Landsman, "Presbyterians and Provincial Society: The Evangelical Enlightenment in the West of Scotland, 1740-1775", *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 15, (February & May 1991): 194-209, Johns Hopkins University Press, p. 207.

convoluted list of those whose opinions Witherspoon would have sought out in making his mind up as to whether or not to accept the College of New Jersey's invitation to be their next president.

(b) Simplified checklist of Witherspoon titles published in Glasgow, Edinburgh and London from 1739 to 1768 (excluding journal contributions)

In his still matchless biography of Witherspoon published in 1925 Varnum Lansing Collins (1870-1936), Secretary of Princeton University for almost 20 years, compiled for that work an exhaustive and meticulously researched bibliography of "President Witherspoon's Writings".⁸ I have leaned heavily on that checklist for this note and for the rest of this section, though I have been able to add to Collins's bibliography in, I believe, significant ways.

It has seemed to me superfluous to incorporate here a full checklist of Witherspoon's published works - especially the American titles - when the Collins list is generally accurate and still freely available in libraries. What is possibly of special interest, on the other hand, are those titles published in Glasgow, Edinburgh and London while Witherspoon was a minister in Beith and Paisley - that is, in the period up to his departure for America in 1768 - together with the Robert Aitken edition of *The Dominion of Providence* of 1776 and the three Paisley reprints of 1788 and 1790.

I have omitted the doubtful *A Letter from a Blacksmith* (1764) which both ESTC and ECCO list under Witherspoon - "Sometimes attributed to Witherspoon" (ESTC) - and agree with Landsman that "there is no solid evidence to connect Witherspoon to that publication."

1739

Disputatio Philosophica, quam favente numine Ut in artibus liberalibus & disciplinis Philosophicis magister rite renunciatur, Auctoritate Reverendi admodum Viri, D. Gulielmi Wishart, S.T.D. Academiae Edinburgenae Praefecti, nec non Amplissimi Senatus academici, & nobilissimae Facultatis atrium decreto, Publico eruditorum examini subjiciet, ad Diem 23 Februarii, hora decima ante-meridiana, Joannes Wederspan, A & R.: Edinburgi: In Aedibus Jo. Paxton, 1739.

[*Note* Witherspoon's University of Edinburgh graduation dissertation. He stayed on at the university for four more years.]

⁸ Collins, *President Witherspoon*, II, pp. 235-266.

1753

Ecclesiastical Characteristics: or, the Arcana of Church Policy. Being an Humble Attempt to open up the Mystery of Moderation. Wherein is shewn A plain and easy Way of attaining to the Character of a Moderate Man, as at present in Repute in the Church of Scotland. Glasgow: printed in the year, 1753. [Price Six-pence]

[Note : Collins, p. 238 - "Not found". See ESTC T 129157]

1754

Ecclesiastical characteristics: ... The Second Edition, Corrected and Enlarged. Glasgow [sic] Printed in the Year, 1754. [Price Six-pence]

[Note : Collins, p. 238 - "Not found". See ESTC T 129690]

[do.] [Third ed.]

1755

[do.] [Fourth ed.]

1756

Essay on the Connection between the Doctrine of Justification by the imputed Righteousness of Christ, and Holiness of Life: With some Reflections upon the Reception which that Doctrine hath generally met with in the World. To which is prefix'd, a Letter to the Rev. Mr. James Hervey, Rector of Weston Favell, Northampton-shire, Author of Theron and Aspasia. By John Witherspoon M.A., Minister of the Gospel in Beith. Glasgow: Printed by John Bryce and David Paterson. 1756.

[do.] [Second ed.]

Edinburgh: Printed by T. Lumisden and Company; sold by Gray and Peter, at their shop in the Exchange. 1756.

[Note : *Christ* misprinted *Chrirt* and *Reflections* spelled *Reflexions*.]

1757

A Serious Enquiry into the Nature and Effects of the Stage. Being an Attempt to show, that contributing to the Support of a Public Theatre, is inconsistent with the Character of a Christian. By John Witherspoon, M.A., Minister of the Gospel in Beith. Glasgow: Printed by J. Bryce and D. Paterson. 1757.

[Note : The Reverend James Baine (or Bayne), then minister of the Paisley High Church, who had preached Witherspoon 'in' on June 16 1757 - his sermon for the occasion was printed in Glasgow by Archibald M'Lean in the same year⁹ - also published very similar views on the stage:

⁹ *A Sermon preached at the Translation of the Rev. Mr. Wotherspoon [sic], from Beith to the Laigh Church of PAISLEY, June 16 1757. By James Baine, M.A. Minister of the Gospel in Paisley. Glasgow: Printed by Archibald M'Lean, M,DCC,[L]/VII.* The 1766 General Assembly debated the case of Baine's resignation from the High Church of Paisley on becoming "settled minister of the Church of Relief in Edinburgh" and the right of the Presbytery of Paisley to call a new minster". See *Annals of the General Assembly, 1752-1766*, Edinburgh, 1840, pp. 313-29.

The Theatre Licentious and Perverted or, a Sermon for Reformation of Manners. Preached on the Lord's Day, December 2. 1770. Partly occasioned by the Acting of a Comedy, entitled The MINOR, in the Licensed Theatre of Edinburgh, on Saturday the 24th of November preceeding [sic]. By James Baine, A.M. Minister of the Gospel at Edinburgh. The Fifth Edition. Printed in the Year, 1771.]

1758

Case of the Magistrates and Town-council of Paisley, the Minister and Session of the Laigh Church, and the Minister of the High Church of that Town, Appellants; the Reverend the Presbytery of Paisley, Respondents. The Appellants Case. To be heard at the Bar of the Venerable Assembly met at Edinburgh in May 1758. [signed on last page "Ja. Baine & Jo. Witherspoon."]

n.d., n.p. [But Collins adds "Paisley, 1758?" - p. 241. It is most unlikely that it was printed in Paisley since the first printed book was not produced until over ten years later. Edinburgh seems the likeliest place of publication.]

The Charge of Sedition and Faction against good Men, especially faithful Ministers, considered and accounted for. A Sermon preached in the Abbey-church of Paisley, on Thursday, September 7, 1758. At the Ordination of Mr. Archibald Davidson, as one of the Ministers of that Church. To which is subjoined, the Charge to the Minister, and the Exhortation to the People. By John Witherspoon, A. M. One of the Ministers of Paisley. Published at the desire of those that heard it.

Glasgow: Printed by J. Bryce and D. Paterson. 1758.

The Absolute Necessity of Salvation through Christ. A Sermon, preached before the Society in Scotland for propagating Christian Knowledge, in the High Church of Edinburgh, on Monday, January 2, 1758. By John Witherspoon A. M., Minister of the Gospel at Paisley. To which is subjoined, a short Account of the present State of the Society.

Edinburgh: Printed for W. Miller. 1758.

Prayer for National Prosperity and for the Revival of Religion inseparably connected. A Sermon Preached on Thursday, Feb. 16, 1758. Being the Day appointed in Scotland for the late Publick Fast. By J. Witherspoon, A. M. Minister of the Gospel in Paisley.

London: Printed for Tho. Field, at the Wheatsheaf. The Corner of Pater-noster-Row Cheapside. 1758.

1759

The Trial of Religious Truth by its Moral Influence. A Sermon, preached at the opening of the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr, October 9th, 1759. By John Witherspoon, A. M. Minister of the Gospel in Paisley.

Glasgow: Printed for James Wilken, Bookseller in Paisley. 1759.

Baine later published *Memoirs of Modern Church Reformation* in which he begs the question: "... is it, that the Presbytery of Relief stand up for our ancient Established Church constitution, so shamefully changed from the limited into the arbitrary; from a truly Christian, British model, into a despotic, French mould?" Baine became minister of the Relief Church in Nicolson's Park, "in the suburbs of Edinburgh", on 13 February 1766, just one day after its doors opened for the first time. He was succeeded in his charge in the High Church of Paisley by George Muir, formerly of Old Cumnock. - *Annals*, p. 319 and p. 324.

1760

Case of the Town-Session of Paisley, Appellants from a Sentence of the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr, at Glasgow, October 15, 1760, disapproving a Plan for uniting the Offices of English Schoolmaster and Session-Clerk in the Town of Paisley. To be heard at the Bar of the Venerable Assembly met at Edinburgh in May 1761.

[*Note* : Collins adds “no t.p. (Paisley, 1760?)”. But, again, this is unlikely, Edinburgh being the likeliest place of printing.]

[A Supplement to the *Ecclesiastical Characteristics* : containing the PLAN of a New Testament of the Holy Scriptures. Adapted to the Taste, Spirit and Practice of the Age; and particularly accommodated to the Promoters of a Post on the Sabbath.

GLASGOW : Printed by JOHN BRYCE, and sold at his Printing Office, near the head of the BRIDGEGATE. 1760.]

[*Note* : Not listed in any edition of Witherspoon’s Works ; not mentioned in Collins and not in ESTC. GUL (Euing Collection - BG58-m.7. Author listed as “John Witherspoon”). There are, I believe, grounds for (at least provisionally) assigning this rarest of titles to the great man.]

1762

Seasonable Advice to Young Persons: A Sermon on Psalm i: I [sic]. Preached in the Laigh Church of Paisley, on Sabbath, Feb. 21st, 1762. To which is prefixed, An Authentic Narrative of the disorderly and riotous Meeting, on the Night before the Celebration of the Lord’s Supper in that Place, which gave occasion to the Discourse. By John Witherspoon, A.M. One of the Ministers of Paisley.

Glasgow: printed by Robert Urie. Sold by Daniel Baxter, and John Barry, in Glasgow; G. Hamilton & J. Balfour. A. Kincaid & J. Bell; and W. Gray, junior, in Edinburgh; [and by others in Stirling, Perth, Dundee, Kilmarnock, Dumfries (2), Greenock and Ayr], 1762.

1763

A Serious Apology for the Ecclesiastical Characteristics. By the real Author of that Performance. Edinburgh: printed by Sands, Murray, and Cochran. For William Gray. 1763.

[*Note* : Unusually, Collins (p. 243) gets this title wrong, giving the year in the imprint as “MDCCLXVIII” yet subjoining the publication to his heading of 1763. I have given the imprint from the ESTC citation T 67815.]

1764

A Practical Treatise on Regeneration. By John Witherspoon, D.D. London: printed for Edward and Charles Dilly. 1764.

[*Note* : A second edition has been lost but a third edition was published in 1789. Also included in *Essays on Important Subjects* published by the Dilly brothers in 1765.]

1765

The History of a Corporation of Servants discovered a few Years ago in the Interior Parts of South America. Containing some very Surprising Events and Extraordinary Characters.

Glasgow: printed for John Gilmour, and sold by him and the other Booksellers in Town and Country. 1765.

Essays on Important Subjects. Intended to establish the Doctrine of Salvation by Grace, and to point out its influence on Holiness of Life. By John Witherspoon, D.D. To which are added by the Publishers, Ecclesiastical Characteristics, or the Arcana of Church Policy, with A Serious Apology; which have been generally ascribed to the same Author. [Vol. I.]

London: Printed for Edward and Charles Dilly, in the Poultry, near the Mansion-House. 1765.

[*Note* : The first (three volume) London edition of the *Essays* published by the Dilly brothers is listed by Collins under the year 1764 on account of it having been advertised in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for September, 1764 and in the *Scots Magazine* for November, 1764. It is clear, however, that it was first published in 1765 as the imprint declares.]

1768

Practical Discourses on the Leading Truths of the Gospel.

Edinburgh: Kincaid and Bell and Gray. 1768

[*Note* : This title forms with *Sermons on Practical Subjects* two of the five volumes of the *Essays and Sermons on Important Subjects* (Edinburgh and Glasgow, 1768) – see below. It is advertised in the *Scots Magazine* for June, 1768 and is reviewed in the *Monthly Review* for April, 1769. The Philadelphia printers W. and T. Bradford published an edition of this book in 1770 but Collins did not find it. Charles Dilly reprinted it in 1792 with a preface by Witherspoon dated “Paisley May 16, 1768”, just two days before he went on board the *Peggy* at Greenock bound for the Delaware.]

Sermons on Practical Subjects: to which is added, a Farewel [sic] Discourse Delivered at Paisley in April and May 1768. By John Witherspoon, D.D.

Glasgow: printed by A. Duncan and Company, for James Duncan Bookseller, opposite the Main Guard, Trongate; and William Walker, Head of the Salt-Mercat. MDDCCLXVIII [sic].

Ministerial Fidelity in declaring the Whole Counsel of God. A farewel [sic] sermon, delivered at Paisley in April and May 1768. By John Witherspoon, D.D.

Glasgow: printed by A. Duncan and Company, for James Duncan; and William Walker, 1768.

[*Note* : This sermon is included in Duncan's collection, *Sermons on Practical Subjects*, published in the same year, but in separate pamphlet form is incredibly rare and not mentioned by Collins. ESTC lists only two copies: one in the University of Edinburgh (New College Library), the other in the Library Company of Philadelphia.]

Essays and Sermons on Important Subjects. ... By John Witherspoon, D.D. President of the College of New Jersey. In Five Volumes.

Edinburgh: printed for A. Kincaid & J. Bell, and W. Gray, Edinburgh; and J. Duncan, & W. Walker, Glasgow. 1768.

An Inquiry into the Scripture-Meaning of Charity. By John Witherspoon, D.D. Formerly Minister of the Gospel at Paisley. Now President of the College of New Jersey.

Edinburgh: printed for A. Kincaid & J. Bell, and W. Gray. 1768.

The Nature and Extent of Visible Religion. A Sermon. By John Witherspoon, D.D. Formerly Minister of the Gospel at Paisley. Now President of the College of New Jersey.

Edinburgh: printed for Kincaid & Bell, and W. Gray. 1768.

The Robert Aitken title

1776

The Dominion of Providence over the Passions of Men. A Sermon preached at Princeton, on the 17th of May, 1776. Being the General Fast appointed by the Congress through the United Colonies. To which is added, An Address to the Natives of Scotland residing in America. By John Witherspoon, D.D. President of the College of New Jersey. Philadelphia: printed and sold by R. Aitken. Printer and Bookseller, opposite the London Coffee-house, Front Street. 1776.

Paisley reprint titles after 1768

1788

Christian Magnanimity; a sermon. Preached at Princeton, Sept. 1775, ... To which is added, an address to the senior class, who were to receive the degree of Bachelor of Arts. By John Witherspoon, D.D. LL.D. President of the College of New Jersey. Princeton: Printed - 1787. Paisley: re-printed by J. Neilson, for R. Reid, 1788.

[Note : See Appendix A, 80-88. Not listed by Collins.]

An Address to the Senior Class of Students, who were to receive the Degree of Bachelor of Arts, and leave the College. Sept. 23, 1787. By John Witherspoon, D.D. LL.D. [sic] President of the College of New Jersey. Paisley: printed by Peter M'Arthur. 1788.

[Note : See Appendix A, 94-88.]

1790

The Religious Education of Children. A Sermon, on Mark x: 13, 14, 15, 16. ... Preached in the Old Presbyterian Church in New-York, on the second Sabbath in May, 1789. By the Rev. John Witherspoon, D.D. President of Princeton College, New-Jersey, in America, and late Minister of the Gospel in Paisley. Paisley: printed by J. Neilson, for G. Caldwell. 1790.

[Note : See Appendix A, 110-90]

[References throughout this chapter to “WJW” are to the second edition of *The Works of the Rev. John Witherspoon, D.D. LL.D. Late President of the College at Princeton, New-Jersey*, [edited by Ashbel Green], 4 volumes, New York [William W. Woodward], 1802 - reprinted, with an Introduction by L. Gordon Tait, Thoemmes Press, Bristol, 2003. I have also used *The Selected Writings of John Witherspoon*, ed., and with an (excellent) Introduction by Thomas Miller, Landmarks in Rhetoric and Public Address, Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1990.]

1 Introductory - Witherspoon and the idea of regeneration

John Witherspoon is a problem for scholars. As Mark A. Noll has observed, despite a recent revival of interest in him, he “remains an enigmatic figure”. For Noll

... “sea change” still seems the only appropriate phrase to describe the two stages of his career [in Scotland and America].¹⁰

Another of the foremost modern Witherspoon scholars, Ned C. Landsman, asks the question that I shall attempt to answer, in my own way, in the course of this study:

To the difficulty of reconciling Witherspoon’s commitment to orthodoxy with his espousal of an apparently humanistic moral philosophy has been added the equally daunting task of explaining how the thoroughly Scottish and Presbyterian Witherspoon, a reluctant emigrant from Scotland to the colonies, could within just a few years turn into a staunch American patriot, the lone clerical signer of the Declaration of Independence and the most eloquent spokesman for colonial rights among a Scottish emigrant population hardly noted for its sympathy for the American cause.¹¹

Put another way, how do we account for the making of Witherspoon *as an American* ; and in so short a time after his leaving Scotland? According to Landsman, what he finds as an apparent duality in Witherspoon’s personal life and career (and likewise in the lives and careers of other figures with a background rather similar to his) is explained by the adaptability of “a new generation of devout Scottish Calvinists” - the Evangelicals or members of the Popular or Orthodox wing of the Kirk, of whom Witherspoon was, of course, one of the acknowledged leaders.

This new-found adaptability on the part of Evangelical ministers, Landsman maintains, took the form of their seeing no difficulty in facing up to the challenges of an eighteenth century Scotland “increasingly enmeshed in evangelicalism, enlightenment and the transatlantic world” and, in the process, in adopting “many of the same concepts, values and terms as their more ‘enlightened’ opponents” (that is, their contemporaries, the members of the Moderate wing of the Kirk). The outcome was that the Evangelicals “committed themselves to the new learning and to the values of literary culture and refinement”. In so doing, says Landsman, they adapted these values to their own evangelical ends and, in short, “became less ‘provincial’”, in the accepted modern sense,

¹⁰ Mark A. Noll, *The Legacy of John Witherspoon One of the Great Men of the Age in Princeton and the Republic, 1768-1822*, Princeton, 1989, p. 58.

¹¹ Ned C. Landsman, “Witherspoon and the Problem of Provincial Identity in Scottish Evangelical Culture” in *Scotland & America in the Age of the Enlightenment*, ed. Richard B. Sher and Jeffrey R. Smitten, Princeton, 1990, p. 29. The essay is in Part I of the book entitled *Religion and Revolution: The Two Worlds of John Witherspoon*.

and more knowing in relation to the sense that would have prevailed in Witherspoon's day; that is, "provincial" as connoting the expansive and enlightened world of the British empire. It is, so far as it goes, a convincing hypothesis. But there other ways of regarding John Witherspoon's American 'conversion' so markedly soon after his arrival in New Jersey in 1768.

It is the aim of this chapter to demonstrate the extent to which John Witherspoon organised his entire life and activities in both Scotland and America - especially, in relation to the latter, in its earlier phase - around the concept of his own interpretation of "regeneration", in its moral, educational and political connotations. As Witherspoon might himself have put it, in this regard 'my text' is from Michael Fry:

His message to America was that enlightened principles pointed the way not just to political liberty but also to moral regeneration.¹²

There is no conflict, no paradox in the way Witherspoon set about enacting that public and personal process of regeneration. As an Evangelical minister of the Church of Scotland, the biblical text that not only guided and informed his own private and openly public religious convictions throughout his life, and which he also used in his "Charge" to newly inducted ministers on the occasion when he 'preached them in', was "Except a man be born again he cannot see God".¹³ This is the text from the Gospel of John ii, verse 3 on which the famous *Practical Treatise on Regeneration* is grounded. It is a theme to which Witherspoon returns in the greatest of all his American sermons. Indeed, as Fry rightly implies, the theme of regeneration was to become almost a kind of personal motto in both his public and private life, in all its manifestations, in America. The modern terminology might be that Witherspoon was constantly reinventing himself.

First, as a Presbyterian minister, College President and didactic moral philosopher, he desired, and in part achieved, a root and branch regeneration of the curriculum at Princeton, even though his success in that department has to be qualified and is perhaps not as dramatic as some might hold. Secondly, as an American politician, a member of the Continental Congress and of many of its more important committees, and as a 'signer' of the Declaration of Independence, Witherspoon came to desire nothing less than a

¹² Michael Fry, *The Scottish Empire*, East Lothian and Edinburgh, 2001, p. 61.

¹³ e.g. See the "Charge" section at the close of the sermon *The Charge of Sedition and Faction against Good Men* - "Examine, therefore, whether you are 'born again' ...". - *WJW*, 2, pp. 441-7.

Republic of Liberty, independent of the country of his birth, again firmly based on his adopted paradigm of regenerative change. In that regard, it is important to assess his bizarre association with Thomas Paine and also with his erstwhile Paisley acquaintance, the printer and publisher Robert Aitken. Approaching Witherspoon as a man of God, moralist, higher education teacher *cum* administrator and, finally, as American statesman, it is useful therefore to define his astonishing life and career by reference to that single word, “regeneration”.

Of course, the term “regeneration” would much later be famously used by Paine, another émigré from Britain to Philadelphia just six years after Witherspoon, in a different context - the French Declaration of Rights of 1789.¹⁴ However, in John Witherspoon’s case, the regenerative process has discrete and obviously Christian ramifications, which would have been key to his *modus vivendi* as a Presbyterian man of God, but by extension, has important secular implications besides. Above every other consideration, these concerns were to have a profound influence on his political outlook as he, his wife and five children stepped ashore at Philadelphia off the *Peggy*, out of Greenock, on 7th August 1768, just seven years from the outbreak of hostilities between the mother country and her American colonies.

2 Witherspoon’s ministry in Scotland

John Witherspoon was born in Yester in 1723, practically indistinguishable from modern-day Gifford, just outside the east Lothian town of Haddington, the birthplace of his supposed illustrious ancestor, John Knox, to whom it is said (though the claim is extremely doubtful) he could trace direct lineage through his mother. His father, the Reverend James Witherspoon, according to Alexander ‘Jupiter’ Carlyle, “very sulky and tyrannical” and “as fat as a porpoise”,¹⁵ was minister of the gospel at Gifford for forty years until his death there in August 1759 (at which time John had been serving his father as assistant minister for almost three years). From 1736 to 1743 Witherspoon attended the

¹⁴ “In the declaratory exordium which prefaces the Declaration of Rights, we see the solemn and majestic spectacle of a Nation opening its commission, under the auspices of its Creator, to establish a Government; a scene so new, and so transcendently unequalled by anything in the European world, that the name of Revolution is diminutive of its character, and it rises into a Regeneration of Man.”, “Observations on the Declaration of Rights” in *Rights of Man* I (1791). Cited by Philip Drew, *The Meaning of Freedom*, Aberdeen, 1982, p. 173

¹⁵ *Autobiography of Alexander Carlyle of Inveresk*, ed. John Hill Burton, London and Edinburgh, 1910, p. 173.

University of Edinburgh¹⁶ where he graduated Master of Arts in 1739 and qualified as a minister four years later.¹⁷ His printed graduation dissertation is dated 23rd February 1739. At Edinburgh his classmates included such future pillars of the Moderate establishment as ‘Jupiter’ Carlyle, Hugh Blair and William Robertson (whose reputation Witherspoon at first repudiated then later embraced), as well as his great personal friend and, in time, fellow Evangelical, John Erskine.¹⁸ Under the system of tutelage then in fashion in the Scottish universities students were assigned to regents (in Oxbridge style, akin to moral/personal tutors) and both Blair and Witherspoon matriculated under John Stevenson, professor of logic and metaphysics at Edinburgh over an incredible period of almost half a century (1730 to 1777). Stevenson is chiefly remembered today for having started the practice of lecturing mainly in English and was also “one of the first to integrate Lockean philosophy into the college curriculum”.¹⁹

In 1744, at the age of just 21, Witherspoon accepted a call to be minister at Beith, Ayrshire,²⁰ a charge that had become vacant as a result of the previous incumbent, William Leechman, an arch-Moderate and intimate friend of Francis Hutcheson, having been appointed to the chair of divinity at the University of Glasgow (and who would serve as principal at Glasgow from 1761 to his death in 1785).²¹ He remained minister of Beith

¹⁶ Incredibly – and uncharacteristically – T. M. Devine is guilty of a howler in not only affirming Witherspoon’s university as “Glasgow”, but in proceeding to develop an argument for the “model for the university curriculum” (he means for that of the College at Princeton) stemming from his own, and others’, experience of undergraduate education there. *Scotland’s Empire 1600-1815*, London, 2003, pp. 172-3. Devine repeats his error in his article “Saltires and Stripes: how the Atlantic became an information superhighway” in a supplement to *The Herald* newspaper of 20 June 2009 entitled “Enlightenment”: “The model for the university curriculum [in the College of New Jersey] was Glasgow, his alma mater.” (p. 6).

¹⁷ See bibliographical checklist (b) above for the title of his graduation dissertation.

¹⁸ Minister of Kirkintilloch (1744-53), Culross (1753-8), New Greyfriars ((1758-67) and Old Greyfriars (1767-1803). Erskine was a colleague of William Robertson in Old Greyfriars and “remained on amicable terms with him despite their different theological and ecclesiastical positions.” (John R. McIntosh, *Church and Theology in Enlightenment Scotland*, East Linton, 1998, p. 240.

¹⁹ Thomas Miller in his Introduction to his *The Selected Writings of John Witherspoon*, Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1990, p. 4.

²⁰ His translation from Beith to Paisley was actually opposed by the Presbytery of Paisley “chiefly on the ground of his being the reputed author of the *Characteristics...*”, *Annals of the General Assembly 1752-1766*, p. 261, note., though the matter never came before the Assembly.

²¹ While at Beith, Leechman’s friend and colleague Francis Hutcheson tried, without success, to persuade him to leave the “pack of horse copers and smugglers of the rudest sort” to whom he was preaching, in order to serve a parish more suited to his education and taste in Hutcheson’s native Belfast. (Hutcheson to Thomas Drennan, Glasgow University Library, MS. Gen. 1018.12).

for nearly thirteen years. With the beadle of his church beside him, and both supporting the loyalist cause, young Witherspoon witnessed the battle of Falkirk on 17th January 1746 and was captured by the rebels during the battle and thrown into prison at the grim Castle of Doune, an experience he never entirely got over and which, it is said, left him permanently in indifferent health. It is a story that might have been straight out of Scott.²²

In September 1748 he married Elizabeth Montgomery of Craighouse, daughter of a local well to do Beith farmer and landowner.²³ Witherspoon quickly made his mark in Ayrshire, pastorally as well as intellectually, and it was at Beith that he first came to the attention of his peers through a combination of the brilliance of his oral preaching and the spreading fame of his scholarly writing. The book which above all others was to ensure his reputation in both Britain and Presbyterian colonial America was *Ecclesiastical Characteristics*, first published anonymously in Glasgow in 1753. By 1767 it had gone into

²² Witherspoon refers to his having witnessed the Battle of Falkirk in *Part of a Speech in Congress, on the Conference Proposed by Lord Howe* (September, 1776), (*WJW*, 4, p. 320). In his *History of the Rebellion in the Year 1745* (1802), John Home accused him of cowardice while at Doune prison but that unflattering assertion may derive from Home's cordial detestation of Witherspoon on account of the latter's diatribe against the stage - with special reference to Home's play *Douglas* (see his *Serious Enquiry*, Glasgow, J. Bryce and D. Paterson, 1757). Home and Witherspoon had been students together at Edinburgh. It is worth pointing out, however, that by no means everyone took the same view of Witherspoon's strictures on the theatre as Home. For example, the reformed slave ship captain, turned evangelical divine, John Newton (influenced by such as Wesley and Whitefield), wrote in 1781 that "Dr. Witherspoon of Scotland has written an excellent piece upon the stage, or rather against it, which I wish every person who makes the least pretence to fear God had an opportunity of perusing." - from *Cardiphonia : or, the Utterance of the Heart ... By the Author of Omicron's Letters. In Two Volumes.* (London, "printed for J. Buckland ... and J. Johnson ... M.DCC.LXXXI").

²³ Mrs. Elizabeth Witherspoon has had to endure a generally bad press from scholars on account of her having been the cause of her husband's initial refusal of the invitation from the College to become President. However, the Reverend Charles Beatty - who visited Witherspoon in Paisley in October 1767 (accompanied by his own wife who was dying of breast cancer) paints an altogether warmer picture of her, in a letter dated October 15th 1767 to Richard Treat: "On Saturday went to Paisley, sent for Dr. Wetherspoon [sic] to my *Imm*, who in a very friendly manner invited me to lodge at his House, at first I was reluctant imagining I wul'd not be very agreeable to Mrs. Wetherspoon, no more than she would be to Me, According to the Idea I had formed of her, however upon his Insisting upon it, I consented -- & I must confess I was very agreeably Disappointed, for Instead of finding a poor, peevish, reserved, Discontented &c -- I found a well looking Genteel, open, friendly woman -- which perhaps, you'll be surprizd at." [Letter cited by Butterfield in *John Witherspoon comes to America*, p. 56.] In a letter dated October 8th. 1768 from New York Witherspoon wrote to Rush in defence of his wife's apparent relapse to depression and home sickness: "It is not easy for one in her Situation after being retired and at Leisure to think without Concern on having left Relations & all the friends of early Life for Ever at least while in the body." And he adds: "Perhaps it would not be much better with me but that I am kept in such a state of Activity that I have not time to brood over Melancholy thoughts."

its seventh edition and had been reprinted in Edinburgh, London, Philadelphia and (almost certainly) Utrecht.

Ecclesiastical Characteristics - the title a deliberate (and easily recognizable) play on the title of Shaftesbury's most famous work, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*²⁴ - is a clever satire on the pretentiousness and hypocrisy of the Moderates, at that time the dominant element within the Church of Scotland. Morren speculates that Witherspoon was provoked into writing it in the light of his fury at the injustice of the contents of an anonymous pamphlet published in Edinburgh in 1753 following the notorious Inverkeithing case, debated at length in the course of the General Assembly of the previous year.²⁵ The case was regarded for years after as a *cause célèbre* in the context of the contentious issue of Patronage and thus, at bottom, in relation to the role of 'the people', as represented in individual congregations, to have a voice in the election of 'their' ministers. The particular incident in Fife involved a 'disputed call', resulting in 'manifestos' being drawn up by both camps - Moderates and Populares - and in the deposition of an unfortunate minister, Thomas Gillespie, who had (seemingly arbitrarily) been victimized a scapegoat by virtue simply of his membership of the offending Presbytery of Dunfermline that had opposed the call.²⁶ More generally, however, the case

²⁴ First published in London (John Darby) in 1711. The Foulis Press in Glasgow published an edition of the same work in 1744 (Gaskell no. 30, p. 84) and another Glasgow printer (possibly Robert Urie) published it in 1758, probably on the back of the popularity of Witherspoon's book in successive editions. Witherspoon mentions Shaftesbury no less than three times in *Ecclesiastical Characteristics*, most importantly in *Maxim VI* where he lists "Shaftesbury's Characteristics" as among the "short catalogue of the most necessary and useful books, the thorough understanding of which will make a truly learned moderate man." His catalogue also includes "Collins's Inquiry into Human Liberty, all Mr. H[utchison]'s pieces, ... and H[ume]'s Moral Essays." - *Selected Writings*, p. 80.

²⁵ *Annals of the General Assembly from 1739 to 1752*, ed. N. Morren, Edinburgh, 1838, pp. 242-3, footnote. The key pamphlet is almost certainly by the Reverend Dr. John Hyndman, minister of the West Church in Edinburgh: *A Just View of the Constitution of the Church of Scotland, and of the Proceedings of the last General Assembly in relation to the Deposition of Mr. Gillespie*, Edinburgh, 1753.

²⁶ The Inverkeithing case is usefully described in some detail by McIntosh, (who, nevertheless, seems unaware of the Hyndman pamphlet mentioned by Morren) in *Church and Theology in Enlightenment Scotland*, pp. 103-4. Thomas Gillespie (1708-1774) defiantly still led worship among members of his former church and others at open air services in Dunfermline for almost seven years and in 1761, with others, (including Thomas Boston), founded the Presbytery of Relief which pointedly went out of its way to avoid confrontation with the Church of Scotland. See also the pamphlet by James Baine, Witherspoon's former colleague in Paisley, *The Case of the Reverend Mr Thomas Gillespie reviewed*, Edinburgh, 1770.

graphically summed up and exposed the deep and real chasm that had opened up between the two warring factions within the Kirk at that time.

Ecclesiastical Characteristics is written in the form of a spoof “panegyric” of “moderation” and those “moderate men” who act upon “moderate principles”. In *The Preface* Witherspoon - *qua* narrator and Moderate apologist - sets the scene for what follows:

If any shall think fit to blame me, for writing in so bold and assuming a way, through the whole of my book, I answer, I have chosen it on purpose, as being the latest and most modern way of writing; and the success it has already met with, is a demonstration of its propriety and beauty. The same thing also, to my great satisfaction, is a proof of the justice of a late author’s scheme of Moral Philosophy, who has expelled *mortification, self-denial, humility, and silence* from among the number of the virtues, and transferred them, as he expresseth himself, to the opposite column; that is to say, the column of VICES. This scheme, I dare say, will stand its ground; and, as a critic, I observe, that it was probably the single circumstance just now mentioned, that brought upon the author an adversary who, though possessed of many truly good qualities, had the misfortune to be always eminent for modesty, and other bastard virtues of the same class.²⁷

The whole point of the book is to show the Moderates in their true colours and, as its modern editor, Thomas Miller, shrewdly points out, what lies at its heart is that -

Witherspoon returns again and again to the irony that the Moderates were attacking orthodoxy as a source of factionalism while at the same time they were establishing themselves as the ruling faction.²⁸

Four out of the twelve so-called “Maxims” of *Ecclesiastical Characteristics* relate to the alliance of the Moderates with men of good taste, refinement, quality and background; for example, in Maxim IV one of the “special marks” attending a “good preacher” is that “he must be very unacceptable to the common people” -

... suppose a man should have the approbation of the very best judges, viz. Those whose taste we ourselves allow to be good, if at the same time he happens to be acceptable to the common people, it is a sign that he must have some subtle refined fault which has escaped the observation of the good judges aforesaid; for there is no man even of our own fraternity so perfect and uniform in judging right as the common people are in judging wrong. ... all the several reasons that have been given for the particular maxims of moderation, concur in establishing this; for the people are all declared enemies of moderation, in its principles and practice; and therefore if moderation be right, they must be wrong. ... From this it evidently follows that a popular preacher essentially signifies a bad preacher; and it is always so understood by us, whenever we use the expression. If we but hear it reported of any one, that he is very popular among the lower sort, we are under no difficulty of giving his character, without having heard him preach ourselves.²⁹

²⁷ *WJW*, 3, pp. 205-6.

²⁸ *The Selected Writings of John Witherspoon*, ed. Thomas Miller, Carbondale and Edwardsville, Southern Illinois, 1990, Introduction, p. 13.

²⁹ *WJW*, 3, pp. 225-6.

And in an interesting reference to the preaching style of George Whitefield, our Moderate panegyrist suggests a single compromise, qualifying his previous argument: that, exceptionally, if an important point is to be gained from departing from the principle that moderation is above courting popular opinion, and by invoking the view that “there is sometimes more beauty shown in a composition by receding from the rules of art”,

... it shall be allowable for any moderate man upon an extraordinary emergency to break them [those rules] for a good end: As for instance, he may speak even in Whitefield’s style when his settlement has the misfortune to depend upon the people, which I have known done with good success.³⁰

And where the modern reader is concerned, the key word here, of course, is the modifying adverb, “even”.

The climax of the argument arrives when, in a state of near euphoria, our narrator looks forward to a utopian future when the common people have finally departed “to the seceders” and moderation has been brought to a state of utter bliss and perfection:

... let us stand still and rejoice over the happy state of our mother-church of Scotland, in which moderation so greatly prevails; and let us rejoice in hope of what improvements she may yet arrive at by adhering to these maxims, now digested into such admirable form and order. O what noble, sublime, and impenetrable sermons shall now be preached! What victories and triumphs shall be obtained over the stupid populace by forced settlements, which never have such a beautiful and orderly form, as when finished by soldiers, marching in comely array, with shining arms; a perfect image of the church-militant! And what perfectly virtuous and sinless lives shall be led by these clergy, who with steady eye, regard the good of this vast whole, which never yet went wrong! ... who can tell whether, when we shall have brought moderation to perfection, when we shall have driven away the whole common people to the Seceders, who alone are fit for them, and captivated the hearts of the gentry to a love of our solitary temples, they may not be pleased to allow us more stipend[d]s, because we shall have nothing to do but spend them?³¹

When, however, the artifice of the neo-Swiftian satire is stripped away from the rhetoric, the historical nucleus of the ‘real’ Witherspoon’s ire is plain. The Kirk, in consequence of its obsession with taste and style and its resultant departure from the basis of Christian orthodoxy, is in a depressed and dishonourable state. Moreover, the consequences are likely to be dire, with ministers having nothing in common with their flocks and the ordinary folk (that make up the majority of their congregations) feeling increasingly alienated, such that they can no longer find resistible the call of alternative, more responsive worship on offer from the secessionists.

³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 226.

³¹ *ibid.*, p. 259.

Such was the popular appeal of *Ecclesiastical Characteristics* that (possibly with Bryce's active encouragement) Witherspoon may have dashed off a sequel – *A Supplement to the Ecclesiastical Characteristics containing the Plan of a New Translation of the Holy Scriptures* (Glasgow, 1760) – now an incredibly rare book.³² The *Supplement* appears to have been overlooked by all modern scholars, was certainly unknown to Collins, and has been missed by Landsman and Sher. Even to a modern reader, parts of the *Supplement* are vastly entertaining :

Another reason by many for their throwing aside the Scriptures is, That they cannot understand them; the doctrines are many of them mysterious and above the comprehension of even reason itself, and innumerable passages are so figurative and ambiguous, that they are greatly at a loss what judgment to form of them. To rectify this, I shall clothe my ideas with such determination and perspicuous terms and expressions, as all will easily understand. I shall likewise leave out all these doctrines that are incomprehensible mysteries, as none can believe what he does not comprehend. In the prosecution of this plan, I shall seclude a great part of the Pentateuch and prophets in the Old Testament, and the whole of the Apocalypse in the New, from the sacred canon, and join them to the Apocrypha; and for the Song of Solomon, (formerly so unintelligible to many) I propose to adopt that judicious and elegant version which the author of the Fair Circassian has given us in a poem of that name.³³ By this means, the Bible will not only be rendered more plain, but also more neat for the pocket, as it will be comprized in less than half the size of the former translation, which, by the bye, is certainly no small advantage : hereby likewise all such religious controversies as take their rise from ignorance or a misunderstanding of terms, will happily subside, as the very foundation of them will be eraz'd from that sacred book.³⁴

It is, of course, perfectly valid to argue that the *Supplement* was not by Witherspoon but is merely a commercially exploitable pastiche of the original by another hand. It is my personal view, however, - from a combination of the internal evidence of style and content, allied to the involvement of Bryce as printer/publisher (who had, after all, published works by Witherspoon in each of 1756, 1757 and 1758) - that attribution of this pamphlet to Witherspoon, at least provisionally, cannot be lightly dismissed.

Not to be outdone by Bryce, three years later Witherspoon's friend, the Edinburgh printer William Gray, published his *A Serious Apology for the Ecclesiastical*

³² The GUL copy seems to be unique, the *Supplement* being absent from ESTC and other major catalogues in the UK and the USA, including those of the Library of Congress, the LCP, all Scottish university libraries and the NLS.

³³ This is a reference to Samuel Croxall's celebrated erotic poem, *The Fair Circassian, a Dramatic Performance*. Based on part of the Song of Solomon in the Old Testament, it was first printed in Steele's *Miscellanies* in 1714 but expanded and published on its own in 1720. Hugh Gaine printed it in New York in 1754 and another NY edition came out as late as 1795. It was hugely popular as was Croxall's *Fables of Aesop and Others* (1722) which, among many others, Robert Aitken published in Philadelphia in 1777, 1783 and 1792.

³⁴ *A Supplement to the Ecclesiastical Characteristics*, p. 5.

Characteristics (Edinburgh, Sands, Murray and Cochran for Gray, 1763), extending the fame and appeal of the satire still further.

If the *Ecclesiastical Characteristics* and its sequels show a more playful side of Witherspoon's temperament – albeit for a deadly serious purpose – these writings were an exception to his normally unyielding appraisal of popular leisure activities of the time. In particular, he deplored what he saw as the gross immorality associated with the theatre and in 1757 published *A Serious Enquiry into the Nature and Effects of the Stage* which the Glasgow evangelical printers Bryce and Paterson produced for him.³⁵ This pamphlet was to be Witherspoon's last publication as minister of the gospel at Beith. Later in the same year, he was called to be minister of the vacant charge at the Laigh Church in Paisley, less than fifteen miles away. His wife, it seems, had almost to be dragged there, knowing the removal meant she would see less of her family and friends at Beith.

It was around this time that the finest of his pulpit sermons began to attract notice and his fame spread. Edited printed versions of the sermons flowed steadily from his publishers in Glasgow, Edinburgh and (as the surest mark of his growing reputation) from London as well:

- *The Charge of Sedition and Faction against good men* [Glasgow, Bryce and Paterson, 1758]
- *The Absolute Necessity of Salvation through Christ* [Edinburgh, printer not cited, 1758]
- *A Prayer for National Prosperity and for the Revival of Religion* [London, printer not cited, 1758]
- *The Trial of Religious Truth by its Moral Influence* [Glasgow, 1759, printer not cited [but published by James Wilken, a Paisley bookseller]

³⁵ He was to return to the same theme in his *Farewell Sermon delivered at Paisley in April and May, 1768. Ministerial fidelity in declaiming the Whole Counsel of God*, in the course of which he exhorts his congregation not to allow themselves to be tempted by “the pernicious entertainments of the stage.” [WJW, 2, p. 550.] In a wicked twist of fate, the Laigh Church survives to this day in Witherspoon Street, Paisley but as part pub and, horror of horrors, part theatre!

John Bryce was without doubt the best known of the Glasgow printers of evangelical titles at this time. Bryce was in business as a printer in Glasgow continuously from 1752 to 1784; from 1752 to 1759 the firm was known as “Bryce and Paterson” but it was then that Bryce's partner moved to Edinburgh and set up for himself as a printer in the Lawnmarket where he operated from 1760 to 1782, thereafter in Castle Hill, until his name appears in an imprint for the last time in 1789. John Bryce carried on in business for himself at his Glasgow Saltmarket premises until 1784, and in an imprint of 1787 (the last to appear bearing his name) is described simply as “bookseller”. See the NLS Scottish Book Trade Index online and Landsman, *Liberty, Piety and Patronage in The Glasgow Enlightenment*, ed. Hook and Sher, East Linton, 1995, p. 222.

- *Seasonable Advice to Young Persons* [Glasgow, Robert Urie, 1762]

Less than a year after moving to Paisley, Witherspoon encountered the ugly side of industrialisation and the widespread misery caused by war. It was 1757, year two of the Seven Years War, and things were going badly for the British. In Paisley he saw not just poverty, unemployment and the resultant acute hardship but, as the sermon makes clear, the extreme of real “famine” in the town – literally, starvation – and quite possibly among members of his own congregation. It moved him greatly and the result was the powerful sermon *Prayer for National Prosperity and for the Revival of Religion*. It was delivered on February 16, 1758. For this extraordinary sermon he chose as his text the book of Isaiah, li, verse 9 from the Old Testament and the line “Awake, awake put on strength!” Conforming to the usual rhetorical structure of sermons in this period, after a long passage of scriptural precedents it closes with the preacher relating his biblical text “to our own present situation, as to public affairs.” The following extract is among the most powerful examples of Witherspoon’s dramatic use of periodic prose and has really to be read out loud to fully comprehend the powerful contemporary effect it must have had on his listening congregation:

Is not our state, both as a nation, and as a church, exceedingly fallen and low; and have we not the greatest need to address this prayer in the text, “Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord!”? May we not take our low and fallen state as a nation from the universal confession of all without exception, however opposed in sentiments or interest? Every class and denomination of men among us, every party and faction, however unwilling each may be to acknowledge its own share of the guilt, and however prone to load its adversaries with the blame of procuring it, is yet willing to acknowledge that we are at present in a distressed, and in a contemptible state ... We have not only had, for some time past, repeated threatening of scarcity and dearth, but vast multitudes have been afflicted with famine in its rigor, which is one of God’s “sore judgments.” Through the mercy of God this is alleviated in some measure at present, but far from being entirely removed. We have also been long engaged in war with a powerful and politic enemy. ... Has there not been an obstructed trade, a loss of territory, a loss of honor, and expence of treasure? Is not this nation, once in a manner the arbitress of the fate of Europe, now become the scorn and derision of her neighbours and all that are round about her? What weak and divided councils among those that preside? Instead of any genuine public spirit, a proud and factious endeavor to disgrace each other’s measures, and wrest the ensigns of government out of each other’s hands. How numerous and expensive, but how useless and inactive have been our fleets and armies? And how deplorable is the condition of our colonies abroad? They are the chief theatre of the war, because, indeed, they are the subject of the contest.³⁶

³⁶ *WJW*, 2, pp. 470-1. Witherspoon’s prayers were answered, since the year in which the sermon was preached was followed, in 1759, by the “Annus Mirabilis”, the “Year of Victories” (e.g. Quebec, Minden and Quiberon Bay).

It is not fanciful to suggest that this is Witherspoon the proto-statesman speaking, in language that anticipates and mirrors that of some of his great speeches to the Continental Congress in Philadelphia and of his greatest sermon, his theological and political masterwork, *The Dominion of Providence*, still some twenty years off.

More important, it is often said about Witherspoon that until he went to America his declared aim was to keep politics out of the pulpit. In support of that view there is the following passage from his sermon of September 7th, 1758, *The Charge of Sedition and Faction against Good Men* preached in Paisley Abbey on the occasion of the ordination of Archibald Davidson as one of the ministers there :

... ministers take care to avoid officiously inter-meddling in civil matters. A minister should be separated and set apart for his own work; he should be consecrated to his office. It is little glory to him to be eminently skilled in any other science, except such as may be handmaids to theology. ... Ministers giving themselves to worldly employments, have been commonly of bad fame; ... But it is still more sinful and dangerous, for them to desire or claim the direction of such matters as fall within the province of the civil magistrate.³⁷

Tait puts it very well :

... this is not an actual proscription against introducing politics into preaching, but there is no question that in 1758 Witherspoon thought ministers should put themselves at considerable distance from affairs of state.³⁸

And, significantly, the ‘Charge’ to young Mr. Davidson begins with an allusion to the necessary centrality, for Davidson’s life and doctrine – and, by extension, for that of everyone listening to the preacher that day – of re-birth and regeneration:

Examine, therefore, whether you are born again.

One of the most stirring of the printed sermons published during Witherspoon’s ministry in Paisley is *The Trial of Religious Truth by its Moral Influence*, the only sermon at this time to have been published by a Paisley bookseller and occasional publisher, James Wilken.³⁹ The sermon was published in 1759, a full ten years before the publication of the first printed book in the town. The text chosen by Witherspoon for the sermon is from the gospel of Matthew vii, verse 20: “Wherefore, by their fruits ye shall know them.” It is a ringing recapitulation of the same underlying theme he first (satirically) developed

³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 438.

³⁸ L. Gordon Tait, *The Piety of John Witherspoon*, Louisville, Kentucky, 2001, p. 154.

³⁹ Only two years later (1761) Wilken is described as a “merchant”, the year in which his only other published work, the sixth edition of James Durham’s *Christ Crucified* came out from the Glasgow press of Archibald M’Lean and Joseph Galbraith.

in *Ecclesiastical Characteristics* : that is, how can it be that a man who professes to love Christ and serve the Kirk can hold himself aloof from the needs and circumstances of the poor and lowly - the “multitude” he calls them - and can still sleep easy in his bed at night? -

Religion is the concern of all alike, and therefore, what relates to it should be open to all. It was the character, and the glory of the gospel, at its first publication, that it was preached to the poor. And by this it is still distinguished, not only from many or most false religions, but especially from those philosophical speculations, in which the enemies of all religion place their chief strength. When we peruse a system or theory of moral virtue, the principles of which are very refined, or the reasoning upon it abstracted and above the comprehension of the vulgar, it may be ingenious, but it carries in itself a demonstration, that, because it is unfit, it could never be intended for general use.⁴⁰

Witherspoon’s words show how he and other evangelicals like him despised the cult of learning for learning’s sake where ministers chose to ignore the *whole* world.

In his ‘application’ he reserves for the climax of his sermon the primary target of his scorn - the backsliding clergy itself:

What in former times would have been reckoned ... no more than plainness and ministerial freedom, would now be called the most slanderous invective and unpardonable abuse. Instead, therefore, of taking upon me to say who are chiefly to be blamed as the criminal causes of it, I shall only affirm and lament the melancholy effect, that we have in many places of this church a despised, forsaken, useless ministry; that many of the people have gone from mountain to mountain, and forgotten their resting place, while a still greater number is fast asleep in ignorance, security, and sloth. Where is that union, that mutual esteem and affection, which once subsisted between ministers and their people? It must be acknowledged, that their influence and authority is now in a great measure lost, and therefore I may safely conclude that their usefulness is gone.⁴¹

Five years after the publication of *The Trial of Religious Truth* the brothers Edward and Charles Dilly - dissenters and distinguished London publishers of several Scottish religious and enlightenment titles and, interestingly too, with strong American ties - published Witherspoon’s *A Practical Treatise on Regeneration* (1764). The work was reprinted in London five times and was still being reprinted as late as 1855. It is at this phase of his career in Scotland the most incisive of his statements on the regeneration theme. Predictably, the treatise is founded on the classic text from the AV version of the gospel of John ii, verse 3: “Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” As we shall see,

⁴⁰ *WJW*, 2, p. 392.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 408.

this is the same text to which he would compulsively return in a key section of his most famous American sermon of all, the *Dominion of Providence*.

The regeneration *Treatise* begins uncompromisingly by laying full responsibility on ministers of the gospel which Witherspoon makes clear they cannot shirk. Further, this responsibility knows no divisions, such that all ministers, Moderates, Evangelicals and seceders alike share a common burden. And the nature of that responsibility? It is, he explains, a responsibility central to us all professing the Christian ministry:

The condition on which ministers of the gospel hold this office, is extremely awful. .. We are told that “except a man be born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of God”. In this all parties, every profession and denomination of Christians, do or ought to agree. By whatever name you are called, whatsoever leader you profess to follow, whatever ordinances you enjoy, if you are not “born again”, you shall not enter into the kingdom of God. ... I am sensible that regeneration or the new-birth is a subject, at present, very unfashionable; or, at least, a stile of language which hath gone very much into desuetude. It is, however, a subject of unspeakable moment, or, rather, it is the one subject in which all others meet as in a centre. ... If this subject is, indeed, unfashionable and neglected, we are miserably deceiving ourselves.⁴²

Towards the close of the treatise Witherspoon addresses himself to the “rich and affluent” -

It is, indeed, a matter of no small difficulty often to persuade such to hear the truths of the gospel. ... [Here he cites the famous lines from Matthew xix, 23-24, that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.] Worldly grandeur is ... the most destructive of real religion ... however your greatness or wealth may deter others from treating you with plainness or sincerity, you are sinners of the race of Adam, you are lost in him by nature, you are transgressors in practice, and liable to divine wrath, from which there is no shelter but in the blood of Christ.⁴³

Less than five years later, it is a different story entirely. In two parts delivered over April - May 1768, just a few weeks before he left Scotland for America, Witherspoon preached his “Farewell Sermon” in the Laigh Church in Paisley. The title of the sermon is *Ministerial Fidelity in declaring the Whole Counsel of God*. It is cautionary and even admonitory in tone. For this, the most momentous occasion in his ministerial life and career to date, Witherspoon chose as his text the lines from the Acts of the Apostles, chapter xx, 26-7: “Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.”

⁴² *WJW*, 1, pp. 93, 95, 97.

⁴³ *ibid.*, pp. 256-7.

He begins by referring to the great personal difficulties he has confronted, surrounding his decision to leave Paisley and Scotland, and to the way in which “Providence” - one of his favourite theological terms - intervened finally to convince him that leaving his charge for a new life represented the means by which he could continue to be “useful”; and now there can be no turning back:

The circumstances attending the removal, which, if Providence prevent not, seems now to be at hand, are such as do not lessen, but greatly increase the difficulty of speaking from such a subject. And yet, in another view, they seemed to urge it so strongly, and to present such an opportunity of being useful, as I durst not wholly decline.⁴⁴

At the same time, he makes it clear to his congregation that they should not count on him to explain to them why he has decided to accept the call of America and, by so doing, to turn his attentions to “a different employment” of his Christian ministry:

Least of all do I intend to endeavour to satisfy you of the motives which have induced me to accept of a call to a distant part of the world, and, in some degree, a different employment in the church of Christ.⁴⁵

After briefly returning to one of his favourite themes (as previously developed in, for example, *The Trial of Religious Truth*) - namely, that “sloth” (alongside the related vice of “worldliness in ourselves”) is one of the greatest sins besetting ministers of religion - he proceeds to condemn what he perceives as the growing moral laxity arising from the town’s fast increasing population and, he almost whispers it, from “wealth”:

This place, engaged in commerce and traffic, growing in numbers, and I suppose, growing in wealth, is in great danger of a worldly spirit, and of importing, if I may speak so, fashionable vices, instead of real improvements.⁴⁶

Dramatically, with the voyage to America fast approaching, he then appears to modify his old orthodox views on elegance, propriety and good taste by an astonishing *volte face* in deference to the moderate, more fashionable “manner of life” using in the process words that, in his early ‘enthusiasm’, would have choked in his throat only a few years previously:

While I say this, I would not be understood as being against a liberal education, and elegant manner of life, or any thing that is truly becoming in an advanced rank. There is no more religion in being sordid, than in being sumptuous.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ *WJW*, 2, pp. 509-10..

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p. 510.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 549-50.

And then, as if to allow his congregation to pause for breath, he adds:

But I think the spirit of the gospel is such, that it will dispose a truly pious person to be rather late than early in adopting new ornaments.⁴⁸

What he is now saying in relation to wealth is that while its possession may undoubtedly lead to weakness and vice, it is not necessarily the case that being very rich is the same as being very sinful. Is there necessarily anything immoral in being “sumptuous”?⁴⁹ And he doesn’t stop there. On (almost literally) the eve of his departure for America he re-defines his ideas on education and, more than that, appears to desire to liberalise even the way one lives one’s life. His words and his language are breathtaking. A “liberal education”? An “elegant manner of life”? Some members of his congregation would have been bewildered, perhaps even shocked.

The apparent contradictions in his message, within so short a time span, are precisely what Landsman means when he avers that the Evangelicals, in time, “committed themselves to the new learning and to the values of literary culture and refinement”. But it’s much more than that. It’s as if Witherspoon is already in process of undergoing the self-regeneration that he himself foresaw in the *Practical Treatise*, albeit at that phase of his life in a strictly religious context - *Except a man be born again ...*. It was not, of course, to end there, in the pulpit of the Laigh Church in Paisley. Rather the words of the *Farewell Sermon* mark the beginning of a more or less continual process of Witherspoon’s re-birth and self-renewal that would find its apotheosis in America on the eve of, and in the years immediately following the revolution - in which, as he would come to see it, he was destined by ‘Providence’ to play a major role.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 550.

⁴⁸ *ibid.* A few years earlier Witherspoon had urged a broad education for ministers - “It is a great mistake to think, sound learning is an enemy to religion, and to suppose that an ignorant minister is the best or safest” (*Ministerial Character*, *WJW*, 2, p. 559). Cited by L. Gordon Tait in *The Piety of John Witherspoon*, p. 117 and note 30 on p. 232.

⁴⁹ In his published Glasgow University Ph.D thesis, *Church and Theology in Enlightenment Scotland: The Popular Party, 1740-1800*, East Linton, 1998, p. 80, John R. McIntosh points out that in Witherspoon’s *A Serious Enquiry into the Nature and Effects of the Stage* (Glasgow, Bryce and Paterson, 1757) he had distinguished between two categories of possessors of wealth, first, those who gratify “their violent and ungovernable passions”, and, secondly, those who use their money virtuously. McIntosh rightly states that “Witherspoon’s suspicion of wealth was reinforced by his pessimistic, cyclical interpretation of national development in which wealth led to luxury which was the precursor of a return to poverty.” (*ibid.*, p. 81). However, McIntosh has not apparently picked up on his more temperate opinion on money and wealth as stated in the *Farewell Sermon*. This apparent *volte face* is a good example of one of the many ambiguities and inconsistencies of Witherspoon’s life and career on which several scholars have commented.

3 The call of America

In October 1767 the Reverend Charles Beatty, an old associate of Benjamin Franklin and himself a trustee of Nassau Hall,⁵⁰ was only one in a fairly steady line of American visitors who had either already visited, or were in course of beating a path to, the Laigh Church manse at Paisley, all of them resolved on trying their best to move Witherspoon (but, more especially, his wife) to accept the invitation of the Princeton trustees that he succeed Samuel Finley as President of the College of New Jersey. The others who had preceded Beatty in visiting Paisley on the same mission were, no disrespect to him, to become altogether more distinguished: Benjamin Rush, then a young medical student at Edinburgh, and the lawyer and Princeton alumnus Richard Stockton who had called on Franklin in the course of his preparatory visit to London prior to making the long trip north. In some ways it was an almost incestuous triangle. In Nolan's words:

On his journey northward the lawyer [Stockton] carried at his saddle-bow letters from Franklin to Benjamin Rush, who was still pursuing his medical studies at Edinburgh. Rush was himself a graduate of the College of New Jersey in the class of 1759 and was destined, ten years later, to marry Stockton's daughter Julia.⁵¹

There is no doubt, however, that Rush was the prime mover and with considerable insight had identified Witherspoon as the right man. In 1767 Rush had sent Witherspoon a letter in which he said:

You can have no Prospects of rising into a higher Sphere of Usefulness in the Church of Scotland. ... [The] present ruling Faction have marked you out as an Object of their Resentment.⁵²

Rush was using his knowledge of Witherspoon's battles with the Moderates to try to persuade him that his future lay at Princeton. Moreover, as we have seen in the evidence of his Paisley "Farewell Sermon", the "opportunity of being useful" stood high among the reasons behind Witherspoon's delayed decision to leave Scotland.

⁵⁰ *Benjamin Franklin in Scotland and Ireland 1759 and 1771*, Philadelphia and London, 1938, p. 116. Nolan states that Beatty and Franklin were "great friends" and notes that Franklin in his *Autobiography* "pays a tribute to Beatty's services and comments upon the tact with which he mingled his prayers with an adroit distribution of rum."

⁵¹ Witherspoon performed the marriage ceremony at Princeton on January 11, 1776. All three men - Witherspoon, Rush and Stockton - signed the Declaration of Independence later that year.

⁵² Cited by Gideon Mailer in his article, "Anglo-Scottish Union and John Witherspoon's American Revolution", in *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Series, Volume LXVII, Number 4, October 2010, at p. 729. The Rush letter is dated Apr. 23, 1767 and is in the Witherspoon Collection, box 2, folder 26, Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Firestone Library, Princeton University.

It was not until 1953, and the publication of his then ground-breaking account *John Witherspoon comes to America*, that the editor of Rush's voluminous correspondence, L. H. Butterfield, was able, with the help of hitherto unseen documentation,⁵³ to provide the most detailed account thus far of the complex and tangled circumstances behind Witherspoon's call to Princeton. For Nolan to describe Witherspoon as "obstinate" is wide of the mark. Truth to tell, it was Mrs Witherspoon who had proved the real stumbling block.⁵⁴ As we have already noted, she had even been against her husband's translation from Beith to Paisley - around 25 miles or so - so that it must have come as no surprise that she could not bear to contemplate the terrors of the transatlantic crossing, in these days a voyage of rarely less than three months, not to mention the prospect of the finality of separation from her extended family and friends in Ayrshire and Renfrewshire.

⁵³ L. H. Butterfield, *John Witherspoon comes to America*, Princeton, 1953. But not, it seems, with access to the Beatty diary which Nolan cites as "never published" and "in the possession of his descendants at Westfield, New Jersey." (*Benjamin Franklin in Scotland and America*, p. 218, note 22). The cornerstone of Butterfield's research was the recovery and publication of 24 letters, all but one of which came into the possession of Princeton University Library after their sale in New York in 1943. None of these was available to Collins or Nolan. Butterfield's achievement was to cover "all the correspondence discoverable that belongs to the negotiations of 1766-1768 or that comments significantly upon them." (*ibid.*, p. xi). It is also clear, however, that he did not have access to - nor, apparently, was aware of - the two 'commonplace books' mentioned by Collins. [See the Bibliographical checklist at the beginning of this chapter and Appendix E.]

⁵⁴ See for example Butterfield, p. 27: "Witherspoon's letter of 28 February [1767, to Archibald Wallace] shows that Stockton thoroughly persuaded *him* the call from Princeton should be accepted, but that Mrs Witherspoon flatly refused to entertain any such notion." There is no question that while Witherspoon had been minded to accept the Princeton invitation, it was his wife who could not bring herself to go along with her husband's wishes on that score. Thus, Witherspoon's letter of April 18 1767 to Richard Stockton: "... I felt a very strong Inclination to have accepted the Office to which I was chosen, but Family Difficulties continue as great as ever & indeed I am now convinced are insurmountable. My wife continued under such Distress on the Subject that for some Weeks after you left us she was scarcely ever half a Day out of bed at a time till I told her at any Rate to make herself easy for whatever Inclination I might have to it, the Removal was of such a Nature that I would not insist upon it unless she could be brought to agree to it. Since that time we have conversed more fully on the subject & I was sometimes of Opinion that it might do, but now I have little or no hopes of it." In his letter to Benjamin Rush of August 14 1767 Witherspoon "again proposed the scheme of going to N. Jersey to my Wife but I cannot say with much or indeed with any hope of success." However, after Rush made a lightning visit to Paisley a few days later, Elizabeth Witherspoon did change her mind and Rush calmly notes in his diary entry: "After spending some days at his House we were so happy as to succeed in Our Persuasions, and embraced an Opportunity wch: very fortunately offered a few days Afterwards, of writing to the Trustees of the College that the way was now open for the Doctor's accepting of the Presidts: Chair shd. the Trustees think proper to choose him a second time. This Affair turned out according to our wishes, for in Jan'y: 1768 we received the vote of the Trustees confirming the Doctor's Reelection." - Butterfield, *John Witherspoon comes to America*, p. 39 and pp. 50-51.

In fact, Witherspoon himself had made up his own mind quite early on in the negotiations with Richard Stockton, such that he could write to Archibald Wallace in Edinburgh on February 28, 1767:

From the Persuasion of you & other friends at Edinr & what Mr Stockton has said of the State of Religion in America I find a pretty favourable Inclination in my own Mind to the Proposal though many Difficulties ly in the Way. ... I believe I need scarcely beg Your Sympathy & the Assistance of your prayers on this weighty Occasion as I dare say they will not be wanting.⁵⁵

Witherspoon was in no doubt, however, of the scale of the challenge awaiting him in New Jersey. He was wanted by the trustees of the college because they were well aware of his high standing among the Evangelicals within the established Kirk in Scotland. To a man, they were of the same kidney, with their allegiance unambiguously tied to the “New Side” party which was then in the clear ascendancy in America, out-numbering the Old Side “by not less than four to one”. In their eyes, Witherspoon’s reputation went before him, largely on account of the celebrated way in which he had dealt with the Moderates whom he had mercilessly lampooned in *Ecclesiastical Characteristics*. Accordingly, he could be relied on to buttress the New Side within both the inner councils of the College, but even more important, to advance their interests furth of Princeton as well. Anticipating that latter action was of special importance given the machinations of William Smith of (Princeton’s rival) the College of Philadelphia, a man whom Benjamin Franklin detested⁵⁶ and whose ambition was to secure for America nothing less than the establishment there of Church of England hegemony - and for himself an Anglican bishop’s crozier.

Butterfield tells how just a year after *Ecclesiastical Characteristics* was published two men of Princeton - the Reverend Samuel Davies and Gilbert Tennent - came to Scotland on a fund-raising mission. Davies wrote in his journal under the date 15 June 1754:

There is a piece published under the title of the Ecclesiastical Characteristics, ascribed to one Mr. Weatherspoon, a young minister. It is a burlesque upon the high-flyers under the ironical name of *moderate men*: and I think the humour is nothing inferior to Dean Swift.⁵⁷

Butterfield comments:

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 28.

⁵⁶ Franklin famously said of Smith: “I made that man my enemy by doing him too much kindness”. Letter to Mary Stevenson, Philadelphia, March 25, 1763: in *Benjamin Franklin Writings*, Library of America, New York, 1987, p. 798.

⁵⁷ Cited in *John Witherspoon comes to America*, p. 12.

The mission of Davies and Tennent was remarkably successful, and it created a bond of sympathy between the Popular wing of the Scottish Kirk and the New Light Presbyterians in America.⁵⁸

But there is much more to Witherspoon's acceptance of the call from America than the mere congeniality of a recommendation from the Princeton trustees, let alone the not inconsiderable financial and other perquisites they offered. To understand the background to Witherspoon's final acquiescence with the college invitation to be their President, it is necessary to locate his evangelicalism within the setting of Scottish church politics of the time. Sher has described, respectively, the high tide, followed by the waning of influence of Moderatism in the Kirk of Robertson's and Leechman's day. Landsman has shown how Witherspoon was part and parcel of the continuity of Scottish orthodox evangelicalism which had irresistible appeal to the artisan classes of the west and, in particular to the spinning and weaving communities. Elsewhere in this study I have tried to bring out the extent to which orthodoxy and secessionism were, at times and in certain respects, difficult to disentangle. And we have seen that nowhere was that in greater evidence than in a town like Paisley with its economy based on the fragile vicissitudes of the textiles industry. That essentially interstitial nature of religion and the dominant place it occupied in the workaday lives of ordinary folk is perhaps difficult for us to grasp in our largely secular modern world.

Thus, Witherspoon exchanges pulpits with such as James Baine (*alias* Bayne) who, two years before Witherspoon left for America, having been succeeded in the High Church in Paisley by Witherspoon's great friend and ally, George Muir, would leave the Kirk altogether on becoming the first Relief Church minister in Edinburgh (1766);⁵⁹ and also, perhaps more controversially, with the enigmatic and colourful William Thom of Govan whose views on America, in Landsman's words, would come to stand

⁵⁸ *ibid.*

⁵⁹ Witherspoon would have had little difficulty in temporising his theology with that of Baine even after the latter's espousal of the Presbytery of Relief which was originally constituted for Christians "oppressed in their Church privileges". J. H. S. Burleigh is on the mark when he states that the Relief Church "was free of the rancorous animosity towards the Established Church which marked the older Secession, and to begin with at any rate conceived of itself as an ally rather than an enemy of the national Church." - *A Church History of Scotland*, p. 284. Douglas Sloan also emphasises the ultimately (and evidently surprising) "moderate" nature of Witherspoon's relations with Moderatism: "Schism was repugnant to him, and while he did battle with his opponents, he remained with them in the national church". Sloan convincingly writes of Witherspoon's "mediating position" within the Kirk and of his sympathy with the seceders, yet his refusal to join them. See *The Scottish Enlightenment and the American College Ideal*, Columbia, New York, 1971, pp. 108-9.

as a refuge for Scotsmen deprived of both religious and economic liberty, and a repository of their hopes for economic, political and religious prosperity, extending far into the future.⁶⁰

Moreover, while in Paisley Witherspoon regularly corresponded with his old Edinburgh classmate John Erskine, minister of Kirkintilloch then of Edinburgh Old Greyfriars, a friend and intimate of such as George Whitefield and of Jonathan Edwards (the latter president of the College of New Jersey for a short time in 1758)⁶¹ – both forever associated with the First Great Awakening and, in the case of Whitefield, with tent revivalism in particular. Witherspoon, in short, found it easy to relate to men such as these where others (even several fellow evangelicals) found their theology at times hard to take.⁶² In George Muir of the High Church in Paisley there was, however, no ambiguity of that sort. Between Witherspoon and Muir there was a lifelong warmth and mutual respect that found its expression in Witherspoon ‘arranging’ a Princeton honorary degree for his former Paisley colleague remarkably soon after his arrival there in 1768. Much later, it was Witherspoon who wrote the foreword to Muir’s son’s book of sermons published while he was still a young minister in Bermuda.⁶³

In the last analysis, therefore, Witherspoon’s acceptance of the call from New Jersey was in some ways entirely predictable. When he refused to disclose to his congregation in his *Farewell Sermon* the “motives” that had “induced” him to leave Paisley for Princeton, all he would say was that the Trustees’ invitation was also God’s personal call to him. To

⁶⁰ Thom was an enthusiastic and articulate advocate of emigration to America who wrote five extensive pamphlets on the subject. Devine says of him that “he linked the decay of liberty in religion to the cancer of oppressive landlordism and a diseased economic system”. – *Scotland’s Empire*, p. 118. Devine seems most interested in Witherspoon from the narrow point of view of his ‘adventures’ in land speculation in New York (Ryegate) and Nova Scotia, in partnership with the expatriate Scots James Whitelaw and David Allan, together with the Pagan family of Glasgow merchants, a subject regrettably outwith the scope of this present study. But Thom was also – like his contemporary, Professor John Anderson (1726-96) – a fierce critic of the academic and administrative structures at the University of Glasgow. See also note 6 above as well as pp. 13-14 and p. 41, note 23, of Ronald Crawford’s *Enlightenment Themes in Education – Benjamin Franklin and John Anderson*, privately printed, Glasgow, 2008.

⁶¹ Edwards (1703-1758) was installed as President of the College of New Jersey on February 16 1758 but died on March 22 as a result of a smallpox inoculation.

⁶² “Nowhere was the expanded perspective of Scottish Presbyterians more evident than in the writings of John Erskine, who had attended Edinburgh University with Witherspoon and for decades ranked with him as a leader of the Popular faction in the church” [Landsman, *Witherspoon and the Problem of Provincial Identity*, p. 34.]

⁶³ *Sermons by James Muir, A.M. minister of the Presbyterian Church, Bermuda. [Princeton] Printed for the author, by James Tod. M.DCC.LXXXVII.* James Muir (1757-1820) contributed a biographical sketch of the Paisley weaver-poet, Robert Tannahill, to a New York (John Cain) edition of his *Poems and Songs* published in 1819.

Witherspoon, the Popularist and Evangelical, America represented just another challenge put by God along the path of life. Richard Sher puts it well, interpreting Landsman:

As America came to be seen as a bastion of true religion, uncorrupted morals and personal liberty, Witherspoon and his colleagues embraced a new form of evangelical cosmopolitanism that shifted the American provinces from the periphery to the centre of their vision.⁶⁴

However, this translation to America would be far from easy. It would involve further progress down the road of his personal regeneration in a way that would be painful and at times dispiriting. Above all, it would require him to modify and temporise on some of his fundamental Calvinist tenets in a way that, only a few years before, he himself would not have countenanced and might well have surprised his colleagues and astonished his critics. Indeed, the warning signs of that process of change are already in evidence in Scotland, as early as in the *Farewell Sermon* :

I would not be understood as being against a liberal education, and elegant manner of life. ... There is no more religion in being sordid, than in being sumptuous.⁶⁵

But perhaps ‘change’ is the wrong word; ‘adaptation’ might be more appropriate. This is what Sher means when he writes:

In this new vision the polite learning and manners of the Enlightenment and the economic prosperity secured by commerce and industry were not necessarily evil and not necessarily incompatible with true religion; rather, they could be instruments of improvement or even signs of divine favour, if joined with the Calvinist piety and political liberty that America offered.⁶⁶

True - except that at this juncture in his life Witherspoon was only vaguely aware of the “political liberty that America offered” through the second-hand accounts of others.

4 Witherspoon and the regeneration of Princeton academic life

Witherspoon, therefore, had been well prepared for the depressed state of the College of New Jersey while he was still considering the trustees’ invitation to become its President. Nevertheless, the letter of invitation of November 19th 1766 from the President of the

⁶⁴ Richard B. Sher, [commenting on Ned C. Landsman’s contribution to part 1 of the book, *Religion and Revolution: The Two Worlds of John Witherspoon* entitled “Witherspoon and the Problem of Provincial Identity in Scottish Evangelical Culture”], “Introduction: Scottish-American Cultural Studies, Past and Present”, in *Scotland and America in the Age of the Enlightenment*, ed. Richard B. Sher and Jeffrey R. Smitten, Princeton, 1990, p. 15.

⁶⁵ *WJW*, 2, p. 550.

⁶⁶ Richard B. Sher, “Introduction : Scottish-American Cultural Studies, Past and Present”, in *Scotland and America in the Age of the Enlightenment*, p. 15.

Board of Trustees, William Peartree Smith, makes no mention of the impoverished state of the college, in terms of its academic and financial resources. Instead, Smith preferred to duck the issue and resort instead to a personal visit to Paisley by one of their number, Richard Stockton, to explain the situation more fully. Furthermore, though Smith does relate the unfortunate “Loss of four Presidents in the compass of a few Years”, he is at pains to stress that these deaths were

owing to *singular* circumstances, & occasioned by a variety of Infirmities which attended them previous to their removal to Nassau-Hall.⁶⁷

Smith also enclosed with his letter a prospectus for the College written as a puff for prospective freshmen. A few months later, Archibald Wallace, an Edinburgh merchant, wrote to Witherspoon from Edinburgh enclosing a “short narrative of the State of Matters” at Princeton, a document he had obtained from his cousin John, a successful Philadelphia merchant and shipbuilder. But it is doubtful if either paper – they may even have been one and the same – fully told the sorry story of the true decline of the College in resource terms, if not in prestige, at the time of the offer to Witherspoon. However, after Stockton’s visit to Paisley and a succession of visits by Benjamin Rush, before and after Witherspoon’s initial refusal of the offer of appointment as College President, he gradually unravelled the true facts. They were scarcely assuring.

Noll describes the situation as follows:

The arrival of Witherspoon gave Princeton trustees hope that a new day might be dawning for their institution. ... The raising of funds, the recruitment of students, the maintenance of discipline, the supervision of tutors – all felt the effects of swiftly changing leadership. Even more troubling, however, was the loss to the denomination of a full generation of its most effective leaders.⁶⁸

Underlying everything, however, the most pressing need was for additional resources – money, books and equipment – and, to an extent, the maintenance and, desirably, enhancement of student recruitment. Before his departure from Scotland, Witherspoon had learned from Rush, Charles Beatty and others the particularly depressed state of the College library. For example, in his letter of October 11th 1767 to Rush he comments

⁶⁷ *John Witherspoon comes to America*, p. 8.

⁶⁸ Mark A. Noll, “The Search for a Christian Enlightenment in the Era of Samuel Stanhope Smith”, in *Princeton and the Republic, 1768-1822*, Princeton, 1989, p. 17.

I told him [Beatty] of my Intentions as to an Increase of the Library but he did not seem sensible of the Poverty of the Colledge [sic] Library which surprised me.⁶⁹

Then he discloses that he has already had constructive thoughts about how to remedy the situation, for this was something he felt he could proceed to help remedy, even before his departure for America. On 11th October 1767 he writes to Rush :

Messrs Foulis in Glasgow have promised me a present of Books which I hope will be of some Value.⁷⁰

The Glasgow University printers did not let him down. On January 25th 1768 he is able to confirm to Rush that

I ... have already got several Books in a present from Messrs Foulis of Glasgow Colledge & have likewise spoke to several Ministers & others about it with very good prospect of success.⁷¹

Certainly, it is on record that Witherspoon brought numerous books with him when he sailed and we also know on the evidence of the Robert Aitken waste-book that he personally acquired over several years many books and pamphlets from his old Paisley friend's bookstore in Philadelphia to augment the college library.⁷²

Student recruitment, however, was a different matter. Here, the problem seemed to be one of complacency. The college had been founded in 1746 and had received its charter two years later. Apart from Harvard and Yale, in the late 1760s Princeton was granting more B.A. degrees than any other American college - an average of 18 per year over the period 1760-1768. Noll again -

Even more than Yale and Harvard it was a national institution, with students attending from New England and the South as well as from New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey.⁷³

⁶⁹ *John Witherspoon comes to America*, pp. 55-6.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p. 56.

⁷¹ *ibid.*, p. 66.

⁷² See Collins, *President Witherspoon*, vol. I, p. 112 where he quotes from a 1768 College "announcement" - "For the Attainment of their [students'] Ends, a very valuable Addition to the Public Library was brought over with the President, another large collection of the most standard Books, is newly arrived; and a Third is very soon expected from London. So that this College, which had before all the Advantages for Study, that a retired healthful Place could possess, is now well furnished with a valuable Public Library, which will be improved by continual Additions." [New Jersey Archives, 1st series, vol. XXVI, p. 306.

⁷³ Noll, *Princeton and the Republic, 1768-1822*, "The Search for a Christian Enlightenment in the Era of Samuel Stanhope Smith", pp. 16-17.

Further, in relation to what today we would call ‘access’ the College was actually ahead of other higher education institutions in America at this time, with an impressive record in that regard even before Witherspoon’s arrival. Miller comments:

While Princeton was smaller than Harvard and Yale, its student population was less regionalized than either. ... 90 per cent of Harvard’s students came from Massachusetts; 75 per cent of Yale’s students came from Connecticut; and other schools like William and Mary drew almost entirely on their own specific areas. However, Princeton’s students came from all the colonies and from a wider cross section of colonial society because Princeton was the cheapest college and had strong support from the popular evangelical movement. Under Witherspoon, several Indians and blacks attended Princeton, including the important teacher and minister John Chavis.⁷⁴

And Sloan, quoting Trinterud, adds:

By the time of the Revolution the College of New Jersey was ... “the least localized of any in America ... both in the sources of its students and in the distribution of its alumni.”⁷⁵

Still, we have to be cautious about all this, recalling Noll’s words that, at bottom, the College was an elitist institution:

With a few exceptions for talented plebeians dedicated to the ministry, [the College] was largely a preserve of the elite. College laws, self-sustaining student societies, a special attention to public speaking, and an ever-present concern for honour provided the means to develop character and prepare students for stations of dignity in the world.⁷⁶

Without doubt, however, the greatest achievement of the new President was his re-shaping – regeneration is as good a word as any – of the teaching curriculum. Noll calls it his “crowning accomplishment”.⁷⁷ In summary, his pedagogical reforms were these:

First, Witherspoon increased the status of the study of English at the level of the grammar school. Secondly, at the other end of the educational spectrum, he established a graduate programme, intended not just to prepare students for the usual professions, but “to fit young Gentlemen for serving their Country in public”.⁷⁸ The most celebrated of his graduate alumni from that programme was James Madison, later fourth President of the United States, who is known to historians of Princeton as the first registered graduate student there outside of divinity;

⁷⁴ *Selected Writings of John Witherspoon*, p. 20.

⁷⁵ Douglas Sloan, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the American College Ideal*, New York, 1971, p. 115. The quotation is from L. J. Trinterud, *Forming of an American Tradition*, Philadelphia, 1949, p. 243.

⁷⁶ Noll, “The Search for a Christian Enlightenment in the Era of Samuel Stanhope Smith”, in *Princeton and the Republic, 1768-1822*, p. 20.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p. 34.

⁷⁸ New Jersey Archives, 1st series 26, p. 306.

Thirdly, he revived and regenerated the student philosophical societies – notably the American Whig and Cliosophic Societies – which had been suppressed shortly before his appointment as President and which Professor John Murrin describes as having “achieved vigour and energy during Witherspoon’s administration”. Murrin also points out that such was the strength of the societies’ resources that “their libraries contained far more current materials than the College collection and were much more accessible to undergraduates”;⁷⁹

Finally, as has been the subject of much scholarly output in both Britain and America, Witherspoon quickly and successfully eased out one system of moral philosophy, (based in part on the speculative idealism of Berkeley - who himself had visited America in 1728 – and, in part, on the epistemological scepticism of Hume), in favour of a teaching syllabus grounded in the Scottish Enlightenment, and, to a degree, on the Scottish moral sense (‘Hutchesonian’) and common sense (‘Reidian’) ‘schools’. Both Hutcheson and Reid made their reputations at the University of Glasgow, having occupied at different periods the same chair there.⁸⁰

In a sense, this change of pedagogical orientation was not so radical, or even so unusual, as perhaps it might seem, since the works of Hutcheson, for example, had also been extolled years before by Franklin in formulating his proposals for the College of Philadelphia (later the University of Pennsylvania). Witherspoon’s change of direction in favour of the Glasgow philosophers was not even unique in America at this time. Indeed, Witherspoon’s *Lectures on Moral Philosophy* were to Princeton undergraduates only what the work of another Scotsman and Hutchesonian, Professor David Fordyce of Marischal College, Aberdeen (author of *Elements of Moral Philosophy* – 1754)⁸¹ was to

⁷⁹ John Murrin, Introduction to *Princetonians 1791-1794 A Biographical Dictionary*, ed. J. Jefferson Looney and Ruth L. Woodward, Princeton, 1991, p. xxv. Murrin’s brilliant essay includes a fascinating detailed statistical analysis of the composition of the Princeton student body in Witherspoon’s day and later.

⁸⁰ Reid, like Hutcheson a Presbyterian minister, had succeeded Adam Smith in the chair of moral philosophy at Glasgow in 1764. His impact on Witherspoon and Princeton is ably discussed, and in considerable detail, in an excellent (unpublished) Oxford D.Phil thesis by Matthew Phelps, *John Witherspoon and the Transmission of Common Sense Philosophy from Scotland to America*, 2002. I am indebted to Dr. Phelps for enabling me to access his thesis from a download, since Oxford does not participate in the UK inter-library loans scheme.

⁸¹ See Thomas D. Kennedy’s introduction to the Liberty Fund edition of Fordyce’s *Elements of Moral Philosophy*, Indianapolis, 2003, p. x. Kennedy notes (p. xi) that “in the mid-1730s Fordyce

generations of their counterparts at Harvard. That is not, however, to grudge Witherspoon his great achievement, however much, in the last analysis, his contribution was strictly pedagogical in its impact, rather than specially innovative, in the sense, that is, of transmitting intellectually creative and original ideas. Originality in that sense was never Witherspoon's stock in trade. His debt to Francis Hutcheson in particular - though never fully acknowledged, apart from the inclusion of "Hutchinson's [sic] *Inquiries into the Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* and his *System*" in his list of "some of the most considerable authors, chiefly British" in the "Recapitulation"⁸² printed at the end of the *Lectures on Moral Philosophy* - is all the more curious when his devastating satirical assault on Hutcheson in *Ecclesiastical Characteristics*, many years before, is recalled.⁸³

Witherspoon, let it not be overlooked, had come to Princeton as a provincial Scottish clergyman. He had no previous experience as a teacher at university/college level. His achievement is all the more astonishing when viewed in that light. Of all the many commentators on Witherspoon's pedagogical skills, Morrison is possibly the nearest to the mark in pointing out that Witherspoon's attachment to and preferment of the Scottish (i.e. largely Glasgow) moral and common sense schools was not just an expression of his desire to advance the cause of the New Side and, consequently, to indulge the academic predilections of the College trustees; rather, it was part and parcel of a grander educational ideal that was moulded from his own personal vision of the whole *purpose* of higher education in pre- and post-revolutionary America. In the course of the war with Britain that was to follow, that ideal was not just to remain close to him but to find new expression in his desire to serve his adopted country in every possible way he could.

Noll comments:

By providing Princeton with a philosophical basis derived from Scottish moral philosophy and by removing a New England tradition strongly under the influence of [Jonathan] Edwards, Witherspoon brought Princeton into the mainstream of eighteenth-century higher education.⁸⁴

spent some time in Glasgow, where he heard Francis Hutcheson lecture ...". See also chapter 1. §4 (b), 27-8 above.

⁸² *Selected Writings*, pp. 229-230.

⁸³ E.g. See "Maxim VI" where "all Mr. H--n's pieces" are listed among the "short catalogue of the most necessary and useful books, the thorough understanding of which will make a truly learned moderate man." (*WJW*, 3, p. 232).

⁸⁴ "The Search for a Christian Enlightenment in the Era of Samuel Stanhope Smith", in *Princeton and the Republic, 1768-1822*, p. 47.

Morrison, developing the same theme, reminds us that in adopting the Scottish moral and common sense schools as the main intellectual base of his lectures on moral philosophy, Witherspoon

by siding with Hutcheson against Edwards in favour of the moral sense, [he] supported a moral epistemology that ended up dominating American thinking. ... Witherspoon's training in the Scottish philosophy, in moral sense, and especially in common sense epistemology, could hardly have been better preparation for his distinguished career in American politics.⁸⁵

One of the key texts for a proper understanding of Witherspoon's educational thinking at this early period in his American career is his *Address to the Inhabitants of Jamaica and other West-India Islands on behalf of the College of New Jersey* (1772). In this pamphlet he advertises (in the modern sense, quite literally) the benefits of a College education and "the importance of public seminaries for the instruction of youth" - first, generally because of

their use in every country, their necessity in a new or rising country, and particularly the influence of science in giving a proper direction and full force to industry or enterprise ...⁸⁶

He then proceeds to demonstrate the unique attractions of Princeton to potential students from the West Indies, a part of the world he has clearly identified as a fertile recruiting field. He refers to himself as someone with a special knowledge of British education and, importantly, he makes particular mention of the University of Glasgow (though it is not, *pace* Professor Devine, his *alma mater*):

No man can have a higher opinion of, and not many have a more thorough acquaintance with, the means of education at present in Great Britain than the author of this address, who was born in the neighbourhood of Edinburgh, educated in it, and spent the greatest part of his after life in constant intercourse and great intimacy with the members of the University of Glasgow.⁸⁷

Witherspoon then describes the Princeton curriculum and stresses the curricular importance assigned to mathematics (a new professor had just been appointed) and to other scientific studies, including astronomy - referring specifically to the College's recent acquisition of the Rittenhouse orrery, purchased under the noses of the faculty at rival William Smith's College of Philadelphia. A major objective at Princeton is to seek funds which will be used

⁸⁵ Jeffrey Morrison, *John Witherspoon and the Founding of the American Republic*, Notre Dame, Indiana, 2005, p. 67.

⁸⁶ *WJW*, 4, p. 185.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, p. 188.

to have a greater number of professorships and carry their plan to as great perfection as possible.⁸⁸ However, arguably the most interesting part of the pamphlet relates to Witherspoon's iteration of the advantages conferred by the "independent" character of the College of New Jersey: this is the much quoted section relating to the Princeton "spirit of liberty" in which he also alludes to the issue of "political contention" within an institution avowedly dedicated to the training of ministers - though, ironically, that original (and narrower) mission was already in process of changing under his presidency:

In consequence of this [he means the fact that the College of New Jersey is an autonomous institution, free of government interference],⁸⁹ it may naturally be expected, and we find by experience that hitherto in fact, the spirit of liberty has breathed high and strong in all the members. I would not be understood to say that a seminary of learning ought to enter deeply into political contention; far less would I meanly court favour by professing myself a violent partisan in any present disputes. But surely a constitution which naturally tends to produce a spirit of liberty and independence, even though this should sometimes need to be reined in by prudence and moderation, is infinitely preferable to the dead and vapid state of one whose very existence depends on the nod of those in power.⁹⁰

In other words, though license is of course to be deplored, our students are free, even encouraged, to indulge their political feelings - where reasonable - and, yes, they do actively deploy those feelings, which is generally a good thing, always provided, that is, they don't overstep the ordinary bounds of propriety. Such a policy clearly not only appealed to the student body, and to prospective students, but actually and demonstrably *worked*. Princeton, during Witherspoon's presidency, became - in Wertenbaker's celebrated phrase - "the school of statesmen"⁹¹ such that, of the student body in Witherspoon's time there as president, James Madison (his personal graduate student) became fourth President of the United States, Aaron Burr became Vice-President, ten Princetonians became cabinet members, six were elected to the Continental Congress, twenty-one entered the United States Senate and thirty-nine the House of Representatives, twelve became governors of states, three were appointed to the United States Supreme Court and six attended the Federal Constitutional Convention.⁹²

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, p. 195.

⁸⁹ "The College of New Jersey is altogether independent. It hath received no favour from government but the charter, by the particular friendship of a person now deceased." [*ibid.*, p. 196].

⁹⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 196-7.

⁹¹ Thomas Jefferson Wertenbaker, *Princeton, 1746-1896*, Princeton, 1946, p. 80.

⁹² Quoted in T. M. Devine, *Scotland's Empire 1600-1815*, p. 173.

For his efforts as author of the *Address* Witherspoon was rewarded with controversy heaped on his head. The puff was reprinted in the *New York Gazette*, calling forth a response in the form of a letter from “Causidicus” – according to Collins a King’s College sympathiser who had taken offence at some of Witherspoon’s loftier claims. As for the alleged independence of Nassau Hall, for example, Causidicus pointed out that “turbulence and faction ever have, and probably ever will mark” the actions of independents, witness the reign of Charles II and the recent Boston ongoing. The letter goes on:

... the President’s assertion that the spirit of liberty is strong at Princeton is unnecessary, the students in their public exhibitions having dwelt on British politics to such an extent “and in such a Manner, as to give the Greatest Offence to many who were present”; this spirit of liberty deserves a worse name, and in using such an argument the President is playing *ad populum*.⁹³

Witherspoon replied to this caustic assault in the same newspaper in mild but firm language; he had not meant to offend anyone, least of all other colleges in America. Also he had no family in mind, nor any college, when he had written that Princeton was free of political ties and family influences. But the matter did not end there. A pamphlet was issued around the same time in Philadelphia entitled *Candid Remarks on Dr. Witherspoon’s Address to the Inhabitants of Jamaica, and the other West-India Islands*.⁹⁴ Among the anonymous author’s contentions are an interesting challenge to Witherspoon’s claim that “it would be much more to the advantage of the gentlemen of the West Indies to give their children their grammar school and college education ... in an American seminary ... than to send them to Great Britain”. The anonymous pamphleteer disagrees: Collins paraphrases his assault on Witherspoon:

It is sophistry to say that it is better for West Indians to go to American institutions for their elementary and collegiate training than to Great Britain; the academies of Great Britain have advantages not mentioned and the faculties of the British universities are larger and better and have finer equipment at their disposal.⁹⁵

To that unassailable point Witherspoon, sensibly, made no reply.

The controversy is summed up by Miller’s last word on the subject: in the last analysis, Witherspoon

⁹³ Collins, II, p. 145.

⁹⁴ *ibid.* The pamphlet was said to have been written by the Rev. Thomas B. Chandler of Elizabethtown.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 146.

was more committed to the ideal of the college graduate as a public leader who was prepared to speak to the political problems of contemporary life⁹⁶

than to the more conventional ideas of higher education emphasising the classics, associated as they were infinitely more with the needs of scholarly gentlemen.

5 The politicisation of John Witherspoon

(a) Lectures on Moral Philosophy⁹⁷

That doyen of modern American historians of the eighteenth century and peerless biographer of Benjamin Franklin, Edmund S. Morgan, sums up as follows the clearly discernible shift to an increasing secularization of American politics, away from its formerly religious orientation, over the fifty year period from around 1740 to 1790 and beyond:

A variety of forces, some of them reaching deep into the colonial past, helped to bring about the transformation, but it was so closely associated with the revolt from England that one may properly consider the American Revolution as an intellectual movement, to mean the substitution of political for clerical leadership and of politics for religion as the most challenging area of human thought and endeavour.⁹⁸

For Witherspoon, the process of self-regeneration he was undergoing meant, not of course the wholesale politicisation of his religious convictions, but rather the introduction of the political dimension *into* those convictions. That profound change did not in any way weaken his traditional Presbyterian Christian beliefs. Indeed, far from politics attenuating his faith, that same emphasis on moral regeneration which we saw dominating his faith while an Evangelical minister in Beith and Paisley now became fully harnessed to the American cause.

To understand this transformation fully it is necessary to approach Witherspoon's politicization through some of his own writings over the period of his most vigorous political activity - that is, in the formative years from the early 1770s through to the Declaration of Independence and in the years immediately thereafter. Of particular relevance in that context are (i) his *Lectures on Moral Philosophy* (first published in 1800 but in circulation among the student body at Princeton from as early as 1772), (ii) the first

⁹⁶ *Selected Writings*, p. 23.

⁹⁷ *WJW*, 3, pp. 367-472.

⁹⁸ Edmund S. Morgan, "The American Revolution considered as an Intellectual Movement", in *Paths of American Thought*, ed. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. and Morton M. White, Boston, 1963, p. 11.

three numbers of *The Druid* papers (1776), contributed to Robert Aitken's *The Pennsylvania Magazine*, and, finally, (iii) his great sermon, preached in the Scottish jeremiad tradition, entitled *The Dominion of Providence over the Passions of Men* (also 1776). Inside that remarkably short five to six year time span, the Reverend Dr. John Witherspoon, Scottish minister turned College President, evolved into a revolutionary American politician.

One of the most insightful American Witherspoon scholars of recent years, Jeffrey H. Morrison, believes that

Witherspoon ... stands out as a founder who made a genuine, though mostly unoriginal contribution to moral philosophy in America as well as to its political structure.⁹⁹

However, Morrison appears to contradict that judgment by concluding in the same breath that

Witherspoon almost single-handedly gave a philosophy to the embryonic nation and helped transform a generation of young idealists into hardheaded politicians of the first rank.¹⁰⁰

Alternatively, we might contrast the statement

His mind was more synthetic than original.¹⁰¹

with the enigmatic contrary claim that :

Witherspoon was ... a bona fide moral philosopher of considerable influence in early American thought.¹⁰²

But there is really no contradiction here. Morrison's entirely reasonable point is that while he was not perhaps of the first rank - "compared to several other supposedly more sophisticated founders, Witherspoon is thought to be second-rank"¹⁰³ - his eclectic blend of Scottish enlightenment thinking was, in the circumstances of the period, relevant, appropriate and, above all, highly influential.

Morrison is wholly right when he traces Witherspoon's views on civil and religious liberty - as first expressed in the *Lectures on Moral Philosophy* (which we know were formulated and first delivered to his students within a remarkably short time after his

⁹⁹ *John Witherspoon and the Founding of the American Republic*, p. 69.

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*, p. 51.

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*, p. 68.

¹⁰² *ibid.*, p. 64.

¹⁰³ *ibid.*

arrival in Princeton in 1768)¹⁰⁴ - in the main to Hutcheson and the Scottish moral sense school, even though his ideas may first have been filtered, “refracted” (Scott) or “mediated” (Morrison) through the twin strains of the seventeenth century liberal Whig theorists on the one hand and the Protestant Reformers, notably Calvin, on the other.¹⁰⁵ In the last analysis, one must concede that Witherspoon cannot be regarded as a groundbreaking philosopher in his own right. His place in the history of ideas is that of a competent synthesizer of the philosophical ‘systems’ of others. Sometimes he is extremely superficial in his analyses. With the common sense philosophy of Thomas Reid, in particular, he is “sketchy and incomplete”.¹⁰⁶

Accordingly, while there can be no argument that Witherspoon’s mind was, to use Morrison’s words, “more synthetic than original”, two main points have to be emphasized by way of qualification. First, as Morrison admits, while Witherspoon’s “version” of the best known tenets of the Scottish moral and common sense philosophers may indeed have been “an amalgam” of those selected parts of their thought that best suited his declared purpose, that version still “made excellent ground for an American career in politics”. Above all, Morrison is not extravagant when he writes:

Certain tenets of the Scottish philosophy that Witherspoon held and taught helped transform him from an apolitical cleric and educator into a practical American politician. Those tenets gave him a moral epistemology identical to that of other founders, particularly Jefferson, which in turn opened political doors to him and his students in the infant republic. His unique and powerful position in the colonies allowed Witherspoon to become the principal transatlantic aqueduct of the Scottish Enlightenment philosophy into early America.¹⁰⁷

And, for a Scot from Paisley like myself, it is satisfying to concur with Morrison that it is precisely that enlightened view of Witherspoon as “the principal transatlantic aqueduct” (i.e. of Scottish eighteenth century thought) that is now beginning to inform and, indeed dominate, the modern, and overdue, reappraisal of John Witherspoon, American.

¹⁰⁴ The earliest complete copy of the *Lectures on Moral Philosophy* is dated 1772 and bears the name of the student Andrew Hunter, Jr. (Princeton University Library).

¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, it is important to stress that Witherspoon had read and studied *all* his sources in the original and that there is no question of him having taken the easy way out by simply regurgitating such as von Pufendorf, Shaftesbury, Hobbes, Locke *et al* second hand, as it were, i.e. *via* the writings of Francis Hutcheson. That was not Witherspoon’s way.

¹⁰⁶ Jack A. Scott, *An Annotated Edition of Lectures on Moral Philosophy*, Newark, p. 33.

¹⁰⁷ *John Witherspoon and the Founding of the American Republic*, p. 51.

In the form we have them today Witherspoon's *Lectures on Moral Philosophy* were never intended for publication. However, they constitute an important reference point in the making of Witherspoon as an American. When read together with *The Druid* papers and the *Dominion of Providence* sermon, it immediately strikes us, to borrow another phrase from Morrison, "how very American Witherspoon appears".

For our purpose, the most relevant of the *Lectures* are the following:

Lecture X - *Of Politics*¹⁰⁸

Much has been written about the sources and derivation of Witherspoon's Lecture X in the *Lectures on Moral Philosophy - Of Politics* - and his indebtedness for much of the lecture's content to the Scottish (Glasgow) moral philosophy school and, in particular, to Francis Hutcheson's posthumously published *A System of Moral Philosophy* (1755), and also to Locke *via* Hutcheson. Indeed, his modern editor thinks that Witherspoon incorporated so much material in his *Lectures* from Hutcheson that it "borders on plagiarism".¹⁰⁹ Others, notably Gideon Mailer, think that his apparent dependence on Locke/Hutcheson is "far less Hutchesonian than most ... have suggested", taking the view that his lectures offer no more than a survey of the essence of what he himself believes his students should take particular notice:

Witherspoon self-consciously assumed the mantle of a "philosopher" to list Hutchesonian propositions for his New Jersey students, but he did not adopt them himself or speak of them approvingly. ... These lectures' passive reference to the differing human philosophies of George Berkeley, Hume, Hutcheson, Locke, and Reid taught a wider lesson that could only confirm the specific message of revelation: "I do not know any thing that serves more for the support of religion than to see from the different and opposite systems of philosophers, that there is nothing certain in their schemes, but what is coincident with the word of God".¹¹⁰

The lecture first invites students to suppose what is termed "the state of natural liberty antecedent to society" to be a reality; he then enumerates "the perfect rights in a state of natural liberty" and these include "a right to life", "a right to personal liberty" and "a power over his own life not to throw it away unnecessarily but for a good reason". He concludes:

¹⁰⁸ *WJW*, 3, pp. 416-424.

¹⁰⁹ Mark A. Noll, quoting Scott, in *America's God From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln*, Oxford and New York, 2002, p. 106.

¹¹⁰ Gideon Mailer, *Anglo-Scottish Union and John Witherspoon's American Revolution*, William and Mary Quarterly, 3d Series, Volume LXVII, Number 4, October 2010, p. 721.

It is easy to perceive that all these rights belong to a state of natural liberty, and that it would be unjust and unequal for any individual to hinder or abridge another in any one of them without consent or unless it be in just retaliation for injury received.¹¹¹

Witherspoon proceeds to consider “society”, defined as

an association or compact of any number of persons to deliver up or abridge some part of their natural rights in order to have the strength of the united body to protect the remaining and to bestow [on] others.¹¹²

And for the political implications, which would not have been lost on his young audience, it is necessary to quote Witherspoon *in extenso* –

When persons believe themselves upon the whole rather oppressed than protected in any society, they think they are at liberty either to rebel against it or fly from it, which plainly implies that their being subject to it arose from a tacit consent. Besides in migrations and planting of colonies in all ages, we see traces of an original contract and consent taken to the principles of union.

From this view of society as a voluntary compact results this principle, that men are originally and by nature equal, and consequently free. Liberty either cannot or ought not to be given up in the social state: the end of the union should be the protection of liberty, as far as it is a blessing. ... [RLC’s italics]

Some observe that few nations or societies in the world have had their constitutions formed on the principles of liberty: perhaps not one-twentieth of the states that have been established since the beginning of the world have been settled upon principles altogether favourable to liberty. This is no just argument against natural liberty and the rights of mankind, for it is certain that the public good has always been the real aim of the people in general in forming and entering into any society. It has always constantly been at least the professed aim of legislators. ...

Reason teaches natural liberty, and common utility recommends it.¹¹³

Lecture XII – *Of Civil Society*¹¹⁴

In his annotated edition of the *Lectures* Jack A. Scott makes the point that in this lecture Witherspoon draws more heavily on Hutcheson’s *System* than at any other place in his *Lectures*.¹¹⁵ The lecture resumes consideration of the Lockean/Hutchesonian premise that

¹¹¹ *WJW*, 3, pp. 417-8.

¹¹² *ibid.*

¹¹³ *ibid.*, pp. 419-20.

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 430-39.

¹¹⁵ *An Annotated Edition of Lectures on Moral Philosophy*, p.147.

society “always supposes an expressed or implied contract or agreement” and, therefore, it should be read as a direct follow-on to Lecture X, *Of Politics*.¹¹⁶

Witherspoon considers the rights of rulers and their subjects, having first established that -

Whatever is the form of government in any society, the members may be divided into two classes, the *rulers* and the *ruled*, the magistrates and subjects.¹¹⁷

Of particular interest to the contemporary political situation in America, is his idea of the “foundation of society”, that is the notion of “consent” being integral to the social contract that must exist between the governors and the governed, the rulers and the people. There will be two exceptions to the customary rules of consent, viz.:

1. ... in general it is but a bad maxim that we may force people for their good. All lovers of power will be disposed to think that even a violent use of it is for the public good.
2. Though people have actually consented to any form of government, if they have been essentially deceived in the nature and operation of the laws, if they are found to be pernicious and destructive of the ends of the union, they may certainly break up the society, recall their obligation, and resettle the whole upon a better footing.¹¹⁸

In the part of the lecture sub-titled “Of the Different Forms of Government”, Witherspoon enumerates these “simple forms” as (1) monarchy; (2) aristocracy; (3) democracy. This three-fold division of government was fairly widespread in eighteenth century political philosophy and Witherspoon’s remarks here directly echo those of Locke and Montesquieu although they also (as Pocock, for example, would have approved) go all the way back to Aristotle in the *Politics*. His thoughts here are largely unoriginal, therefore, but it should be pointed out that the language in which he arranges them is highly significant in the context of the heightened political tensions in America in the early 1770s, that is, around the time the lectures were first delivered. Having offered descriptions of these simple forms, he concludes;

If the true notion of liberty is the prevalence of law and order, and the security of individuals, none of the simple forms are favorable to it.

Monarchy everyone knows is but another name for tyranny, where the arbitrary will of one capricious man disposes of the lives and properties of all ranks.

¹¹⁶ The untitled Lecture XI examines certain non-political issues relating to domestic society such as marriage (a favourite concern of Witherspoon), the “relation of parents and children” (also a recurring interest) and the “relation of master and servant”.

¹¹⁷ *WJW*, 3, p. 431.

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 432.

Aristocracy always makes vassals of the inferior ranks, who have no hand in government, and the great commonly rule with greater severity than absolute monarchs.¹¹⁹

However, “pure democracy” is not the answer either: it

cannot subsist long, nor be carried far into the departments of state --- it is very subject to caprice and the madness of popular rage.¹²⁰

Accordingly, borrowing from Locke and Montesquieu,

... it appears that every good form of government must be complex [as opposed to “simple”] so that the one principle may check the other.¹²¹

We then come to the real heart of the lecture: Witherspoon’s philosophy – second-hand though it may be – of the “advantage of civil liberty”. He conceives of the notion of the residing within every government of “a supreme irresistible power lodged somewhere, in king, senate, or people” – that is, in monarchy, aristocracy or democracy. There are, necessarily, scarcely any limits to the extension of such authority in a “social state”. However, there is a crucial exception to that general rule –

If the supreme power wherever lodged [i.e. king, senate or the people] come to be exercised in a manifestly tyrannical manner, the subjects may certainly if in their power resist and overthrow it.¹²²

In other words, the *right of resistance* may be undeniable.¹²³ Here, it is crucial to point out that though large parts of Lecture XII are highly derivative, this section in particular is an example of Witherspoon “not parroting someone’s else’s thought”. That is important, since he makes much the same point regarding the right of resistance “time and time again”. In the same context, - and by way of brief digression - it should also be noted that the question has sometimes been asked: Was Witherspoon conceivably harking back here, not just to Locke, but also to the seventeenth century Church of Scotland minister, Covenanting spokesman and political theorist, Samuel Rutherford, whose *Lex, Rex: The Law and the Prince* (1644) stood for years as a textbook of armed resistance to a hostile

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 434.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 435.

¹²¹ *ibid.*

¹²² *ibid.*, p. 436.

¹²³ Scott comments that “no topic engendered more controversy in seventeenth and eighteenth century England.” Sir Robert Filmer and Hobbes denied that right but Hutcheson and Locke/Hutcheson were clear on that point, that to rebel *was* an option in appropriate circumstances – *Annotated Edition*, p. 149.

monarchy, in Rutherford's case, of course, to Charles I? John Coffey does not think so,¹²⁴ though it is worth noting that Witherspoon's debt to the 1643 alliance between the Kirk and the English Parliament, and the resultant drafting of the Westminster Confession of Faith, has recently inspired renewed scholarly interest of some distinction.¹²⁵

At the same time, however, Witherspoon temporises by noting that that extreme measure should be contemplated only

when it becomes manifestly more advantageous to unsettle the government altogether, than to submit to tyranny. ... If it be asked who must judge when the government may be resisted, I answer the subjects in general, every one for himself. This may seem to be making them both judge and party, but there is no remedy. It would be denying the privilege altogether, to make the oppressive ruler the judge.¹²⁶

There follow some of the most monumental lines in Witherspoon's prose, all the more remarkable when it is considered that the *Lectures on Moral Philosophy* were never, in the form we have them today, approved by him for publication. This part of the Lecture really needs to be read out loud – in the same way as, we noted earlier, the cadences and periodic sentences of the greatest of the sermons have to be read out loud :

¹²⁴ John Coffey, * citing F. Schaeffer in *A Christian Manifesto*, Winchester, IL, 1981, pp. 105-6 (wherein Schaeffer confidently states that Witherspoon “knew and stood consciously in the stream of Samuel Rutherford”), declares that “contrary to its [Schaeffer's book's] assertions, there is no evidence that either Locke or Witherspoon drew on Rutherford's ideas. As far as we know, neither writer owned a copy of *Lex, Rex* or quoted Rutherford even once. It would seem that Schaeffer was misled by the claims of J. Macleod, *Scottish Theology*, Edinburgh, 1943, pp. 71-3.” Nevertheless, it should not be overlooked that Witherspoon's grandfather had actually signed the 1643 document. Peter Judson Richards similarly has to conclude that “no tangible evidence exists to support a causal link between them [Locke and Rutherford]”, but Richards, going down fighting, indicates that another scholar (Winthrop H. Hudson) had asserted that “the fundamental identity of essential points in the two theories of resistance suggests Rutherford – or for that matter, any other orthodox Calvinist – might as well have provided the outline for Locke's theory of resistance.”- “The Law written in Their Hearts”?: Rutherford and Locke on Nature, Government and Resistance”, in *Journal of Law and Religion*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (2002-2003), pp. 151-189. The source Richards cites is Winthrop H. Hudson, “Locke: Heir of Puritan Political Theorists”, in *Calvinism and the Political Order*, ed. George L. Hunt & John T. McNeill, London, 1965. A final conjectural point of interest: Gordon Donaldson points out that Rutherford himself at one point in his fortunes in 1637 “did not rule out emigration as a solution of his own difficulties: ‘If I saw a call for New England, I would follow it.’” [*Letters of Samuel Rutherford*, 2 vols., ed. A.A. Bonmar, Edinburgh, 1863, i, p. 376] – Donaldson, *Scottish Church History*, Edinburgh, 1985, p. 210.

* *Politics, Religion and the British Revolutions – The mind of Samuel Rutherford*, Cambridge, 1997, p. 12. See also Coffey's excellent DNB article on Rutherford - Oxford, online edition, 2004-10.

¹²⁵ Most notably by Gideon Mailer. See note 109 above.

¹²⁶ *WJW*, 3, pp. 436-7.

The once famous controversy on passive obedience and non-resistance, seems now in our country to be pretty much over; what the advocates for submission used to say was, that to teach the lawfulness of resisting a government in any instance, and to make the rebel the judge, is subversive of all order, and must subject a state to perpetual sedition; to which I answer, to refuse this inherent right in every man, is to establish injustice and tyranny, and leave every good subject without help, as a tame prey to the ambition and rapacity of others. No doubt men may abuse the privilege, yet this does not make it void. Besides it is not till a whole people rise, that resistance has any effect, and it is not easy to suppose that a whole people would rise against their governors, unless when they have really received very great provocation.¹²⁷

This is the new politicised John Witherspoon, putative American statesman – a far cry indeed from the Paisley minister who deplored the introduction of politics into the pulpit.

The lecture subsides on a quieter, less rhetorical note:

What then is the advantage of civil liberty? I suppose it chiefly consists in its tendency to put in motion all the human powers. Therefore it promotes industry, and in this respect happiness, -- produces every latent quality; and improves the human mind. -- Liberty is the nurse of riches, literature and heroism.¹²⁸

Lecture XIII - *Of the Law of Nature and Nations*¹²⁹

This lecture is another ‘amalgam’. In essence it is a popular distillation by Witherspoon, in his own ‘pulpit’ language, of Grotius (*De Jure Belli ac Pacis*, 1625) and Samuel von Pufendorf (*De Officio Hominis et Civis*, 1673), ‘refracted’ through Hutcheson’s *System*. Some of Hutcheson’s actual words are ‘borrowed’ by Witherspoon without acknowledgement, even though he does include Hutcheson as one of his recommended authors in the “Recapitulation” with which the *Lectures on Moral Philosophy* conclude.

He begins by considering the “law of *nature* and *nations*” and having posed the question “Is there any such law?”, he concludes:

If there are natural rights of men, there are natural rights of nations. Bodies politic, in this view, do not differ in the least from individuals.¹³⁰

For the purposes of this study, however, the most interesting feature of the lecture is its extremely close similarity to the wording of parts of the Druid papers numbers II and III.

¹²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 437.

¹²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 439.

¹²⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 439-447.

¹³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 439.

Here, the chronology is all important since the lectures date from 1772 at the earliest and the Druid pieces from June and July 1776 –number III in the very month in which the Declaration of Independence was signed, with their author among the signers. The relative obscurity of the Druid papers may explain why even the meticulous Collins merely notes that both the “basic idea” of Lecture XIII and Druid number III is essentially the same, without pointing out that (a) more than simply sharing the same “basic idea”, the language of some equivalent sections is near-identical, and (b) Lecture XIII is actually a conflation of Druid numbers II and III. Both Scott and Miller fail to exploit the correspondence in content among the three separate pieces, and they miss the full extent of Witherspoon’s (Druid) borrowing *from his own source* (Lecture XIII). The theme of the lecture is summarised below where Druid papers number II and III are discussed.

(b) Witherspoon, Paine, “The Druid” papers and *The Pennsylvania Magazine*

There can be few literary relationships so preposterously incompatible as that between the Reverend Dr. John Witherspoon and Thomas Paine. Yet, anecdotally at least, they were both ‘employed’, in varying senses of the term, by the Philadelphia printer and publisher originally from Paisley, Robert Aitken, on his periodical publication *The Pennsylvania Magazine*. In the next chapter of this study we shall consider how Aitken’s serial venture became one of the symbolic organs of liberty in the course of its brief life and how his initial determination to keep politics out of his magazine was gradually eroded, and ultimately cast aside, by the sheer pace and pressure of unfolding events. Richardson calls Witherspoon “one of the ‘promoters’ of the magazine”, but it is uncertain what that actually meant.¹³¹ There is certainly no evidence from Aitken’s waste book that he was paid for any contribution, although it remains possible that some of his many purchases from Aitken’s bookstore, both privately and on behalf of the College of New Jersey, were made on special terms.

Witherspoon was certainly a major contributor to the magazine, always using a pen name – “X.Y.”, “Epaminondas”, and much later, “The Druid”. His most frequently used pseudonym is “Epaminondas” (six pieces). The subjects covered by Epaminondas include *Letters on Education*, *Reflexions on Marriage* and three essays, including one

¹³¹ Lyon N. Richardson, *A History of Early American Magazines 1741-1789*, New York, 1931, p. 183. See Appendix H.

entitled *On Public Speaking*. Richardson and Pitcher should be consulted for a full bibliography of Witherspoon's *Pennsylvania Magazine* articles. He also contributed a scientific article, signed "J.W.", entitled *A Few Thoughts on Space, Dimension, and the Divisibility of Matter in Infinitum* (May 1776, pp. 225-9). The piece incurred the wrath of the scientist David Rittenhouse who, writing anonymously, indignantly sent in a letter that appeared in the next number effectively demolishing Witherspoon's hypothesis (June 1776, pp. 282-3).

If there ever *was* any, no correspondence has survived between Paine and Witherspoon. We know nothing, for example, about their time together as 'employees' of Aitken. As for Witherspoon's attitude towards Paine, all the signs point to his having entertained a cordial dislike for the hard-drinking, opinionated Englishman. When Paine was nominated by John Adams¹³² in 1777 for appointment as secretary to the Congressional Committee on Foreign Affairs Witherspoon had objected strenuously, accusing Paine of having "bad character" and having mocked in *Common Sense* the doctrine of original sin and other tenets of orthodox Christianity.¹³³ But there were other reasons behind Witherspoon's assault on the proposal. Paine, as (as we shall assume he *was* in fact) 'editor' of *The Pennsylvania Magazine*, had struck out some pro-colonial references, alleging they were "too free".¹³⁴ Despite what Witherspoon (presciently, in the light of what we know of Paine's much later writings) saw as an anti-Christian element in Paine's famous pamphlet, he later defended the central political thrust of the work, writing under the pseudonym "Aristides".¹³⁵ *Common Sense* may have "wanted polish" in parts, he said, and "sometimes failed in grammar, but never in perspicuity".¹³⁶

¹³² See also the highly critical note on *Common Sense* provided by Witherspoon in his fast day sermon, *The Dominion of Providence over the Passions of Men* (1776) below. In time, of course, Adams, too, came round to an even harsher detestation of Paine. By 1805 he wrote: "I do not know whether any man in the world has had more influence on its inhabitants or affairs for the last thirty years than Tom Paine. There can be no severer satire on the age. For such a mongrel between pig and puppy, begotten by a wild boar on a bitch wolf, never before in any age of the world was suffered by the poltroonery of mankind, to run through such a career of mischief." (quoted by Morrison, *John Witherspoon and the Founding of the American Republic*, p. 54).

¹³³ Collins, *President Witherspoon*, II, p. 25.

¹³⁴ *ibid.*, (according to John Jay).

¹³⁵ "The author of *Common Sense*", writes Aristides, "did not write his book to shew that we ought to resist the unconstitutional claims of Great Britain, which we had all determined to do long before; he wrote it to shew that we ought not to seek or wait for a reconciliation, which in his

It is important to interpolate here that despite its phenomenal success and huge sales, *Common Sense* provoked much more severe criticism than Witherspoon's comments which were concentrated on – as he perceived it – Paine's naïve ignorance of elements of Christian orthodoxy. As the latest Harvard *wunderkind*, Professor Jasanoff, has observed, the most trenchant of that written criticism came from the Irish loyalist, Charles Inglis, (later Bishop of Nova Scotia), who, in two long pamphlets published successively in New York and Philadelphia in 1776, wrote of Paine as “the deceiver”, of his book as a formula leading to anarchy, and of independence as a sure recipe for national decline.¹³⁷

Some months after the departure of Paine as Aitken's editor – and at a time in the magazine's short history when it is entirely possible that Witherspoon assisted the publisher in a more ‘front-of-house’ role – he contributed the first of three articles under the pen name of “The Druid”. These are among the most powerful examples of Witherspoon's ‘regeneration’ as an outspoken defender of the principles that galvanized Americans to wage war and, in the process, to declare their independence from Great Britain. There are seven individual papers signed “The Druid”, but we are concerned here only with the first three, those that appeared in successive monthly numbers of *The Pennsylvania Magazine* from May through to the concluding number of the serial in July 1776.¹³⁸ Witherspoon laid the Druid series aside after 1776 and only resumed work on them – but then in a generally lighter tone and with relatively less grave topics – in 1781 when the first three were reprinted, together with four additional numbers, in *The Pennsylvania Journal*.

In the first Druid paper,¹³⁹ written in (for Witherspoon) an uncharacteristically ‘lighter’ style, the author begins with an enigmatic explanation as to why he chose his strange

opinion, is now become both impracticable and unprofitable, but to establish a fixed regular government, and provide for ourselves.” (*WJW*, 4, pp. 311-12.)

¹³⁶ Cited in Morrison, *John Witherspoon and the Founding of the American Republic*, p. 60.

¹³⁷ Maya Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles, the Loss of America and the Remaking of the British Empire*, London and New York, 2011, p. 30. The two pamphlets by Inglis cited by her are *The Deceiver Unmasked; or, Loyalty and Interest united; in answer to a pamphlet entitled Common sense. By a loyal American*, New York, 1776; and, *The True Interest of America Impartially Stated, in Certain Stictures [sic] on a Pamphlet intituled Common Sense. By an American.*, Philadelphia, 1776. A second edition, correcting the typo howler in the title, came out later in the same year.

¹³⁸ pp. 205-09, 253-57 and 301-05. They were reprinted in *The Pennsylvania Journal* of February 14, March 14 and March 21 1781, with four additional papers added. See also Collins, *President Witherspoon*, II, pp. 200-203.

¹³⁹ *The Druid, Number I*, (*WJW*, 4, pp. 425-431).

pseudonym: it was suggested, he says, by “the place which is now, and is likely to be, my residence while I continue on earth”. He is referring to his private residence “Tusculum” (where he was to die on November 15, 1794), a name probably from Cicero whose “Tusculan epistles” would have been well known to Witherspoon. He describes his house as “small but neat” (as indeed it is, for it is still there, not so small and nowadays in private ownership, and not far from Nassau Hall) and “in a pleasant, retired situation, surrounded with woods”. He is, he tells us, aged 50 (he was 53 when he wrote the piece) and he describes himself as “born and educated in Great Britain”, having had “all the advantage I could receive from a long residence in one of the most celebrated seats of learning in that happy kingdom”.

After (ironically) attacking “satire and invective” as a way of writing, that serves merely to heighten “the prevalence of envy and malignity in the bulk of mankind” – yet more proof, be it noted, of the enigmatic nature of Witherspoon’s life and career when one considers the high satire of the *Ecclesiastical Characteristics* written 23 years previously - he then announces the purpose behind the papers:

The general subject of these papers shall be the philosophy of human nature and of human life; ... Literature and morals, arts and industry, shall be my chief themes ... in handling all these subjects, I shall have a particular view to the state and interest of this rising country. As in youth the human frame wears its loveliest form; as the spring is the most charming season of the revolving year: so, a country newly planted, and every day advancing to a maturer state, affords the highest delight to a contemplative philosopher, and is, at the same time, the strongest invitation to activity and usefulness.¹⁴⁰

Of course, he continues, some will complain that now is not the time for such writing. Instead,

... “they will say the time calls not for speculation but action”:
When liberty, property and life are at stake, we must not think of being scholars, but soldiers.¹⁴¹

However, he protests, “these are mistaken reflections” and he adds the words, so typical of Witherspoon’s prose at this time;

Besides, I am much mistaken if the time is not just at hand, when there shall be greater need than ever in America, for the most accurate discussion of the principles of society, the rights of nations,

¹⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 429.

¹⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 430.

and the policy of states; all of which shall have a place in the subsequent numbers of this paper. ... He who makes a people *virtuous*, makes them *invincible*.¹⁴²

In the June number he turns to the topic of waging war.¹⁴³ He informs us that since his first piece he has had second thoughts on “the subject of these meditations” and has been pressed by others who have told him

... something of this kind [i.e. “what relates to this important struggle”] is expected from me, and that if it is long withheld, it will be difficult to avoid suspicion from the warmer sons of liberty.¹⁴⁴

And, he goes on:

... I shall beg leave to make some remarks as a scholar, and as a citizen of the world, on *the manner of carrying on war*.¹⁴⁵

On everyone’s lips has been the extent to which newspapers have been filled with complaints about the conduct of our enemies and, in particular, their “acting savagely and barbarously” and “being guilty of unnatural cruelty”. But, echoing moral philosophy Lecture XIII, if they are acting contrary to the laws of war, as is claimed, what are these laws?⁹

If there is any such law, it is certainly very justly denominated, by civilians, *the law of nature and nations*. Of nature, because its principles are to be derived from the state of natural or universal liberty, and personal independence; and of nations, because there is no person in such a state at present, excepting nations or large bodies, who consider themselves as independent of each other. Now, that there is such a law, I think is evident, not only from the universal acknowledgment of men, and the practice of nations from the earliest ages, but from the nature of the thing. If there are any duties binding upon men to each other, in a state of natural liberty, the same are due from nation to nation. Bodies politic do not in this circumstance, differ from individuals.¹⁴⁶

He continues:

The single purpose of society, indeed, is to protect the individual, and to give him the strength of the public arm, in defence of his just and natural right.¹⁴⁷

At this point, we are treated to another graphic example of Witherspoon’s dramatic ‘pulpit’ oratory in words of purple prose. The terminology is borrowed in the main from Lecture XIII and there, in part, from Francis Hutcheson. Only from *Witherspoon’s* pen the message is particularly shocking:

¹⁴² *ibid.*

¹⁴³ *The Druid, Number II*, (*WJW*, 4, pp. 431-38).

¹⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p. 134.

¹⁴⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 433-34.

¹⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 434.

... supposing nations engaged in a war, which they believe on both sides to be just, let us ask, What are the means by which this war is to be carried on? The first and most obvious answer is, By all manner of force or open violence; and the most able warrior is presumed to be the one that can invent weapons the most deadly and destructive. It is admitted also on all hands, that force may be used, not only against the persons and goods of rulers, but of every member of the hostile state. This may seem hard, that innocent subjects of a state should suffer for the folly and indiscretion of the rulers, or of other members of the same state. But it is often unavoidable. The whole individuals that compose a state, are considered but as one body. It would be impossible for an enemy to distinguish the guilty from the innocent. When men submit to a government, they risk their own persons and possessions in the same bottom with the whole, in return for the benefits of society.¹⁴⁸

In another example of Witherspoon's capacity for the unexpected, he quotes no less an authority as "the celebrated Dr. Robertson of Edinburgh",¹⁴⁹ once among the generality of targets of his mischievous lampoonery of Moderatism in *Ecclesiastical Characteristics*. The quotation is from Robertson's famous SPCK sermon, referring to his professed view that "there is much more gentleness and humanity in the manner of carrying on war than formerly". In all of the many quoted examples of Witherspoon's enigmatic inconsistencies, this is one of the most striking.¹⁵⁰

The Druid goes on : despite the "comparative humanity" of modern times, it remains true

That all acts of cruelty which have no tendency to weaken the resisting force, are contrary to reason and religion, and therefore to the law of nature and nations. The end of war is to obtain justice, and restore peace, therefore whatever tends to lessen or destroy the force of the enemy, must be permitted. It is in this view alone that the capture of private property is allowed and justified. But to take lives without necessity, and even to treat prisoners with oppression or insult, above all to distress or torture the weaker sex, or the helpless infant, ought to be detested by every nation professing the gospel.¹⁵¹

Having then referred to the employment of Indians by the British "upon the back settlements" - "an act of extreme and unjustifiable barbarity" - and the stirring up of slaves "to rebel against their masters", as well as suborning a master's servants "to

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.* This section is almost word for word identical with Lecture XIII. See *WJW*, 3, p. 442.

¹⁴⁹ William Robertson (1721-1793), a distinguished historian, was principal of the University of Edinburgh from 1762 to 1792 and undisputed leader of the Moderate wing within the Kirk of whose General Assembly he was elected moderator in 1763. He wrote an incomplete and largely Eurocentric *History of America* (London, two volumes, 1777) which was concerned with Spanish America only on account of the outbreak of the American war terminating his work in the context of the British colonies. Although the wording of this section is also almost identical and common to both pieces, Witherspoon's specific reference to Robertson - inside inverted commas - is to be found only in Druid Number III. See Jeffrey R. Smitten's contribution on Robertson to the Oxford *DNB*, online edition, 2004-2010.

¹⁵⁰ *WJW*, 4, p. 435.

¹⁵¹ *ibid.*, p. 436

assassinate him privately”, these are to be “universally condemned”. The piece concludes with Witherspoon giving it as his “opinion”, that

burning and destroying houses, where there is no fortress, as has been in some instances done, deserves all the epithets of barbarous, savage and inhuman, that have been bestowed upon it, either by those who have suffered, or those who have felt in their behalf.¹⁵²

In the third and last of the papers by “The Druid”¹⁵³ to appear in Aitken’s magazine, in the July 1776 number (its swansong), Witherspoon begins his essay by saying that he has still something to add to the subject of his previous piece concerning “*the just and lawful means* of carrying on war.” As we shall see, in some ways, it replicates part of the argument in *Common Sense* – published to enormous popular acclaim in January that year – and it can be argued that, in sentiment at least, the essay is the most ‘Paineite’ of the three discussed here. Paradoxically, it is also in its construction and design, intentionally, the closest to a sermon – even to the extent of its having, “as divines would say”, an “application”.

The Druid discusses the distinction between foreign and civil wars. Regarding the latter,

... it has always been found that civil wars have been carried on with a rage and animosity much greater than those of independant [sic] nations. Acts of cruelty have been much more frequent while they lasted; and after peace has taken place, the alienation of mind and inward resentment has been much greater and of longer continuance.¹⁵⁴

Not only that, a civil war

touches the people more universally, than war with a foreign kingdom.¹⁵⁵

Another characteristic of civil wars is their sheer barbarity, the “hateful or contemptible idea which the one side ... often entertains of the other”, for –

... if once a man allow himself to hate another heartily, there is no answering for what he will do to him, nor is the natural humanity of his disposition the least security against his going to excess.¹⁵⁶

He instances several examples of this from history – all in the context of the Reformation – and that leads him, finally, to “the application”. He turns to the increasingly bitter war with Great Britain. It is the most revealing section of all in the Druid papers in that it resonates with Witherspoon’s own instinctive interpretations of (Protestant Christian)

¹⁵² *ibid.*, p. 438.

¹⁵³ *The Druid, Number III*, (*WJW*, 4, pp. 439-445).

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 441.

¹⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 442.

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.*

common sense. Further, as an important historical source of contemporary American opinion, published as it is in the month when the Declaration of Independence was signed, and written by one of the ‘signers’ himself, Witherspoon’s words are authentic, fascinating and deserving of the closest analysis:

I do truly think myself, in my present retirement (begging the reader’s pardon) not ill-qualified, in point of impartiality, for handling this subject, and applying it to the present contest between Great-Britain and America. I am past the age of bearing arms, and whatever I have done before, shall probably never again wield any other weapons, than those improperly so called, the tongue and the pen. I do clearly see the perfect justice and great importance of the claim on the one hand, and easily conceive the power of prejudice on the other. *On the part of America, there was not the most distant thought of subverting the government, or hurting the interest of the people of Great-Britain, but of defending their own privileges from unjust encroachment; there was not the least desire of withdrawing their allegiance from the common sovereign, till it became absolutely necessary, and indeed was his own choice:* [RLC’s italics] On the other hand, I can easily conceive that those who have been long accustomed to subjection, and from whom it is really due, should not suddenly enter into the reasons of exempting a people, otherwise situated, from the same burden. They are therefore of course easily deceived by false or imperfect accounts of a distant country, and insensibly biassed by the phraseology constantly used, particularly the terms rebels and rebellion. Upon the whole, as I am now to dismiss this subject, and prosecute the plan laid down in my first number, I shall conclude with saying, That humanity is the noblest attendant on true valour; and that he will probably fight most bravely, who never fights till it is necessary, and ceases to fight as soon as the necessity is over.¹⁵⁷

The section I have italicised is important in clarifying the direction of Witherspoon’s own thinking on independence at this relatively early juncture in the war when the instrument that made it a reality was scarcely dry on the parchment. It is in some ways a veritable paraphrase, albeit employing certainly *different* rhetorical devices, of Paine’s famous conclusion in *Common Sense* :

Every thing that is right or natural pleads for separation. The blood of the slain, the weeping voice of nature cries, ‘TIS TIME TO PART.’¹⁵⁸

The notable difference between Paine and Witherspoon is essentially rhetorical and lies in Witherspoon’s use of formulaic language (‘on the one hand, on the other’) expressing the view that Americans, understandably in his opinion, may have been led astray on occasion “by false or imperfect accounts of a distant country”. Yet, independence from Britain, though never the first aim, was, he concludes, in the end, “absolutely necessary”. Although it would be difficult to conceive of two persons more opposed to each other in

¹⁵⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 444-45..

¹⁵⁸ Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (Philadelphia, Robert Bell, January 1776) in *The Thomas Paine Reader*, ed. Michael Foot and Isaac Kramnick, London, 1987, p. 83.

temperament, outlook and lifestyle than Paine and Witherspoon, here is a rare example of them arriving at precisely the same political conclusion.

(c) *The Dominion of Providence over the Passions of Men* (1776)¹⁵⁹

In August 1774 Witherspoon had written an essay entitled *Thoughts on American Liberty*,¹⁶⁰ in the course of which he submitted a number of proposals for the consideration of the meeting of the First Continental Congress to be held in Philadelphia in September. These included a recommendation to Congress

To profess ... our loyalty to the King, and our backwardness to break our connection with Great Britain, if we are not forced by their unjust impositions.¹⁶¹

Witherspoon provides a clear foretaste of what would come to be expected of him in relation to his uncompromising attitude towards the colonists' rights:

The Congress is, properly speaking, the representative of the great body of the people of North America. ... There is not the least reason as yet, to think that either the king, the parliament, or even the people of Great-Britain, have been able to enter into the great principles of universal liberty, or are willing to hear the discussion of the point of right, without prejudice. ... We are firmly determined never to submit to it [i.e. the "British parliament"], and do deliberately prefer war with all its horrors, and even extermination itself to slavery, rivetted on us and our posterity.¹⁶²

Collins believes this essay "marks the completion" of Witherspoon's "transformation into an American" :

¹⁵⁹ The sermon is in *WJW*, 3, pp. 17-46. Until the London edition of 1778 *Dominion of Providence* was bound in with another, short work by Witherspoon entitled *An Address to the Natives of Scotland residing in America*. In that pamphlet he writes: "It has often been said, that the present is likely to be an important aera to America. I think we may say much more; it is likely to be an important aera in the history of mankind. ... In America we see a rich and valuable soil and an extensive country, taken possession of by the power, the learning, and the wealth of Europe. For this reason it is now exhibiting to the world a scene which was never seen before. ... I think that every candid and liberal mind ought to rejoice in the measures lately taken through the States of America, and particularly the late declaration of independence, as it will not only give union and force to the measures of defence while they are necessary, but lay a foundation for the birth of millions, and the future improvement of a great part of the globe. ... I am confident the independence of America will, in the end, be to the real advantage of the island of Great Britain. Were this even otherwise, it would be a weak argument against the claim of justice. ... But [in a reference to his active encouragement of emigration from Scotland to America] the circumstance which I apprehend will constitute most to the interest of Great Britain in American Independence is, its influence in peopling and enriching this great continent." [The *Address* is in *WJW*, 3, pp. 47-60. The section quoted is on pp. 50, 51, 54, 54-5 and 56.]

¹⁶⁰ *WJW*, 4, pp. 297-300.

¹⁶¹ *ibid.*, p. 298.

¹⁶² *ibid.*, p. 297 and pp. 298-9.

This essay, Dr. Witherspoon's first known writing on the American controversy, marks the completion of his transformation into an American. We have his own statement that he did not obtrude politics into his sermons and no published discourse of his at this time alludes in any way to the political crisis; his first printed sermon that can in any way be called political is the one on the *Dominion of Providence*, delivered nearly two years later.¹⁶³

Maybe so. But there is another, I think slightly more persuasive argument that holds that *Thoughts on American Liberty* represents the *beginning* of the transformation process which was finally completed with the sermon entitled *The Dominion of Providence over the Passions of Men*, preached at Princeton nine months later on 17th May, 1776. It is, therefore, almost exactly synchronous with the publication of Druid paper number I in *The Pennsylvania Magazine*. The occasion of its delivery was the fast appointed by Congress to be held on that day "through the United Colonies" - the name assigned to the loose union of individual colonies prior to the Declaration and, of course, the later Articles of Confederation.

The text chosen by Witherspoon for this, the greatest of his sermons, was from Psalm 76, 10: "Surely the Wrath of Man shall praise thee; the remainder of Wrath shalt thou restrain". He adopted that theme since he believed it suited his purpose for this great 'national' occasion - that is, to declare that God's power is absolute and that man's "disorderly passions" are ultimately under the control of divine providence. He explains that divine providence extends to things of "great moment", as well as to other lesser things including "things seemingly most hurtful and destructive".¹⁶⁴ He then proceeds to offer a number of examples from history by way of illustration of the intervention of divine providence, including references to the Reformation, the Spanish Armada and, most significantly of all, to the fact that both John Hampden and Oliver Cromwell

had actually taken their passage in a ship for New England when by an arbitrary order of council they were compelled to remain at home.¹⁶⁵

A description of the theology in this "American jeremiad" is provided by a number of commentators, most notably Sher and Tait, although they differ on whether or not the

¹⁶³ *President Witherspoon*, II, p. 163.

¹⁶⁴ Tait notes that in the "Farewell Sermon" preached in the Laigh Church, Paisley in May 1768 Witherspoon credits providence for "directing him to take up his new responsibilities in America". - *The Piety of John Witherspoon*, p. 152. Tait (*ibid.*, p. 171) also provides a fascinating brief description of the centrality of providence to Witherspoon's theology, including his "unwillingness to view providence as some sterile belief unrelated to Christian life and conduct".

¹⁶⁵ *WJW*, 3, p. 30.

sermon truly meets all of the criteria deemed necessary for the piece to conform in all respects to that ‘genre’.¹⁶⁶

It is, however, the second part of the sermon that engages more the historian, since it is Witherspoon’s purpose to apply the general principles he has developed in the first part to “our present situation” – that is, in his way of pulpit-speak, to “illustrate and improve” his text and

to apply it more particularly to the present state of the American Colonies and the plague of war, - - The ambition of mistaken princes, the cunning and cruelty of oppressive and corrupt ministers, and even the inhumanity of brutal soldiers, however dreadful, shall finally promote the glory of God ...¹⁶⁷

Before turning to the second part, however, it is important for the purposes of this study to call attention to the long footnote that Witherspoon appends to his comments in the sermon on “the just view given us in scripture of our lost state”, illustrating what he terms “the depravity of our nature”. He quotes from the anonymous author of “a well known pamphlet, *Common Sense*”¹⁶⁸ who seeks to prove that “original sin and hereditary succession are parallels”, to which argument Witherspoon takes strong exception. It is, I believe, inconceivable that he would have been unaware of the identity of the author of this explosive publication; most Paine scholars have, therefore, missed this reference, being under the impression that the two examples of Witherspoon referring to Paine already cited in this chapter – viz. (a) his fiery opposition to John Adams’ proposal for the appointment of Paine as secretary to one of the committees of Congress, and (b) the reference in the “Aristides” paper – are the only recorded instances of his having done so in his lifetime.

But why does Witherspoon bother to single out Paine in this way? It can only be that having dedicated his sermon to the President of the Continental Congress, John Hancock

¹⁶⁶ *The Piety of John Witherspoon*, p. 155 : “It has been called a jeremiad, and elements of that genre are present, but it lacks a key component, namely, the lengthy lamentation on the sins of the colonists.”

¹⁶⁷ *WJW*, 3, pp. 20-21.

¹⁶⁸ Bibliographically, it is interesting (and a little perplexing) that Witherspoon quotes from “page 11, Bradfords’ edition”, and not from the first edition of Robert Bell, since in his “Aristides” piece he writes: “Well, the book comes out, of which I had a present of two copies, from different persons, notwithstanding the smallness of the number printed.” Perhaps he does so in the knowledge that most of his readers (i.e. in the Aitken printed edition of the sermon) will be more familiar with the Bradford version, the Bell first edition having already by that time developed the status of a scarce book.

himself, Witherspoon is here seizing the opportunity presented by the printed version of this prestigious public discourse to discredit Paine (with whom, as an individual, he had absolutely nothing in common) in the best way he could, and whose identity as the author of *Common Sense* he would have known only too well, in all likelihood from Aitken's own lips. His words are uncannily prescient, especially the last sentence quoted, when one considers Paine's subsequent fall from grace (and celebrity status) in America years later as the notorious author of *The Age of Reason*, denounced by Benjamin Rush and numerous others as an atheistic book :

Without the shadow of reasoning, he is pleased to represent the doctrine of original sin as an object of contempt or abhorrence. I beg leave to demur a little to the *candor*, the *prudence*, and the *justice* of this proceeding. Was it modest or candid for a person without name or character, to talk in this supercilious manner of a doctrine that has been espoused and defended by many of the greatest and best men that the world ever saw, and makes an essential part of the established Creeds and Confessions of all the Protestant churches without exception ? ... Are so many of us, then, beyond the reach of this gentleman's charity? I do assure him that such presumption and self-confidence are no recommendation to me, either of his character or sentiments. ... Is this gentleman ignorant of human nature, as well as an enemy to the Christian faith?¹⁶⁹

To return to the "application", Witherspoon begins the second part of the discourse by first stating

what ground there is to give praise to God for his favours already bestowed on us respecting the public cause.¹⁷⁰

And at this point, astonishingly, the sermon hovers dangerously on the brink of journalese reportage:

It would be a criminal inattention not to observe the singular interposition of Providence hitherto, in behalf of the American colonies. ... Some important victories in the south have been gained with so little loss, that enemies will probably think it has been dissembled; as many, even of ourselves thought, till time rendered it undeniable. But these were comparatively of small moment. The signal advantage we have gained by the evacuation of Boston, and the shameful flight of the army and navy of Britain, was brought about without the loss of a man.¹⁷¹

But then he steadies himself and quickly reverts to the language of the conventional jeremiad, citing the Old Testament story of David and Goliath in support of his firm belief in God, the Lord of Hosts, "great in might and strong in battle" – still the words of the stirring Church of Scotland metrical psalm traditionally sung at the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

¹⁶⁹ *WJW*, 3, pp. 23-4..

¹⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p. 33.

¹⁷¹ *ibid.*, pp. 33-4.

It is at this stage in the sermon that we need to recall Witherspoon's lifelong interest in and cultivation of oratory and eloquence, for here the rhetoric, and the prose in which it is couched, abruptly change in favour of a much more relaxed, even conversational style. It is almost as if he leans over the pulpit and looks individual members of his congregation straight in the eye:

You are all my witnesses, that this is the first time of my introducing any political subject into the pulpit. At this season, however, it is not only lawful but necessary, and I willingly embrace the opportunity of declaring my opinion without any hesitation, that the cause in which America is now in arms, is the cause of justice, of liberty, and of human nature.¹⁷²

What he calls “the true and proper hinge” of the war with Britain is his insistence that no one would voluntarily give up “his estate, person, and family to the disposal of his neighbor”, even though he was able to choose the best master, so that

for these colonies to depend wholly upon the legislature of Great Britain, would be like many other oppressive connexions, injury to the master, and ruin to the slave.¹⁷³

Ironically, the behaviour of the British government has only made us more united and our “public spirit” is so strong among us

that we have much more reason to be thankful for its vigor and prevalence, than to wonder at the few appearances of dishonesty or disaffection.¹⁷⁴

But it is vital we remain united and you should be cautioned “against the usual causes of division” – and he provides examples of what could arise in that regard. “Firmness and patience” will be needed and he quotes from the Old Testament book of Samuel – “Be of good courage, and let us behave ourselves valiantly for our people and for the cities of our God, and let the Lord do that which is good in his sight”.

Witherspoon signals he is near the close of his sermon by invoking three broad principles, constituting “exhortations to duty”: these principles relate religion to the great cause in which all are engaged:

... he is the best friend to American liberty, who is most sincere and active in promoting true and undefiled religion ... Whoever is an avowed enemy to God, I scruple not to call him an enemy to his country.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² *ibid.*, p. 36.

¹⁷³ *ibid.*, pp. 37-8.

¹⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p. 39.

¹⁷⁵ *ibid.*, p. 42.

The first of these principles includes

the concern which every good man ought to take in the national character and manners, and the means which he ought to use for promoting public virtue; and bearing down impiety and vice.¹⁷⁶

Some, in view of their special responsibilities, have an unusual duty to conform to these needs, including

Magistrates, ministers, parents, heads of families, and those whom age has rendered venerable, [and] are called to use their authority and influence for the glory of God and the good of others.¹⁷⁷

The second “exhortation to duty” he enumerates is directed at “all who are not called to go into the field” [i.e. of war] to apply themselves with the utmost diligence to works of industry”; and thirdly and finally, an exhortation doubtless from his Scottish past -

In the last place, suffer me to recommend to you frugality in your families and every other article of expence.¹⁷⁸

It is at this stage in the sermon that its central message becomes crystal-clear. Even the cherished ideal of American liberty cannot be held to be somehow ‘exchangeable’ with the Christian moral regeneration of our American souls; the one is integral to, and ultimately dependent on, the other. Indeed, the two concepts are virtually synonymous. As an agent of God’s ministry of reconciliation, it falls to him to deliver Christ’s message of salvation. And we find that its substance is precisely the *same* as that with which Witherspoon charged young Mr. Davidson in Paisley Abbey all those years ago, in several of his other sermons, and, of course, in the *Practical Treatise*. Addressing “all who are in a state of nature”, his uncompromising message turns yet again on the mantra of John’s Gospel:

“Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God”.

This time, however, the ‘charge’ is not delivered to an individual, or even to the assembled Princeton congregation at large, but to none less than the entire emergent “confederacy of the colonies”, whom, now as an American himself, he addresses here, jointly and severally.

The great *Dominion of Providence* sermon concludes with these words of benediction:

¹⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p. 41.

¹⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p. 43.

¹⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p. 44.

God grant that in America true religion and civil liberty may be inseparable, and that the unjust attempts to destroy the one, may in the issue tend to the support and establishment of both.¹⁷⁹

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Witherspoon's American 'conversion' did not engender universal appeal. In America, Ezra Stiles of Yale, writing in his diary in July 1777, traced Witherspoon's newfound and misplaced enthusiasm for total separation to "Scotchmen" in the British government and in America" who

[had] used the ensuing turmoil to facilitate their rise to prominence and then worked to reconcile America's independence with specific interests in Scotland. [Stiles wrote] - "The Dr [Witherspoon] is a politician. We may use him as far as he is for America - but scorn to be awed by him into an ignominious Silence on the subject of Scots Perfidy & Tyranny & Enmity to America".¹⁸⁰

In Britain in particular some blistering attacks on him were launched, notably in a pamphlet war begun in 1776 by Hugo Arnot, an Episcopalian, Writer to the Signet and advocate in Edinburgh, who cleverly turned the tables on Witherspoon through the medium of his *Prophecies of Thomas the Rhymer ... Dedicated to Doctor Silverspoon, Preacher of Sedition in America*¹⁸¹ and continued a few years later in the same vein by such as Dr. Jonathan Odell of Burlington ["Camillo Querno, Poet-Laureat to the Congress"].¹⁸²

In 1777 a reprint of Aitken's original Philadelphia edition of the *Dominion* sermon and the accompanying *Address* - entitled "The Third Edition, with Elucidating Remarks" - appeared in Glasgow with an "Advertisement" [a preface by the editor], extensive footnotes and an "Appendix" by "S.R."¹⁸³ This is a virulent attack on Witherspoon's "most rebellious sentiments". The reprint is justified on the grounds that reading both pieces - the sermon and the address - will fully justify the "allegation" that Witherspoon had "a greater share" of the "clerical influence" that lay behind and "considerably

¹⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p. 46.

¹⁸⁰ Ezra Stiles (1727-95), *Literary Diary*, 2: 185; cited by Mailer in his William and Mary Quarterly article, p. 744.

¹⁸¹ *The XLV. Chapter of the Prophecies of Thomas the Rhymer, In Verse; with Notes and Illustrations. Dedicated to Doctor Silverspoon, Preacher of Sedition in America. ... Edinburgh: Printed for C. Elliot... M,DCC,LXXVI. [Price Sixpence.]*

¹⁸² *The American Times: a Satire in Three Parts. In which are delineated the Characters of the Leaders of the American Rebellion: amongst the principal are, [16 names follow including "Witherspoon"] By Camillo Querno, Post-Laureat to the Congress ... London: Printed for the Author; and sold by William Richardson, opposite Salisbury Street, in the Strand. MDCCLXXX (1780).*

¹⁸³ *Philadelphia Printed. Glasgow Re-Printed; Sold by the Booksellers in Town and Country MDCCLXXVII. Price Six-Pence.* No printed is cited in the imprint.

promoted, if not primarily agitated” “the unhappy commotions in our American colonies.” The reason for this new edition of “the doctor’s” sermon and address is, “not to gain friends to his sentiments”, but

to shew what artful means, and fallacious arguments have been made use of by ambitious and self-designing men, to stir up the poor infatuated Americans to the present rebellious measures; ... to convince his friends, in this country, of the truth of his being a chief promoter of the American revolt; and that if he falls into the hands of government, and meets with the demerit of his offence, he hath justly and deservedly procured it to himself.¹⁸⁴

America would have been better off “had the doctor kept his place in Beith, or even in Paisley”. As for his defence of rebellion, he is being inconsistent:

In the year 1745 and 1746, when the last rebellion took place in Scotland, the doctor was then of opinion, that the rebels had justly forfeited His Majesty’s clemency and protection, and deserved to be exemplary [sic] punished as enemies to their king and country.

Gideon Mailer is almost certainly right when he suggests that “S.R.” may well have associated Witherspoon with “the pleas for American independence that emanated from the Kirk’s Popular minority”.¹⁸⁵ That minority included intimate friends of his such as Erskine and Thom.

Witherspoon would not have taken these assaults too seriously but he might just have done in the case of an altogether heavier-weight response by no less than John Wesley. Writing in 1788, and quoting directly from Witherspoon’s 1776 *Dominion of Providence* sermon, Wesley, who claimed first-hand knowledge of the American problem by virtue of his three-year sojourn there from 1735, and in the light of his many American supporters and adherents, takes Witherspoon roundly to task for daring to proclaim that independence is a God-given liberty. On the contrary, Wesley argued, there is more than one kind of liberty -

The Spirit of Independency ... the same which so many call *Liberty*, is over-ruled by the Justice and Mercy of God He will send thro’ all the happy land, with all the Necessaries and Conveniencies of Life, not *Independency*, (which would be no blessing, but an heavy curse, both to them and their Children) but *Liberty*; real, legal Liberty! which is an unspeakable Blessing. He will superadd to Christian Liberty, Liberty from Sin, true Civil Liberty; a Liberty from oppression of every kind; from illegal Violence; a Liberty to enjoy their Lives, their Persons and their

¹⁸⁴ p. [iii], “Advertisement”, pp. 55-6 “Appendix”.

¹⁸⁵ “Anglo-Scottish Union and John Witherspoon’s American Revolution”, p. 744.

Property: in a word, a Liberty to be governed in all things by the Laws of their Country. They will again enjoy true *British* Liberty, such as they enjoyed before these commotions ...¹⁸⁶

And Wesley is careful to distinguish between the power of Providence as he understands it, compared with the obnoxious interpretation assigned to it by Doctor Witherspoon:

Thus by the adorable Providence of God the main hindrances of this work are removed. And in how wonderful a manner! ... So does *the fierceness of man*, of the *Americans*, *turn to his praise*, in a very different sense from what Dr. Witherspoon supposes.¹⁸⁷

It is perhaps only when we read the vehemence and detestation of these attacks from the mother country that one begins to comprehend the extent to which Witherspoon had distanced himself, at least from the perspectives of the authors of such pamphlets, from the notions of “lawful government” as he himself had once understood and experienced it in Scotland. And we learn in the process just how thorough and complete his regeneration and transformation as an American had been.

Postscript

This study began with a quotation from Ned C. Landsman, one of the foremost modern Witherspoon scholars, remarking on the “daunting” challenge facing historians asked to explain “how the thoroughly Scottish and Presbyterian Witherspoon, a reluctant emigrant from Scotland to the colonies, could within just a few years turn into a staunch American patriot”. It was found that one of the epithets most commonly used to help account for that personal ‘regeneration’ of the man, the minister, college president and ‘born again’ revolutionary politician, is to describe him as, in the last analysis, “enigmatic”. It is an unsatisfactory conclusion but it is on the whole, I believe, a correct one. It is as ‘enigmatic’ for Witherspoon to recommend the essays of David Hume and of “Lord Kaims” [sic] to his students, when a mere dozen or so years before as a Popular minister in Paisley he had derided both (in one of his published sermons),¹⁸⁸ as it was assuredly ‘enigmatic’ for him to base whole swathes of his Princeton *Lectures on Moral Philosophy* on the *System* of Francis Hutcheson, a man whose thought he had, similarly, once ridiculed.

¹⁸⁶ *Some Account of the late work of God in North-America, in a sermon on Ezekiel i. 16* By John Wesley, M. A. London: Printed by R. Hawes and sold at the Foundery in Moorfields; and at the Rev. Mr. Wesley's preaching-houses, in town and country, 1778. [quotation from pp. 18-23] A second edition appeared in the same year and two more in 1778 and 1790 respectively.

¹⁸⁷ *ibid.*, p. 21.

¹⁸⁸ *The Absolute Necessity of Salvation through Christ*, 1758. [*Works*, II, p. 259 ff.] See Bibliographical Note at the beginning of this chapter.

In his contribution to a recent book of essays entitled *The Atlantic Enlightenment* Daniel W. Howe, regretting Morrison's (deliberate) ignoring of Witherspoon's ministries in Scotland, points out that

Witherspoon's career cannot be understood save in conjunction with *both* its Scottish and American situations. ... Witherspoon was a quintessentially Atlantic figure.¹⁸⁹

Witherspoon did not accept the call of America because he anticipated, least of all relished, the prospect of a fight to the death with the government of the country of his birth; nothing could then have been further from his mind. For all that, however, it remains true that, with other Scots - including his friend and colleague in theology, William Thom - Witherspoon saw in the symbol and actuality of America, colony and emergent nation, both a refuge from "British degeneracy" and an opportunity for a new beginning. 'Regeneration', in Witherspoon's comprehension of the term, was the means of his being able to reconcile his particular brand of Scottish Presbyterian theology with his newfound and startlingly uncompromising American revolutionary political ideology.

¹⁸⁹ "John Witherspoon and the Transatlantic Enlightenment", in *The Atlantic Enlightenment*, ed. Susan Manning and Francis D. Cogliano, Aldershot and Burlington VT, p. 68.

Chapter Five

Robert Aitken (1735-1802), bookseller and printer in Philadelphia: conduit of liberty

“ ... A printer and bookseller here, a man of reputation and property ... has lately attempted a magazine [and] has applied to me for assistance.”

Thomas Paine, letter of 4 March, 1775 to Benjamin Franklin.

Bibliographical note

(a) Aitken in Paisley - 1759 to 1769; 1769 to 1771

The Spawns¹ and Professor Sher² both agree that in his years in Paisley as a bookseller, bookbinder and proprietor of a circulating library - effectively that is, from 1759 (if not a little earlier) to 1769 when he first ‘sojourned’ in America while on a fact-finding trip prior to his permanent emigration there in 1771 - Robert, or R., Aitken’s name appears in the imprints of seven titles. All of them are religious works, four of them printed for Aitken and other Scottish booksellers by John Bryce, at that time Glasgow’s best-known evangelical publisher. The other three were considerably longer works printed in Glasgow at Aitken’s exclusive commission.

However, it is important to note that there is one further Aitken title, printed by John Bryce in Glasgow, with the puzzling date 1773. Borrowing a word from the title, I find this “curious”. I incline to the view that *Curious letters and papers* is probably evidence of the reverse of the process Aitken engaged in while in Philadelphia on his first visit in 1769: it is possible, that is, that Aitken had left a commission *in Glasgow* which was only carried out by Bryce some two years *after* Aitken and his family finally set sail for their new life in America. Perhaps it was done with a view to testing the American market and I think it likely that Aitken may have gone along with it at Bryce’s own suggestion. I failed, however, to find any mention of the title in Aitken’s wastebook.

¹ Informally that is, in correspondence with the author in the early 1960s. See also Ronald L. Crawford, “A note on Robert Aitken, printer of the ‘Bible of the Revolution’”, *The Bibliothek*, 5, 1967, pp. 36-7.

² Richard B. Sher, *The Enlightenment and the Book*, Chicago and London, 2006, p. 532.

This means that a total of eight Glasgow imprints incorporating Robert Aitken's name (usually but not always describing him as a bookseller in Paisley) can be attributed to his activities in Scotland from 1759 – including the strange Glasgow imprint of 1773 (this last-named without, of course, any reference to “Paisley” in the imprint). Significantly, bearing in mind that Aitken himself was an Antiburgher, it will be noted that the content of no fewer than five of the eight works relate in one way or another to the secessionist controversy.

These eight Glasgow titles are:

1759

Ignorance, falsehood, and malice exposed: or, remarks upon a pamphlet, intituled, A warning, &c. Read by Mr. Alexander Ferguson to his congregation at Kilwinning. Being a letter from a seceder in P-y to his friend in K-w-g. ...
Glasgow: printed by John Bryce, and sold by Robert Aitken in Paisley, 1759.

1761

The artifices of the burghers, to hide their defection, considered; in a letter to the burgher-seceders. From Mr. Alexander Moncrieff; minister of the Gospel at Abernethie.
Glasgow: printed for, and sold by John Bryce; Rob. Aitken bookseller in Paisley; James Dun merchant. Edinburgh; James Young bookinder [sic], Edinburgh; and by Geo. Norman merchant, Kirkcaldy, 1761.

The mission and work of gospel-ministers, considered; in a sermon ... Preached at the ordination of of Mr. John Ferguson, to be minister of the associate congregation of Comrie and Strathallan: with some exhortations to him and the people after he was set apart, March 4th, 1760. ... Together with some thoughts concerning Mr. Ferguson's death. By John Muckarsie, ...
Glasgow: printed for, and sold by John Bryce, Rob. Aitken, Paisley; James Dun merchant, James Young, Edinburgh; and by Geo. Norman merchant, Kirkcaldy, 1761.

1764

Friendship in death: in twenty letters from the dead to the living. To which are added, letters moral and entertaining, in prose and verse: in three parts. By Mrs. Elisabeth Rowe. To which is prefixed, an account of the life of the author.
Glasgow: printed for Robert Aitken, bookseller in Paisley, 1764.

A collection of about fifty religious letters, expressing the various duties and exercises, losses and crosses, trials and discouragements in the world, ... Written to divers persons, ministers and others. By John Monro, ... With an epistle recommendatory, by one of these ministers with whom he corresponded.
Glasgow: printed for Robert Aitken, bookseller in Paisley, 1764.

1768

The Synod of Jerusalem: or, courts of review in the Christian Church considered. A sermon preached at the opening of the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr, at Irvine, Oct. 13th, 1767. Being an

attempt to vindicate Presbyterian church government, in opposition to the independent scheme. By the Reverend Mr. George Muir, ...
Glasgow: printed and sold by John Bryce; W. Gray and J. Wood, Edin. R. Aitken Paisley. W. White Beith [and 2 others in Kilmarnock, 1 in Irvine, 1 in Greenock], 1768.

1769

A defence of the Reformation-Principles of the Church of Scotland. With a continuation of the same. And a letter from a member of the Associate Presbytery to a Minister in the Presbytery of D-e. Wherein the exceptions that are laid against the conduct of the Associate Presbytery, as also against their Judicial Act and Testimony, by the Rev. Mr. Currie in his Essay on Separation, are examined; and the injurious Reflections cast upon our Reforming Period from 1638 to 1650, in the foresaid Essay, are discovered. By William Wilson A.M. Minister of the Gospel at Perth.
Glasgow: printed by Joseph Galbraith, and Company, for Robert Aitken Bookseller, Paisley, 1769.

1773

Curious Letters and Papers, concerning the War betwixt James Marquis of Montrose, and the Covenanters; in the reign of Charles I. Published from the originals. To which is added, an Appendix from Bp. Wishart's History.
Glasgow: Printed for Robert Aitken; By John Bryce, Bookseller, Salt-market. 1773.

(b) Aitken in Philadelphia - 1771 to 1802

In Willman and Carol Spawn's 1961 article for the *Graphic Arts Review* reference is made to two titles, viz. - "an edition of the Shorter Catechism, and *A Dialogue between Jockey and Maggy [or] How to Court a Country Girl*" (which they describe as "both surefire best sellers") - commissions for which Aitken left with an unknown printer in Philadelphia in the course of his first, fact-finding 'sojourn' in America in 1769.³ The Spawns state that "these duly appeared in his absence in 1770", with Aitken's name in both imprints but with no printer identified. Unfortunately, they fail to provide a source and I have been unable to locate either title in the LCP catalogue or on ESTC online.⁴

³ Wilman and Carol Spawn, "R. Aitken Colonial Printer of Philadelphia", in *Graphic Arts Review*, January-February, 1961.

⁴ Is it possible that the Spawns got this wrong? A catechism - "Muckarsie's [Children's] Catechism"- and "Jocky & Maggy" are mentioned in sequence together in an order dated June 18, 1771 on p. 3 of Aitken's waste book, vol. 1: the books were clearly popular since the order was for 12 of the former and "2 doz." of the latter. In view of the date of the order, it is quite likely that these were imports from Scotland brought personally by Aitken either in 1769 or 1771. John Bryce of Glasgow printed three different editions of the Muckarsie between 1765 and 1771; and "The whole proceedings of Jocky and Maggy" were almost never out of print somewhere in Scotland in the last 35 or so years of the eighteenth century - e.g. see an Edinburgh edition (Alex. Robertson) in 1771. Remarkably, the waste book shows that Aitken was still selling the Muckarsie as late as 1796.

Certainly, the subject matter of one is a world away from that of the other, as indeed *Jockey and Maggy* is from that of all of Aitken's previous productions.

The catalogue of the Library Company of Philadelphia lists almost 400 discrete Aitken titles, the majority of which issued from his own press from 1773 – the year Aitken started to print for himself – right through to the year before his death, 1801. The last book to bear his name in his lifetime was, ironically, Janeway's *Token*, a title well known in Paisley, the Scottish town of his adoption.⁵ His American checklist also includes, in the interval between the setting up of his bookstore in Philadelphia and the date of his own first printed book in the LCP catalogue, twelve publications with Aitken's name in the imprint or otherwise: of these, the printers (where identified) were either Joseph Crukshank (8) or John Dunlap (3).

1 Robert Aitken and the call of America

For Robert Aitken's career in Scotland all that is said in the NLS Scottish Book Trade Index about him could hardly be more terse:

AITKEN, Robert *bookseller* Paisley
Paisley 1760-69

My own 1965 B.Litt thesis goes a little further. Of the eight Scottish titles listed above I record the entry in Carnie – the 1764 *A collection of about fifty religious letters* – to which I add a title I located in Paisley Library, the Glasgow (Joseph Galbraith) 1769 production of William Wilson's *A Defence of the Reformation-Principles of the Church of Scotland*. I conclude my short entry on Aitken by noting that "Aitken, as Carnie indicates, has no entry in Bushnell".

In stark contrast with his Paisley acquaintance (and likely customer in his bookshop at the 'Buchanan's Head'), the Reverend Dr. John Witherspoon, one looks in vain for the name of Robert Aitken in recent histories of the Scottish diaspora and of the so-called 'Scots Empire'. Not in Devine, Ferguson or Fry, nor in Hook, nor even in Brock, is there a single mention of Aitken. Sher and Smitten's *Scotland & America in the age of the Enlightenment* – a collection of essays published in 1990 – mentions him twice: once in Sher's own contribution (p. 46) where he notes the first (Aitken) edition of Witherspoon's

⁵ See Appendix A, 74-87.

fast day sermon of 17 May 1776, *The Dominion of Providence over the Passions of Men*. And, in the same book, David Daiches cites Aitken, in an endnote to his essay (p. 225) on Witherspoon's good friend and fellow Edinburgh University *alumnus*, Hugh Blair, as the printer of the 1784 Philadelphia edition of Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*.

Robert Aitken was born in Dalkeith, near Edinburgh in 1735. Dalkeith, it should be noted, is barely twenty miles from Yester, at Gifford,⁶ the birthplace of John Witherspoon twelve years earlier. As we shall see, Aitken's own chequered life would, for a time, become enmeshed with Witherspoon's illustrious career when they caught up with each other again in America, on the eve, as it were, of the revolutionary war. Aitken moved to Paisley around 1759 in furtherance of his bookbinding skills and it was then that his name appears in the imprint of a secessionist pamphlet which John Bryce of Glasgow brought out that year. Four years later – on August 20th, 1763 to be precise – he married Janet Skeoch. From the marriage record in the Old Parish Register the bridegroom is described as a “Bookbinder” though by that date he was also operating in Paisley, at least intermittently, as a bookseller and occasional publisher. A little later he added the proprietorship of a circulating library as another string to his bow.⁷

It is important to note that Aitken belonged to the Antiburgher persuasion within the Presbyterian ‘family’ of churches. That is, he was a member of the most prominent seceding congregation of the age and in that regard he would have found Paisley, town and neighbourhood, a congenial place in which to live and work. As we have already seen in chapter 2, the original secession church (1733), whose congregational members were termed either ‘Anti-Burghers’, by virtue of their determined opposition to the taking of the oath required of burgesses of certain cities, or ‘Burghers’, who allowed the oath, was

⁶ Gifford is adjacent to Haddington, East Lothian, the birthplace of John Knox (c.1513-72). Witherspoon claimed to be a direct descendant of Knox but this is doubtful. It is disappointing to note that in one of the best, most recent essays on Witherspoon his birthplace is given as “Guilford [?], East Lothian, Scotland”. See Daniel W. Howe, “John Witherspoon and the Transatlantic Enlightenment”, in *The Atlantic Enlightenment*, Aldershot and Burlington, VT, 2008, p. 61.

⁷ The reference to Aitken running a circulating library comes from two tickets, one pasted on to the front board and the other stuck on the inside board, opp. t.p., of a copy of J. Brown's *Thoughts on Civil Liberty* (Dublin, printer not cited, 1765), in the possession of the library at Allegheny College. The precise wording is “Aitken's Circulating Library, At Buchanan's Head. Paisley. No. [blank]”. I am grateful to the College Librarian for sending me digital copies of both tickets.

unusually strong in Paisley at the time, as indeed it was in most towns and communities in Scotland where textiles (weaving, cloth and thread manufacture) was the main source of employment. Later in this chapter, we shall discuss the issue of the lawfulness/sinfulness of the taking of oaths at a critical moment in Aitken's life and career in America.

Seceders were generally acknowledged to be "persons of sturdy independent minds" and their ministers often characterised as "humble men of great seriousness with strong, evangelical, presbyterian, even covenanting principles". Burleigh comments:

The Evangelical party in the Church deeply lamented the loss of these people, but in course of time the existence of Dissenting congregations was accepted as natural and even beneficial, certainly not dangerous to the Establishment, which could placidly watch them engage in interminable controversies amongst themselves both in their congregations and in their synods.⁸

The 1759 pamphlet cited above, bearing Aitken's name in the imprint, is an account of just one such minor controversy.

According to Crawford/Semple (1782) an Antiburgher 'meeting house' was opened in Paisley in 1756 and in "about 1762" a 'meeting-house' was built "near the head of the Schoolhouse-wynd" (School Wynd in modern Paisley). Ten years after Aitken's permanent departure from Paisley (1781), this building had to be extended and in the Glasgow engraver James Lumsden's map of the town produced in the same year it is clearly shown as immediately adjacent to the High Church.⁹ Paisley High Church is little more than a few hundred yards from Witherspoon's Laigh Church (both buildings are still there today) on the other side of the High Street, one of modern Paisley's busiest thoroughfares, running from east (Glasgow) to west. In Aitken's and Witherspoon's day, the minister of the High Church in Paisley was the Reverend George Muir, a colleague and close friend of Witherspoon whose pamphlet *The Synod of Jerusalem* was printed by John Bryce for Aitken and others in 1768, the year Witherspoon set sail for America and just one year before Aitken's own 'sojourn' there.¹⁰ George Muir's *An Essay on*

⁸ J.H.S. Burleigh, *A Church History of Scotland*, p. 324.

⁹ A Burgher meeting house is also shown in the same map.

¹⁰ Muir had been minister of Old Cumnock before his translation to the High Church in Paisley in October 1766. He was granted an honorary D.D. at Princeton in 1770. Muir's son James went to America after the Revolution, becoming minister of the Presbyterian Church at Alexandria, Virginia.

Christ's Cross and Crown (Weir and M'Lean, 1769) is always cited as the first book to have been printed in Paisley and there is no need to dispute this.¹¹

Aitken's bookshop at "The Buchanan's Head"¹² would have been a mere stone's throw from the High Church and the Antiburgher meeting hall in Schoolhouse-wynd, the latter being just a few dozen yards up a steep hill from "the Town-head" (modern Townhead), the present-day site of the main campus of the University of Paisley (now, extraordinarily, recently re-named the University of the West of Scotland). On the pavement outside the entrance to the Paisley campus stands a slightly over-egged Italianate statue of John Witherspoon by a local artist, a copy of which – devoid, at least when I saw it, of the graffiti adorning the Paisley version – is on the altogether boskier campus at Princeton where, as Princetonian wits are fond to observe, the great man has his *face* turned towards the chapel and his *backside* to the theatre, an orientation, we are advised, with which Witherspoon himself would have been thoroughly content.

We know that Aitken left Paisley in 1769 for a brief sojourn in America, returning home in November of the same year. On May 10, 1771, Aitken arrived in Philadelphia for the second time, this time in the company of his wife, Janet and their two children, Jane and Robert junior. It is believed that the death of a third child in October, 1769, while Robert was still in America, had delayed their travel and Aitken's return to his newly established business there.

In the course of his first visit Aitken had carried with him books and other goods for sale during his stay. He advertised these in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* on May 18 1769; the caveat in the final sentence of the ad. is important. To the bibliographical historian it is a

¹¹ Appendix A, 1-69.

¹² Sher believes that "the fact that [Aitken] worked 'at the sign of Buchanan's Head' suggests not only a commitment to Scottish patriotism, Whig political principles, and learned Presbyterianism but also a respectful awareness of the London bookshop maintained by one of Paisley's most successful native sons, Andrew Millar." – *The Enlightenment and the Book*, p. 532. I am not so convinced that as much should be made of this as Sher suggests. As a native of Paisley myself, I know that the surname 'Buchanan' is a local street name : thus, my first primary school was in East Buchanan Street, off the main Glasgow Road and "Buchanan Parks" is named as a district of Paisley in the Lumsden map of 1781. [cf., similarly, Hugh Simm's brother, a weaver, lived in the 'Town-head' – modern Townhead.] In any event, the printed ticket indicating "Aitken's Circulating Library" merely lists its location as an address – i.e. "At Buchanan's Head" – and that is where Hugh Simm knew where to find him.

fascinating reference source and shows that Aitken was even at this stage in his American career commercially aware:

ROBERT AITKEN Bookseller, From Glasgow, just now arrived in the snow Peggy, and has opened his store the first door below Mr. David Sproat, Front Street, Philadelphia, WITH a valuable variety of books, consisting of almost all the branches of literature, Church history, antient and modern law, physic, mathematics, &c. Also a large and elegant assortment of books, moral and entertaining, of the most approved authors, viz. Swift, Pope, Young, Milton, Thompson, Cambray, Fontenelle, Voltaire, Rollin, Shaftsbury, Spencer, Congreve, Waller, Locke, Tillotson, Scott, &c. &c. also novels, plays, songs; but chiefly books of divinity, whose names are famous in the churches, viz. Luther, Calvin, Knox, Rutherford, Durham, Flavel, Henry, Trail, Guthrie, Owen, Ambrose, Gurnal, Wellwood, Willison, Watson, Bunyan, Binning, Boston, Erskine, Hervey, Watts, Gray, Walwood, Brooks, &c. &c. He has also a neat assortment of chapman books, pamphlets, ballads, and ink powder; also fine stays sorted, silk and thread gauze, different patterns, plain and flowered. The above will be sold by wholesale, for ready money only. Such who intend to furnish themselves with any of the above articles, will apply soon, as the proprietor will make but a short stay in this place.

As Sher and others have pointed out, the practice of Scots ‘sojourning’ in America was quite common at this time. In Aitken’s case, his short stay in Philadelphia and the propitious conditions in the book trade he found to exist there must have encouraged him to return and, ultimately, to have convinced him that a new life for himself and his family in America was potentially an exciting and, hopefully, financially attractive proposition.

What finally persuaded Aitken to take such a bold step and emigrate to America?⁹ I suggest there were two main factors: first, the first book to be printed in Paisley appeared in 1769, the same year as Aitken’s sojourning visit to Philadelphia. One can only surmise that Aitken, who undoubtedly, one would have thought, would have contemplated the alternative possibility of extending his business *in Paisley* into printing (instead of merely commissioning the odd work from printers in neighbouring Glasgow), may have been dismayed at the realisation that, with the opening of Weir and M’Lean’s business, there could be absolutely no room, both from a commercial and financial point of view, for a second printer in the town. Aitken’s prospects in Paisley, therefore, were strictly limited. In America at this time, as so many Scots and Irish were discovering - several of them in the printing and bookselling trade - small fortunes were already being made.

Secondly, there can no longer be any doubt surrounding the long-held, but until now vague, theory that, somehow, John Witherspoon’s final acceptance of the call from Princeton influenced Robert Aitken’s own subsequent decision to follow suit and quit

Paisley for a new life in America. Evidence I have found in the course of a study visit to Princeton University tends, I believe, to reinforce that conclusion.¹³ The Rare Books and Special Collections Department, Manuscripts Division, of the Firestone Library at Princeton holds the collection of Hugh Simm papers, consisting of twenty-two letters and other documents for which there is a generally helpful finding aid available online. The library finding aid explains that Hugh Simm was a “mechanic” (probably a euphemism for a weaver) in Paisley whom Witherspoon “brought with him”¹⁴ when he came to the College of New Jersey as its new President in 1768.

Quite soon after his arrival in Princeton it seems that Witherspoon prevailed on the College trustees to appoint Simm as the College’s first ‘librarian’ and inspector of rooms at an annual salary of £5. Simm was also given duties in the school (an integral but discrete part of the College) which at that time filled a useful ‘feeder’ role for supplying the College with undergraduates. Having had the degree of Bachelor of Arts conferred on him – presumably to make him academically ‘respectable’ – Simm lingered in Princeton barely a year before securing successive appointments as a schoolmaster, and in due time headmaster, of schools in Freehold, New Jersey, then latterly in New York. Most of the letters are written to his brother Andrew, a weaver whose address is consistently the same – the ‘Town-head’ in Paisley.

One of the earliest of the Simm letters is addressed to “Rob. Aiken” although the author of the Princeton finding aid has incorrectly termed the addressee “Atkin”. This unfortunate compound error over the spelling, confusion about Simm’s handwriting and, consequently, a fatal misattribution of the surname accounts for the fact that until now no one has established that Simm is in fact writing to Robert Aitken. In addition, and scarcely less important is the date of the letter: for it was written while Aitken was coming to the end of his 1769 sojourn. It is dated October 13, 1769, at precisely the time when Aitken must either have been packing up to return home to Paisley in advance of the fearsome winter Atlantic gales, or, it is equally possible that by the time Simm’s letter arrived at

¹³ See Appendix D.

¹⁴ Another of Hugh Simm’s letters indicates that he may not have been the only one from Paisley to have accompanied Witherspoon, his wife and children on their voyage across the Atlantic. His letter to brother Andrew from New York dated October 29, 1780 refers to another friend from Paisley by name of “Joseph English” who “after he came to America with Dr Witherspoon ... went into the country was married and settled for a few months ...”. (Princeton MS. in box C1201 of Hugh Simm Papers).

Aitken's temporary address in Philadelphia, he had already left for the return voyage to Scotland.

Simm addresses his letter "To Mr. Rob. Aikin" [sic, not "Atkin", as in the Princeton finding aid for the first "i" - though certainly crudely written - is clearly not a "t".]. To be fair to the author of the finding aid, the confusion probably arises in part at least from the fact that, as Scots will be aware, the well-known surname "Aitken" is usually pronounced, in the west of Scotland at anyrate, with the "t" silent and there can be no doubt that that is how Simm would have pronounced it.

Some of the Hugh Simm letters - though not this one to Aitken - were published by L. C. Butterfield in 1953 in his then ground-breaking study, *John Witherspoon comes to America*. The Aitken letter is reproduced almost in its entirety by Bernard Bailyn's Harvard research associate, Barbara DeWolfe, in her 1997 book, *Discoveries of America - Personal Accounts of British Emigrants to North America during the Revolutionary Era*. However, DeWolfe merely repeats the finding aid error, though in fact she cites the addressee's surname as "R. Atken" [sic]. The point is that, incredibly, neither Butterfield (who surely would have printed it if he had rumbled the Aitken connection to Witherspoon), nor DeWolfe, makes the connection with our Robert Aitken.

The lack of attribution to Aitken is remarkable - especially when the internal evidence is so conclusive. But how can we be so sure of the letter's provenance - and why is it so important? First, Simm goes so far as to describe his addressee in the most designedly helpful way he can, in order that the letter gets to Aitken in his temporary accommodation in Philadelphia. He writes to him as a "mertchent [sic] from Paisley to be found near Mr. Sproat's shop, Philadelphia".¹⁵ It is certain that Simm's addressee is

¹⁵ Sproat came from Port Mary, Kirkcudbright and arrived in Philadelphia in 1760. He was a general merchant and, coincidentally, also extensively advertised his goods for sale in the same newspaper in May, 1769 - May 4 to be precise. But was it coincidence? Since there are items that seem to overlap with those advertised a fortnight later by Aitken it seems credible that Aitken might have brought these *also* with him from Paisley and had already done a deal with his fellow Scot to allow both to sell the imports at the same time; they were after all sharing the same premises. Sproat served as Secretary (1768-69) and then Vice-President (1772-73) of the St Andrew's Society of Philadelphia of which body both Aitken and Witherspoon were also members. See Robert B. Beath, *Historical Catalogue of the St. Andrew's Society of Philadelphia*, vol. II (1749-1913).

There is a grim side to the story of David Sproat. In October 1765 he was one of the signers of the Non-Importation Resolutions but when the war began he decided to serve the loyalist cause and entered service as a volunteer under Lord Howe in the expedition to the Chesapeake,

Robert Aitken and that he writes to him when he heard (probably from Witherspoon) that Aitken was visiting America and, while lodging in Philadelphia, intended to call on “the Dr.” at the College in Princeton. Secondly, any lingering doubts are removed when we read Simm’s closing words to his acquaintance when he expresses his regret that should Aitken be unable to visit Princeton in the course of his sojourn, their next meeting must await Simm’s own return to Scotland at some unknown time in the future. Finally, the letter is hugely significant in the light of Simm’s apparent assumption that Aitken may be returning soon to Paisley to resume business there so that their future reunion can only in those circumstances take place in Scotland and, more precisely, at Aitken’s premises at the Buchanan Head.

In view of its importance to this study, I attach the full text of the letter as follows -

[*Note* I have normalised most of the spelling and punctuation.]

Dr. Sir

Freehold
Octob 13
1769

’Twas no small Surprise to me to hear that you are yet on this side of the Atlantic. Otherwise I should certainly have directed a letter to you if not have come to see you -- I purposed at the first hearing that you were to be at Princeton to attend on you there but as you are uncertain when you will come and that the Dr. [Witherspoon] will not be at home which may prevent your coming I cannot venture for tho it be vacation with me just now, yet I find sufficient employment to prepare for the next half year -- I have a very agreeable employment [as a schoolmaster] and situation here. My incomes are not large indeed but sufficient for present maintenance -- As a number of the boys will be filed for the college in the Spring to which, should they go, it [i.e. the diminished roll] will render the School not worthy [of] attendance so that it is probable that I will not stay here longer than that time -- If you come to Princeton and would favour me with a visit nothing could be more desirable. It is but about 18 miles and not much further from Philadelphia. If you do not do so I cannot hope to see you till I call upon you at the Buhannan’s [sic] head.

Hugh Simm

If for the moment we leave aside the indefatigable efforts of the Spawns over many years to document Aitken’s distinguished career as a creator of fine bindings, it was not until 2006 and the publication of Sher’s *The Enlightenment and the Book* that, in an impeccably researched and wholly accessible way, justice was finally done to Robert Aitken, and a comprehensive account presented of, on the one hand, his Scottish

preparatory to the British occupation of Philadelphia. After the battle of the Brandywine in September 1777, Sproat was appointed Commissary General of Naval Prisoners at New York and was accused of complicity in the harsh treatment of American prisoners of war, a charge which was later disputed even by some American historians. Sproat returned to his native Kirkcudbright in 1783 and died there in 1799, aged 65.

(Paisley) background prior to 1771, and, on the other, Aitken's unique contribution to the history of the printed word in America. Adequate recognition, therefore, of his place in the canon of important Scots exiles to America in the period immediately prior to the American Revolution, if it comes at all, will have come very late for Robert Aitken. Granted, however, the necessarily specialised nature of Sher's scholarship, whether even his brave effort will be sufficient to resuscitate Aitken (in terms, that is, of his inclusion from now on in accessible and general histories, on both sides of the Atlantic) remains to be seen. It seems to me that the nature of Aitken's trade alone may make that outcome unlikely.

There are two reasons why in the final analysis Aitken may remain a relatively obscure figure. First, to be fair to Fry, Devine and the rest in Britain who have either ignored him or seem unaware of him, even in the United States modern historians of the Revolutionary period most often pass him by, presumably on the grounds that he is – as, truth to tell, indeed he assuredly *is* – a peripheral figure seen against the backdrop of those turbulent times. Moreover, even within the more specialist context of the contemporary printing and publishing trade in Philadelphia he is, properly, not so highly regarded as a printer of original titles *per se* but rather as a reprint man and, then, as a somewhat lesser figure than, say, the (almost certainly) Glasgow-born Robert Bell or than that other Scot, William Young; he is also assuredly inferior to the Irishman Mathew Carey, a printer and publisher of genuine distinction. As we shall see, however, in some ways that is to miss the point.

Secondly, and to make a more general point, printers on their own account only rarely *make* history. Their true role, patently, is as agents of history and as conduits of ideas. Aitken, in my judgment, is *very* important because he was the conduit of some really big ideas – nothing less than the idea of liberty and the ideas and ideals of the American Revolution. In that regard his innovative publication of the ephemeral *Pennsylvania Magazine* (1775-76) is not only a great monument in American publishing history but, as a few scholars are only now beginning to unravel and savour, within the context of the actual history of the Revolution itself. Moreover, it cannot be overlooked that it was

Robert Aitken who first recognised the potential genius of Tom Paine and took a massive gamble in employing him as the *Magazine*'s first contributing 'editor'.¹⁶

2 The "two worlds" of Robert Aitken

Richard Sher refers to the two worlds of Aitken, by which he means the worlds of "piety" and "Enlightenment". Aitken was certainly a religious man. He had been a member of the Antiburgher congregation in Paisley, the same secessionist faith to which another, slightly later Scottish émigré printer in Philadelphia, William Young, also belonged. Further, Aitken was, as we have seen - and as the Hugh Simm letter of 1769 to Aitken confirms - an acquaintance of the Reverend Dr. John Witherspoon and was close enough to Witherspoon to plan to visit him in Princeton in the course of his brief sojourn in Philadelphia that year. One can only guess that Aitken's wish to do so may have been prompted not simply out of friendly courtesy but probably more by a desire to consult Witherspoon on his future aspirations as a publisher *cum* printer *cum* binder *cum* bookseller when he returned to America for good, as soon as he could arrange his affairs in Paisley, and perhaps to sound out the good Doctor on his ambitious plans for setting up business in Philadelphia.

Witherspoon himself, it is true, was still finding his feet in Princeton in 1769 but even so would have been a reliable and insightful source of information regarding those books and pamphlets that would appeal in America - and more important, those that would not and, consequently, should be avoided like the plague. Possibly, like Franklin's printing partner David Hall, writing almost a decade before to the Edinburgh firm of Hamilton and Balfour, his advice to Aitken would have been along the same lines:

Remember Divinity is a most dull Article here. Send nothing relating to Scots Affairs, such as Pitscottie, Hathorndon, Guthrie, Fletcher &c. No Plutarch's Lives, Knights of Malta, and such like. And you must send everything on the best and lowest Terms.¹⁷

At the same time, however, when we compare Hall's strictures with the terms of Aitken's advertisement in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* in May 1769 there is an awkward dissonant note. The ad. is stuffed *full* of divinity titles and many of the authors named - e.g. Knox,

¹⁶ See Appendix G for a discussion of exactly what role Paine fulfilled in relation to his time with Aitken.

¹⁷ Cited in Rosalind Remer, *Printers and Men of Capital*, Philadelphia, 1996, p. 13.

Boston, Hervey, Erskine, Watson – were either Scottish themselves or, where they were not, were authors of works Aitken would know by personal experience had sold well in his own bookshop in Paisley. Intriguingly, one of these authors – Guthrie – is specifically included among Hall’s names to avoid. Just how successful the ad. was we shall never know. However, there is no doubt that by 1777 or thereabouts, as Sher informs us,

Aitken was learning the difference between the book cultures of Paisley and Philadelphia. The potential American readership for sectarian works on Scottish Presbyterianism was small and divided ...¹⁸

Aitken returned to Philadelphia in May 1771 and, remarkably, in *The Pennsylvania Gazette* of June 6 advertised the opening on that date of his book store at “the 4th door from Market street, in Front street, opposite the London Coffee house”. The impossibly short gap between the date of his arrival, May 10, and the date of the opening of his store, puts it beyond all reasonable doubt that he had already established the business in the course of his sojourning visit so that he only needed to turn the key on the door of his Front Street premises to commence operations. The ad. ran as follows:

ROBERT AITKEN, BOOKSELLER, STATIONER, and BOOKBINDER, just arrived from GLASGOW,

BEGS leave to inform the public, that this day he opens his store, the 4th door from Market street, in Front street, opposite the London Coffee house, where will be exposed for sale, upon the most reasonable terms, the following assortment of articles, a large and elegant collection of BOOKS (London and Scots editions) written by authors of the greatest fame for literary knowledge, and entreating upon a variety of subjects, moral and entertaining; a large assortment of bibles, various sizes, testaments, prayer books, chap books, writing paper, of the following kinds, super royal, demy, fine thick post, large post, fools cap, coarse and fine pott, elegant pocket cases, for gentlemen and ladies, with and without instruments, steel and silver locks, and of different sizes; leather and brass inkpots, penknives, ivory folding sticks, round rulers, red, black, and vermilion wafers, best red and black sealing wax, New market cases, with steel and silver locks, gilt paper, message cards, quills, blotting paper, folio paper cases, with and without locks, &c.&c.

N.B. A Journeyman, and two Boys, inclining to serve the branch of bookbinding (if well recommended) may apply at the above store, where they will meet with encouragement.

Two years later – in 1773 – Aitken branched into printing for himself.¹⁹ The Library Company catalogue records one prospectus and five other titles published by Aitken, but

¹⁸ *The Enlightenment and the Book*, p. 535.

¹⁹ He was also taking orders for bookbinding by 1772. In the same ad. (on p. 28 of his edition of Freneau’s *Poem, on the Rising Glory of America*, printed by Cruikshank) in which he advertises the publication of *Domestic Medicine* – and the forthcoming publication of Robert Walker’s* *Sermons on Practical Subjects* – he announces, “Also Books bound in the best Manner.”

printed for him by either Cruikshank or Dunlap, in 1772: these included two good sellers, his *Aitken's General American Register* (Cruikshank) and, especially, the first American reprint (by subscription) of William Buchan's *Domestic Medicine* (Dunlap). Ever the canny businessman, Aitken had spotted a good market opportunity and his decision to commission a reprint of the first (Edinburgh) edition of 1769²⁰ proved lucrative for him over a period of some years. He himself printed the second American edition of *Domestic Medicine* in 1774, with a text based this time on the 1772 London edition of Strahan and Cadell. It is this edition for which Aitken's waste book records extensive sales, particularly to other Scots including William Aikman of Annapolis, Maryland (36 copies in spring 1774) and Samuel Loudon of New York (100 copies in July 1774).²¹

3 Robert Aitken and Thomas Paine

In a letter written in July 1809 to James Cheetham, who was then collecting material, from those who knew him, about Thomas Paine's early years in America for what would in time be dismissed as a notoriously unreliable and hostile *Life of Thomas Paine*, the elderly Benjamin Rush comments:

In compliance with your request, I send you herewith answers to your questions relative to the late Thomas Paine.

He came to Philadelphia about the year 1772, with a short letter of introduction from Dr. Franklin to one of his friends. His design was to open a school for the instruction of young ladies in several branches of knowledge which, at that time, were seldom taught in the female schools of our country.

About the year 1773 I met him accidentally in Mr. Aitkin's bookstore and was introduced to him by Mr. Aitkin. We conversed a few minutes, when I left him. Soon afterwards I read a short essay with which I was much pleased, in one of Bradford's papers, against the slavery of the Africans in our country, and which I was informed was written by Mr. Paine. This excited my desire to be better acquainted with him. We met soon afterwards in Mr. Aitkin's bookstore, where I did homage to his principles and pen upon the subject of the enslaved Africans. He told me the essay to which I alluded was the first thing he had ever published in his life. After this Mr. Aitkin

* "One of the Ministers of the High Church of Edinburgh". Walker was at the High Kirk from 1754 to 1783. McIntosh describes him as "a leading opponent of patronage", whose sermons "were published under the editorship of the leading Moderate, Hugh Blair." - *Church and Theology in Enlightenment Scotland*, pp. 242-3.

²⁰ *Domestic medicine; or, the family physician: ... Chiefly calculated to recommend a proper attention to regimen and simple medicines. By William Buchan, M.D. Edinburgh: printed by Balfour, Auld, and Smellie, 1769.* It is interesting that this is one of the books available for loan in Caldwell's circulating library in Paisley in 1789. See Appendix A, 105-89.

²¹ See Sher, *The Enlightenment and the Book*, pp. 341 and 534-5.

employed him as the editor of his *Magazine* with a salary of fifty pounds currency a year. This work was well supported by him.²²

Rush goes on to recall the circumstances that led to the writing of *Common Sense* and that he himself had been the one to suggest that title to Paine who had initially preferred *Plain Truth*. The letter concludes on a sour note with Rush noting that

I did not see Mr. Paine when he passed through Philadelphia a few years ago. His principles avowed in his *Age of Reason* were so offensive to me that I did not wish to renew my intercourse with him.

and by his insisting that:

Should you publish this letter, I beg my testimony against Mr. Paine's infidelity may not be omitted in it.

Although Rush is a little confused on the dates – it was not until the end of November 1774 that Paine first set foot on American soil²³ – and probably also exaggerates a little the salary paid him by Aitken,²⁴ he is, of course, right to attribute to Franklin Paine's letter of recommendation. That letter, addressed to Franklin's son-in-law Richard Bache, has survived and is worth quoting in full:

London, 30 September, 1774

Dear Son,

The bearer, Mr. Thomas Paine, is very well recommended to me, as an ingenious, worthy young man. He goes to Pennsylvania with a view of settling there. I request you to give him your best advice and countenance, as he is quite a stranger there. If you can put him in a way of obtaining employment as a clerk, or assistant tutor in a school, or assistant surveyor, (of all which I think him very capable,) so that he may procure a subsistence at least, till he can make

²² Rush to Cheetham, Philadelphia, July 17, 1809, in L. H. Butterfield, ed., *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, 2 vols., Princeton, 1951, v.2, p. 1007.

²³ The precise date was at one time the subject of intense scholarly debate and no little confusion. The correct date – November 30 – as supplied by Paine himself in his letter to Washington of November 30, 1781 is now commonly accepted. In the early 1930s, however, the waters were for a time muddied in this regard by a seemingly convincing paper by Frank Smith giving a date of “no earlier than December 7 and no later than December 12, 1774”, which he based on newspaper reports of the movement of Paine's ship, the *London Packet*. See Smith's *Thomas Paine's First Year in America, 1775* in *American Literature*, vol. I, no. 4 (1930), pp. 347-371. To his credit, however, Smith resiled from that date in favour of November 30 in his slightly later paper in the same journal – *The Date of Thomas Paine's First Arrival in America* in *American Literature* vol. III, no. 3 (1931), pp. 317-318.

²⁴ For a discussion of the terms on which Aitken employed Paine see Appendix G.

acquaintance and obtain a knowledge of the country, you will do well, and much oblige your affectionate father. My love to Sally and the boys.

B. Franklin.²⁵

One of the acknowledged best modern (1995) biographies of Paine, by the English academic John Keane, creatively reconstructs the first meeting between Aitken and Paine in the former's bookshop which Keane dates as having taken place "around January 10, 1775":

He [Paine] spent much of his spare time ... browsing in bookshops, his favourite being Robert Aitken's on Front Street, just opposite the London Coffee House and right next door to his lodgings.

Unfortunately, this is one of the least satisfactory sections in Keane's otherwise magisterial work. In particular, he commits no less than three serious errors in the space of a paragraph and a half; first,

The shop [Aitken's] contained one of the most extensive collections of books in the province. It also housed a printing press, from which had already sprung the first publication of the English Bible in the American colonies.

But worse is to follow:

One morning ... the bookseller, a printer who had arrived in the colonies from Aberdeen a few years earlier, struck up a conversation with Paine, who quickly impressed him with his energy, knowledge, and political and literary fluency.²⁶

From Aberdeen indeed! I shall spare Keane the embarrassment of having his elementary errors painstakingly iterated here since they are obvious to anyone with only a smattering awareness of Aitken's career in America, his Paisley background and his tentative introduction to printing after his arrival in Philadelphia. The story of the Aitken Bible is told in some detail later on in this chapter. Sadly, however, here is another example of how the Robert Aitken story has still to be documented in an acceptably scholarly way.

²⁵ Franklin's Letters, Franklin Collection at Yale (online). In a long letter to Henry Laurens enclosed with a much shorter one dated January 14, 1779 Paine himself writes: "I brought with me letters of introduction from Dr. Franklin. ... My particular design was to establish an academy on the plan they are conducted in and about London, which I was well acquainted with. I came several months before Dr. Franklin, and waited here for his arrival." Letter reproduced in Moncure D. Conway, *The Writings of Thomas Paine* (New York, 1894-6), Vol.IV, pp. 429-431.

²⁶ All quotations from John Keane, *Tom Paine A Political Life*, New York, 1995, p. 92.

Finally, we have Paine's own account of his first dealings with Aitken. In March 1775 he writes to Franklin reporting that the voyage across the Atlantic had been a nightmare on account of an outbreak of "a putrid fever" by which most on board had been afflicted, including he himself who had "suffered dreadfully" from its severest effects, -

Opposite the London Coffee House Front Street Philadelphia March 4th. 1775
Honored Sir

... I was six Weeks On Shore before I was well enough to wait on Mr. Beache [i.e. Richard Bache, Franklin's son-in-law] with your favour, but am now thank God perfectly recover'd.

... Your Countenancing me has obtaind me many friends and much reputation, for which, please to accept my sincere thanks. I have been applied to by several Gentlemen to Instruct their Sons, on very advantageous Terms to myself. And a Printer and Bookseller here, a Man of Reputation, and Property (Robt. Aitken) has lately attempted a Magazine, but having little or no turn that Way himself has applied to me for assistance. He had not above 600 Subscribers when I first assisted him. We have now upwards of 1500, and daily encreasing. I have not yet entered into terms with him; this is only the Second Number, the first I was not Concerned in. ...

Thos: Paine

P:S: Should be greatly obliged to you, for any thing you may judge Serviceable to the Magazine, when you make your much hoped for return to America, or sooner if you please²⁷

Accordingly, nothing can detract from the inescapable fact that it was a small-time bookseller and binder from Paisley who gave Tom Paine, one of the most iconic figures of the revolutionary period and soon to be the author of *Common Sense*, his first job in journalism. It was Aitken who, having recognised Paine's inventive genius and unique ability to communicate 'at street level' with ordinary folk, presented him with his first journalistic opportunity. Paine being Paine, he seized it with both hands.²⁸

The "Magazine" referred to by Paine in his letter to Franklin is, of course, *The Pennsylvania Magazine; or, American Monthly Museum*. In its pages, from its first issue to its last in its short life, one clearly sees Robert Aitken working and living in two different worlds - at first, as his 'Plan' showed, by an unwillingness to get involved, by cautious, anxious neutrality on his part, even by his sitting on the fence, a posture that must have been desperately frustrating for the choleric Paine. Then, falteringly to begin with, and in time with mounting resignation, Aitken submits to the inevitability and high drama of the ongoing military and political situation, culminating in his recognition that

²⁷ Franklin Papers at Yale (online).

²⁸ In the letter to Laurens of January 1779- see note 25 - Paine clarifies his relationship with Aitken and reveals the reason behind their parting of the ways.

he himself was in fact a small part of it all – a veritable conduit of liberty.²⁹ Thus, in the “Publisher’s Preface” to the second volume of the magazine in January 1776 Aitken can now openly declare:

Every heart and hand seem to be engaged in the interesting struggle for *American Liberty*.

And the full flowering of his Americanisation is both symbolical and real when he prints in the very last number of his *Magazine* – the issue for July, 1776 – the complete text of the Declaration of Independence.

Considerably earlier than that, however, Tom Paine also became an American through the medium of his short-lived association with Aitken and the *Pennsylvania Magazine*. One has to admire the clever way in which Paine, as contributing editor, sailed ever closer to the wind by a combination of allegory and fable as an inventive device for getting round his publisher’s caution and, when that became too tame for him, through a deliberate casting aside of that policy of caution into the four winds. So he, too, like his publisher Aitken, became an American through the medium of the *Pennsylvania Magazine*. No one has put this better than Edward Larkin:

Being an American became a matter of acting and thinking in specific ways, and by extension participation in the revolution also became a matter of everyday life. ... To the extent that these articles make the revolutionary experience an integral part of the reader’s daily life, they create an atmosphere where every action or thought can be interpreted as either pro-American or pro-British. So, while not every article printed in the *Pennsylvania Magazine* directly addresses a political issue, everything in it takes on a political dimension insofar as it can be construed as a form of acting as an American rather than as a British subject. Paine seems to have sensed that creating a viable national identity for Americans other than through their customary association with Britain was a crucial part of the revolutionary process.³⁰

How then did Aitken and Paine accomplish that transformation? *How* did they become Americans in the way I suggest?

²⁹ The symbolic process of Aitken’s ‘conversion’ to political involvement is graphically portrayed (literally) by the different forms of the cartouche he employs on variants of his title page for the magazine. Thus, the version of the cartouche first used from number 1 simply depicts anchors, a globe and a harp with the motto “Juvat in Sylvis Habitare” whereas the title page for volume I (1775), printed in January 1776, has become “Liberty seated, with liberty-cap and shield with Penn arms. To right, a tree, with battle-axe, spear, gun, and cartridge-box inscribed ‘Liberty’. To left, a pine-tree with flags, and a mortar inscribed ‘The Congress’.” Significantly, Robert Aitken was himself the engraver in the later form of the cartouche as Stauffer remarks – “*R. Aitken Scul*”. See David M. Stauffer, *American Engravers upon Copper and Steel*, vol. 2, New York, 1907, p. 4.

³⁰ In Edward Larkin, *Thomas Paine and the Literature of Revolution*, Cambridge, 2005, pp. 45-6.

4 *The Pennsylvania Magazine* – the role and contribution of Thomas Paine

Aitken published his preliminary prospectus (his “plan”) for *The Pennsylvania Magazine* in three newspapers – *The Pennsylvania Packet* of November 21, 1774, and subsequently in *The Pennsylvania Gazette* and *The Pennsylvania Journal* of November 23, 1774. His “PROPOSALS for printing, by SUBSCRIPTION, The PENNSYLVANIA MAGAZINE, or, THE AMERICAN REPOSITORY of USEFUL KNOWLEDGE”³¹ adumbrated a periodical production which was to be, above all, an “American Magazine”. The first of six sections – to be entitled “American essays” – would take the following shape:

A proportion of nearly the same number of pages in each Magazine will be set apart for original American productions ... [extending] to the whole circle of science, *including politics and religion as objects of philosophical disquisition, but excluding controversy in both*. Lest this should offend any, *all the political controversy proper for this periodical publication will fall under the article of news*. [my italics – RLC]

These six separate sections would place clear emphasis on issues of special interest to the American colonies, viz. American essays, selected essays from British journals, lists of new books with “remarks and extracts”, a poetry section, news or “Monthly Intelligence”, and a meteorological diary.³²

Subjoined to the proposals in the *Packet*, Aitken, in a separate statement, emphasises the utilitarian and moral direction he desires should set the standard in his new publication:

TO THE PUBLIC

... He is now to inform the public, that a number of gentlemen of the first character for genius and liberal sentiment among us, have been pleased severally to signify their approbation of his design; and also to make such additions to the plan formerly proposed, as they judged would contribute to render it still more universally entertaining and instructive. For this purpose they have authorised the publisher to say, that, so long as he continues to make his Magazine the decent repository of useful and ornamental Science, excluding from it every indelicate, every party production, they shall hold themselves bound to lend him every assistance in their power; not only on those occasions when the judgment of a friend may be thought necessary, but in furnishing him monthly with some original performances.

³¹ Note the altered sub-title from that specified in his ad. to the simpler “*American Monthly Museum*”.

³² Edward Larkin shrewdly points out – “By including a ‘Meteorological Diary’ section in each issue, the *Pennsylvania Magazine* plays upon its resemblance to an almanac, shifting the emphasis from one section of the Almanac to another. The almanac’s typical lower and middling sort of readership was precisely the audience Paine, the son of an artisan, would repeatedly attempt to politicize over the course of his writing career.” *Thomas Paine and the Literature of Revolution*, pp. 31-2.

These favours which gratitude calls upon him to acknowledge, as on this condition he hopes shall long claim the protection and assistance so generously offered — being unalterably determined to conduct his Magazine upon a plan of the most extensive usefulness, and to admit nothing but what relates to the grand interests of Learning, Virtue, and our common Christianity.

R. AITKEN.

From this statement of intention, one could speculate that Aitken may have conceived his proposals with the approval of his friend from Paisley, John Witherspoon – or, at the least, with Witherspoon in mind.³³ One might go even further and put forward the view that it is conceivable that, in turn – had that hypothesis been verifiable – Witherspoon would have demanded some such public undertaking *before committing himself* to supporting the venture as a major contributor. As things turned out, it would certainly have been a prudent gesture. Yet, as we saw in chapter 4, the supreme irony lies in the fact that it was Witherspoon, more than anyone, who by his “Druid” pieces, broke the mould of Aitken’s “plan” and dared to be more overtly political, and even more militaristic, than any other contributor with the single exception of Paine himself.

The four most cited reference sources for insight into Paine’s connection with the *Pennsylvania Magazine*, and the identifiable extent of his contributions, are Lyon N. Richardson (citing Paine’s biographer Moncure D. Conway, who provides a list of the contributions credited to Paine throughout the period of his association with the journal),³⁴ Edward Larkin and, most recently, Edward W. R. Pitcher and an Australian scholar, Hazel Burgess. Of the four, however, Pitcher is a disappointing let-down since his book does not actually reveal what its title promises, so that one is unable to build up a micro-bibliography of Paine’s contributions from Pitcher’s index of contributors. That is a great pity. Burgess is, frankly, unreliable and in this context, in my judgment, to be largely discounted.

To these, must be added Paine’s modern biographer John Keane who, despite my earlier misgivings on his unscholarly remarks on Aitken, gives a splendid account of this phase of Paine’s career in America. Finally, we should not, of course, neglect the contemporary evidence of Aitken himself and of Benjamin Rush, while, of course, approaching their comments with due caution. Appendix G describes the somewhat confused way in which

³³ “... it is probable that Witherspoon played a key role in planning, developing, and funding the magazine.” – Keane, *Tom Keane A Political Life* p. 553, note 24.

³⁴ Moncure D. Conway, *The Life of Thomas Paine*, 4 vols., New York, 1894-6.

the tracing of Paine's writings more generally, and the micro-bibliography of the *Magazine* in particular, has been built up over many years and is still, despite the best efforts of such as Pitcher and Burgess, substantially unresolved.

As we have already seen from the letter he wrote to Franklin on March 4 1775, Paine did not edit the first number. In the same letter he informs Franklin that no deal had yet been done on the matter of a contract between Aitken and himself:

I have not yet entered into terms with him; this is only the Second Number, the first I was not concerned in.

It seems likely that Paine ended his brief period as Aitken's editor in June or July 1775 though it is just possible that he continued to contribute the odd piece for a number or two beyond that. Larkin thinks he "ceased to work for Aitken some time in August and September" and he expresses the view - which I think highly unlikely - that Aitken himself succeeded Paine as editor:

[After Paine's departure] Aitken continued to publish his magazine, *which he now presumably edited* [RLC's italics], through July 1776, when the war made it impossible for him to keep publishing it.³⁵

Keane states that

During his time with *The Pennsylvania Magazine*, Paine published at least seventeen and perhaps as many as twenty-six essays, poems, reports, a clear majority of which dealt with controversial social and political matters of the day.³⁶

But he is seriously in error when he writes:

... during his next fifteen months as executive editor, Paine tried to steer the magazine towards the growing controversies about the position of the American colonies within the British Empire. Paine's duties and his influence on the policy of the magazine often have been exaggerated, although his contributions were sometimes impressive.³⁷

In Appendix G I deal with the ongoing argument surrounding the nature and extent of Paine's relationship with Aitken at this time, as well as with the problems of attribution in relation to his real and supposed contributions. Here, it is sufficient to state that from the evidence of Aitken's waste book - which is crystal-clear on this point - there is no record of any payment having been made to Paine for his editorial/journalistic services after August 1775. In volume 1 of the waste book (sales and purchases ledger) Aitken records

³⁵ *Thomas Paine and the Literature of Revolution*, p. 47.

³⁶ *Tom Paine A Political Life*. p. 95.

³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 95.

eight cash payments to “Thomas Pain” [sic] with the first made on 10 April 1775 and the last on 2 August in the same year, the whole sum totalling £35 2s 6d. That figure tallies exactly with the figure - £35 2s 6d - recorded in volume 2 (double entry account ledger) under the name “Thomas Pain[e]”, though here the date given for the entry is 2 July 1777.³⁸ If we take it that Paine’s weekly wage was 15/- (admittedly a guesstimate based on the two payments of the lowest sum recorded by Aitken), it would seem possible (from the evidence of other waste book entries) that the weekly wage equivalent paid to Paine was exactly *half* that paid to Aitken’s journeyman printer, John McCulloch. If that hypothesis is correct - though, it has to be emphasized, it is all necessarily speculative - it would then be possible to conclude that the main reason for Aitken and Paine going their separate ways was Paine’s dissatisfaction with the poor terms of employment he endured under Aitken.

Accordingly, the issue of Paine’s working relationship with Aitken must remain uncertain. On the basis of the waste book accounts, however, I incline to the view that Aitken employed Paine on a more or less monthly (and certainly *ad interim* footing) and paid him accordingly - though irregularly. It could even be that Aitken remunerated Paine on the successful completion of each number of the magazine on publication - which, if it were true, might help to explain the discrepancy in wages between Paine and McCulloch. There is, too, the further possibility that Aitken deducted money from Paine’s wages for board and lodgings (since we know that he resided at this time literally next door to the bookstore). In any case, the waste book appears to confirm the traditionally held view that no contract was ever concluded between the two.

The four principal contributors to *The Pennsylvania Magazine* were Paine, John Witherspoon - whose contributions written under the *nom de plume* “The Druid” were discussed in chapter 4 - the poet and essayist Francis Hopkinson and, to a rather lesser extent, the physician and minister Matthew Wilson. For our purpose in this chapter, however, I intend to concentrate on Paine. Other contributors, though in a minor way only, included Benjamin Rush and William Smith.

³⁸ “In the last quarter of the eighteenth century, Robert Aitken’s accounts show that the Italian method had made some inroads. He carefully stuck to the system of keeping a waste book (or daybook) and recorded regularly from it to double entries in a ledger, noting which accounts had been settled or lost.” - Rosalind Remer, *Printers and Men of Capital*, Philadelphia, 1996, p. 103.

It is impossible here to seek to do full justice to all of Paine's established and supposed contributions³⁹ to the *Pennsylvania Magazine*. Since, however, it is my purpose in this section of my study to attempt to unravel Paine's gradual drift away from Aitken's original intention in his *Plan* to avoid political controversy - as part of the whole magazine's dramatic *volte face* in that regard - a few of his contributions deserve special comment in order to illustrate my general hypothesis:

"The Magazine in America" (No. 1, January, 1775)⁴⁰

This unsigned piece (i.e. without *nom de plume*) is introductory of the first number and is intended, not so much to set out editorial policy - which Aitken, after all, had already done in his *Plan* - but to declare the value, purpose and above all, usefulness of the new magazine. He also emphasises its American-ness. In so doing he can't resist, in typical Tom Paine fashion, a swipe at English magazine corollaries. This early example of Paine's prose is not yet Paine in his pomp, yet it is not fanciful to discern in his easy-flowing, direct, journalistic style the periodic cadences of *Common Sense*, only (precisely) one year off:

America has now outgrown the state of infancy: her strength and commerce make large advances to manhood; and science in all its branches has not only blossomed, but even ripened on the soil. ... It has always been the opinion of the learned and curious, that a magazine, when properly conducted, is the nursery of genius; and by constantly accumulating new matter, becomes a kind of market for wit and utility

The two capital supports of a magazine are Utility and Entertainment: The first is a boundless path, the other an endless spring. ...

It was not the ignorance of the age only, but the vanity of it, which rendered it dangerous to be ingenious. The man who first planned and erected a tenable hut, with a hole for the smoke to pass, and the light to enter, was perhaps called an able architect, but he who first improved it with a chimney, could be no less than a prodigy. ...

A magazine can never want matter in America, if the inhabitants will do justice to their own abilities. Agriculture and manufactures owe much of their improvement in England, to hints first thrown out in some of their magazines. Gentlemen whose abilities enabled them to make experiments, frequently chose that method of communication, on account of its convenience. And why should not the same spirit operate in America? I have no doubt of seeing, in a little

³⁹ e.g. "The full extent of his contributions is not known and several works have been wrongly ascribed to him by admirers." - Hazel Burgess, *Thomas Paine A Collection of Unknown Writings*, New York, 2010, p. 5. Sadly, Burgess herself is far from a reliable authority since some of her "unknown" ascriptions are manifestly not the work of Paine! Her book has been poorly received. See Appendix G.

⁴⁰ Larkin gets it all wrong when he states that "Aitken ... published the first issue of his *Pennsylvania Magazine* ... in February of 1775, and hired Paine ... as his editor for the following month." *Thomas Paine and the Literature of Revolution*, p. 34.

time, an American magazine full of more useful matter than I ever saw an English one: Because we are not exceeded in abilities, have a more extensive field for enquiry; and, whatever may be our political state, *Our happiness will always depend upon ourselves.*

... Wit is naturally a volunteer, delights in action, and under proper discipline is capable of great execution. ... European wit is one of the worst articles we can import. It has an intoxicating power with it, which debauches the very vitals of chastity, and gives a false colouring to every thing it censures or defends.

Paine's continual reference to the Enlightenment idea of the usefulness of science is not only in the mainstream of his own reasoning (as well as a reflection of his, admittedly sketchy, education and training in England), but, more important, is calculated to appeal to the reading public of Philadelphia, used as it was to Benjamin Franklin's insistence on *useful knowledge* - the mantra that lay behind the great man's vision as enshrined in the numerous creations of his practical intellect in that city, such as the first true university in America, the American Philosophical Society and the Library Company. Paine liked to be thought of as a true disciple of his famous mentor.⁴¹

Larkin is on the mark when he comments on Paine's likening of a "properly conducted" magazine to a "nursery of genius", providing "exercise" for the mind so that it does not "fall into decay" -

As a "nursery of genius and a "market of wit" the magazine generically becomes an educational instrument that may be used to assist America as it "outgrow[s] the state of infancy". Thus the *Pennsylvania Magazine* becomes a parental mentor in the process of educating the people of the colonies, a process that, within the context of the post-Lockean developmental models of the period, inevitably leads to independence. The mission of the magazine to educate its readership thus implicitly involves it in a revolutionary process.⁴²

He could have added - 'and there was little that the hapless Aitken could have done about it'. In "The Publisher's Preface", in the same first number, Aitken himself, as he was on the point of putting the first issue to bed,

looked with some concern on the turbulence of the year, and hoped that an amicable solution would soon be found. All who would normally write for the magazine, he said, "now turn their attention to the rude preparations for war --- Every heart and hand seem to be engaged in the interesting struggle for *American Liberty*." It was "the sincere wish --- the earnest prayer of the

⁴¹ For an account of Franklin's approach to *useful knowledge* see Ronald Crawford, *Enlightenment Ideas in Education - Benjamin Franklin and John Anderson*, Glasgow, privately printed, 2008.

⁴² *Thomas Paine and the Literature of Revolution*, p. 35.

Publisher” that “all public contentions may find a speedy and equitable reconciliation, and that this once happy country may again enjoy the unviolated blessings of the *British Constitution*.”⁴³

“Useful and Entertaining Hints” (No. 2, February 1775)

This piece by Paine, writing under one of his favourite *noms de plume*, “Atlanticus”, is ostensibly about the science of geology and fossil-hunting, yet it becomes clear that there is also a sub-text which would not have needed much unravelling on the part of the shrewd reader. It should be noted that tensions were at fever point between the Americans and the British by the time this number appeared.⁴⁴

Were a man to propose or set out to bore his lands as a carpenter does a board, he might probably bring on himself a shower of witticisms; and tho’ he could not be jested at for *building castles in the air*; yet many *magnanimous* laughs might break forth at his expence, and vociferously predict the explosion of a mine in his subterraneous pursuits. I am led to this reflection by the present domestic state of America, because it will unavoidably happen, that before we can arrive at that perfection of things which other nations have acquired, many hopes will fail, many whimsical attempts will become fortunate, and many reasonable ones end in air and expence. *The degree of improvement which America has already arrived at is unparalleled and astonishing*, but ‘tis miniature to what she will one day boast of, if heaven continue her happiness. We have nearly one whole region yet unexplored: I mean the internal region of the earth. By industry and tillage we have acquired a considerable knowledge of what America will *produce*, but very little of what it *contains*.

... Her gold and jewels lie concealed in the earth, in caves of utter darkness; and hoards of wealth, heaps upon heaps, mould in the chests, like the riches of a Necromancer’s cell.

... Since so great a portion of our enjoyments is drawn from the mine, it is certainly an evidence of our prudence to inquire and know what our possessions are. Every man’s landed property extends to the [centre] of the earth. Why then should he sit down contented with a part, and practise upon his estate those fashionable follies in life, which prefer the superifice to the solid? Curiosity alone, should the thought occur conveniently, would move an active mind to examine (tho’ not to the bottom) at least to a considerable depth.

... These hints are not intended to lament any loss of time, or remissness in the pursuit of useful knowledge, but to furnish matter for future studies; that while we glory in what we are, we may not neglect what we *are to be*.

Of the present state we may justly say, that no nation under heaven ever struck out in so short a time, and with so much spirit and reputation, into the labyrinth of art and science; and that, not in the *acquisition* of knowledge only, but in the happy advantages flowing *from* it. The world does not at this day exhibit a parallel, neither can history produce its equal.

⁴³ Lyon N. Richardson, *A History of Early American Magazines 1741-1789*, New York, 1931, p. 178.

⁴⁴ “In the first week of February [1775] both houses approved an address to the king declaring the colonies in rebellion and calling for forceful measures to ensure obedience to the laws and sovereignty of England.” – Robert Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause The American Revolution, 1768-1789*, revised ed., Oxford and New York, 2005, p. 270.

One can almost picture Aitken getting hot under the collar when he had explained to him the subtle under-current and veiled sub-text of Paine's skilful *doubles entendres*. But it was nothing to what lay ahead.

"New Anecdotes of Alexander the Great" (No. 2, February 1775)

In my view, this is by far one of Paine's most important *Magazine* pieces. It appeared in the same February number as his "Atlanticus" contribution cited above, but this time under another of his *noms de plume*, "Esop".⁴⁵ This was the first of Paine's political fables and its inventive satire is as witty as its real meaning is all too shockingly clear. Put simply, for Alexander the Great, read George III. Writing in the first person, the traveller - reminiscent of Jonathan Swift or even the much later Washington Irving - informs his reader:

As I passed towards the Schuylkill, my ideas enlarged with the prospect, and sprung from place to place with an agility for which nature had not a simile.

He passes the Styx, and "made large excursions into the shadowy regions" and "taking a new flight, inspected the state of things unborn" - i.e. the world of the future. The traveller's curiosity having got the better of him -

Perfectly at rest from care or business, I suffered my ideas to pursue their own unfettered fancies; and in less time than what is required to express it in, they had again passed the Styx and toured many miles into the new country.

... Having a mind to see in what manner Alexander lived in the Plutonian world, I crossed the Styx ... and enquired of a melancholy looking shade, who was sitting on the banks of the river, if he could give me any account of him, *Yonder he comes*, replied the shade, *get out of the way or you'll be run over*. Turning myself round I saw a grand equipage rolling towards me, which filled the whole avenue. Bless me! thought I, the gods still continue this man in his insolence and pomp! The chariot was drawn by eight horses in golden harness, and the whole represented his triumphal return, after he had conquered the world.

Where was Alexander on board the chariot? asks the traveller stopping to speak to the shade. He is puzzled because he doesn't make him out: was he there?

⁴⁵ In 1777 Aitken printed the first American edition of Samuel Croxall's *Fables of Aesop and Others*; he reprinted the same title in 1783 and again in 1792. No fewer than 16 different editions of Aesop's Fables were published in America between 1777 and 1800, three of which appeared in Philadelphia alone in 1777. One of Aitken's competitors, the (probably) Glasgow-born Robert Bell (printer of *Common Sense*) published different translations by Dodsley and Robert Burton in that same year.

Yes, answered the shade, *because he was the forehorse on the side next to us.* Horse! I mean Alexander the Emperor. *I mean the same,* replied the shade, *for whatever he was on the other side of the water is nothing now, he is a HORSE here; and not always that, for when he is apprehensive that a good licking is intended for him, he watches his opportunity to roll out of the stable in the shape of a piece of dung, or in any other disguise he can escape by.*

And one can be sure that the phrase “on the other side of the water” would not be lost on an American readership. But the merciless satire doesn’t end there -

... when I had reached the banks of the river, and was preparing to take my flight over, I perceived that I had picked up a *bug* among the Plutonian gentry, and thinking it was needless to increase the breed on this side of the water, was going to dispatch it, when the little wretch screamed out, *Spare Alexander the GREAT.* On which I withdrew the violence I was offering to his person, and holding up the emperor between my finger and thumb, he exhibited a most contemptible figure of the downfall of tyrant greatness. Affected with a mixture of concern and compassion (*which he was always a stranger to*) I suffered him to nibble on a pimple that was newly risen in my hand, in order to refresh him; after which I placed him on a tree to hide him, but a Tom Tit coming by, chopped him up with as little ceremony as he put whole kingdoms to the sword. On which I took my flight, reflecting with pleasure, -- That I was not ALEXANDER THE GREAT.

I am unaware of any previous study exposing this first example of American revolutionary period satire. Even Larkin, whose efforts I much admire in successfully placing *The Pennsylvania Magazine* at the very summit of American political journalism in this period, fails to grasp the hidden significance of Paine’s tale. He does, on the other hand, hit the target when he comments:

The *Pennsylvania Magazine* ... provides a perfect example of what John Adams meant in 1815 when, in one of his most famous letters to Thomas Jefferson, he suggested that the war was only the “Effect and Consequence” of the true revolution, which was “in the Minds of the People, and this was effected, from 1760 to 1775, in the course of fifteen Years before a drop of blood was drawn at Lexington.”⁴⁶

“*Cupid and Hymen*” (No. 4, April 1775)

This number of the magazine was published only a couple of weeks before American rebels (on April 18-19) confronted General Gage’s army when he tried to seize rebel *matériel* stored in Concord, near Boston. The “massacre” at Lexington took place on “the fatal nineteenth of April, 1775”.⁴⁷ The first battle of the revolutionary war took place

⁴⁶ *Thomas Paine and the Literature of Revolution*, p. 46.

⁴⁷ “No man was a warmer wisher for reconciliation than myself, before the fatal nineteenth of April 1775, but the moment the event of that day was made known, I rejected the hardened, sullen-tempered Pharaoh of ---- for ever; and disdain the wretch, that with the pretended title of FATHER OF HIS PEOPLE can unfeelingly hear of their slaughter, and composedly sleep with their blood upon their soul.” - *Common Sense*, p. 87, *The Thomas Paine Reader*, ed. Foot and Krannick.

at Bunker Hill in June. The piece is an allegory, but with a meaning so transparent that again, as in the case of the earlier Alexander the Great piece, Paine (writing once more as “Esop”) can almost disdainfully ignore Aitken’s ban on straying into political controversy, strictures that were in any case now beginning to wear thin indeed.

Hymen, the god of marriage, seeks to marry off Ruralinda, a poor villager in love with another, to a rich Lord of the Manor who has merely consulted the mother of Ruralinda who quite likes the prospect of her daughter being the Lady of the Manor. Cupid, the god of love, intervenes, however, and asserts his authority over Hymen –

Know, Hymen, that I am your master. Indulgent Jove gave you to me as a clerk, not as a rival, much less a superior. ‘Tis my province to form the union, and yours to witness it. But of late you have treacherously assumed to set up for yourself. ‘Tis true you may chain couples together like criminals, but you cannot yoke them like lovers.

An indignant Hymen replies:

You are not of such importance in the world as your vanity thinks; for my own part I have enlisted myself with another master, and can very well do without you.

Hymen has betrayed Cupid and allied himself with Plutus, (who, Paine identifies in a footnote, is the “God of riches”). Larkin, who has made a special study of Paine’s use of fable, brilliantly analyses the fairly obvious hidden meaning of the fable:

Ironically, Paine asserts the legitimacy of one hierarchical relationship (Cupid’s rule over Hymen), in order to undermine another one (Great Britain’s rule over the American colonies). The fable’s implications for the relationship between Great Britain and its colonies in North America are clear enough: The bond should be based on mutual consent and affection, not on commercial interests.⁴⁸

“Reflections on Titles” (No. 5, May 1775)

In this short piece Paine writes as “Vox Populi”. His theme – the iniquity of hereditary titles – is one with which he grapples again and again: in *Common Sense*, of course, but even more particularly in *Rights of Man* Part One, the latter still fifteen years distant. Here, he almost anticipates the poet Robert Burns of the famous song, *For a’ that and a’ that*⁴⁹ written just twenty years later –

⁴⁸ *Thomas Paine and the Literature of Revolution*, p. 42.

⁴⁹ “Thomas Crawford, * following John Maccunn, has called attention to similarities in thought and phrasing between Burns’s song and Paine’s *Rights of Man*. – Paine praises the French constitution for asserting ‘*There shall be no titles*, so that ‘the peer is exalted into MAN, rather than fussing

When I reflect on the pompous titles bestowed on unworthy men, I feel an indignity that instructs to despise the absurdity. The *Honourable* plunderer of his country, or the *Right Honourable* murderer of mankind, create such a contrast of ideas as exhibit a monster rather than a man. Virtue is inflamed at the violation, and sober reason calls it nonsense.

... The lustre of the *Star* and the title of *My Lord*, over-awe the superstitious vulgar, and forbid them to inquire into the character of the possessor: Nay more, they are, as it were, bewitched to admire in the great, the vices they would honestly condemn in themselves. This sacrifice of common sense is the certain badge which distinguishes slavery from freedom; for when men yield up the privilege of thinking, the last shadow of liberty quits the horizon.

... Modesty forbids men, separately or collectively, to assume titles. But as all honours, even that of Kings, originated from the public, the public may justly be called the fountain of true honour. And it is with much pleasure I have heard the title of *Honourable* applied to a body of men, who nobly disregarding private ease and interest for public welfare, have justly merited the address of The Honourable Continental Congress.

[*Two pieces provisionally assigned to Paine*] -

"The Dream Interpreted" (No. 6, June 1775)

Richardson thinks the attribution of this piece to Paine "may be doubtful" and Frank Smith pronounces it "provisional". It is signed "Bucks County". I shall assume it is by Paine but whether it is or not, it illustrates the extent to which the original policy of political 'caution' in Aitken's *Plan* has, by now, been totally abandoned. The gloves, so to speak, are well and truly off. "*This is the new America*" is now the clear message.

Like Paine's *New Anecdotes of Alexander the Great* of February, here we are presented with a dream sequence, in this case the reader being asked to picture a traveller in Virginia who turns off the road to shelter from the sun and drink from an obliging spring. It is an idyllic picture. He beholds "one of the most pleasing landscapes" he has ever seen. Then the scene begins to change "by an almost insensible gradation". The sun consumes everything with its intolerable heat, the hills appear "burnt and black", the fountains dried up

and the atmosphere became a motionless lake of air, loaded with pestilence and death.

A tempest shakes the earth. At length the storm subsides. The traveller expects to see "a world in ruins". Instead, he is struck with astonishment to discover a "lovely and inviting" prospect which "had all the promising appearance of exceeding its former glory.":

about an aristocratic 'fine *blue ribbon*' or '*garter*.' - Robert Crawford, *The Bard*, London, 2009, p. 383.

* Thomas Crawford, *Burns A study of the poems and songs*, Edinburgh, 1960, especially p. 365.

All, all was felicity; and what I had dreaded as an evil, became a blessing.

The traveller awakens from his reverie, meets with a companion and tells him his dream. "I think", says his friend, "that I can interpret it". This is his interpretation -

That beautiful country which you saw is America. The sickly state you beheld her in, has been coming on her for these ten years past. Her commerce has been drying up by repeated restrictions, till by one merciless edict the ruin of it is completed. The pestilential atmosphere represents that ministerial corruption which surrounds and exercises its dominion over her, and which nothing but a storm can purify. The tempest is the present contest, and the event will be the same. She will rise with new glories from the conflict, and her fame be established in every corner of the globe; while it will be remembered to her eternal honour, that she has not sought the quarrel, but has been driven into it. He who guides the natural tempest will regulate the political one, and bring good out of evil. In our petition to Britain we asked but for peace; but the prayer was rejected. The cause is now before a higher court, the court of providence, before whom the arrogance of kings, the infidelity of ministers, the general corruption of government, and all the cobweb artifice of courts, will fall confounded and ashamed.

For Aitken as publisher, and for Paine as his writer/editor, there can be no turning back from now on, and no second thoughts. Both had become thorough-going Americans through the pages of *The Pennsylvania Magazine*. One suspects that in more ways than one, Paine had forced Aitken's hand much more than he might have wished.

"Thoughts on Defensive War" (No. 7, July 1775)

This piece is also of doubtful attribution to Paine. If it is one of his, it is one of the last to appear in Aitken's magazine. Moncure D. Conway says it is "probably by Paine", whereas Richardson believes "it is well to observe the [i.e. Conway's] caution". Frank Smith, on the other hand, thinks that it should be "accepted provisionally".

The *nom de plume* used is "A LOVER OF PEACE". Whoever wrote it, it is politically the most extreme and outspoken piece from the magazine we have yet considered. It dramatically illustrates the extent to which, by July 1775 - just before Paine walked out on Aitken - the *Pennsylvania Magazine* had become a quite different kind of periodical from the one originally conceived by its canny Scottish publisher. The magazine is simply no longer recognisable as a journal covering "the whole circle of science, including politics and religion as objects of philosophical disquisition, but excluding controversy in both". Whether *Thoughts on Defensive War* it is by Paine or not - and from the internal evidence there is much to convince even the sceptic that, though maybe not vintage Paine, this is at least *Paineite* (or even *Painesque*) in its rhetoric - the point is that the *Magazine*

was beginning to display all the signs of having become what Aitken must have feared it might become, a vehicle of anti-British sentiment:

Whoever considers the unprincipled enemy we have to cope with, will not hesitate to declare that nothing but arms or miracles can reduce them to reason and moderation. They have lost sight of the limits of humanity.

... From the House of Commons the troops of Britain have been exhorted to fight, not for the defence of their natural rights, not to repel the invasion or the insult of enemies; but on the vilest of all pretences, gold. “Ye fight for solid revenue” was vociferous in the House. Thus America *must suffer* because she has something to lose. Her crime is property. That which allures the Highwayman has allured the ministry under a gentler name. But the position laid down by Lord Sandwich, is a clear demonstration of the justice of defensive arms. The Americans, quoth this Quixote of modern days, *will not fight*; therefore we will. His Lordship’s plan when analyzed amounts to this. These people are either too superstitiously religious, or too cowardly for arms; they either *cannot* or *dare not* defend; their property is open to any one who has the courage to attack them. Send but your troops and the prize is ours.

... But there is a point to view this matter of superior consequence to the defence of property; and that point is *Liberty* in all its meanings. ... Political liberty is the visible pass which guards the religious.

At this point in the article the writer – it may be Paine – refers to a sermon he has recently heard preached which moved him greatly:

I had the pleasure and advantage of hearing this matter wisely investigated, by a gentleman, in a sermon to one of the battalions of this city; and am fully convinced, that spiritual freedom is the root of political Liberty.

An odd remark, it may be thought, from the man who would one day write *The Age of Reason* and, in so doing, cut himself off permanently from men of Christian faith everywhere. But this was still 1775 and religion, after all, was one of the key factors behind the outbreak of war. The preacher on the occasion ‘Paine’ refers to was the Reverend Jacob Duché⁵⁰ whose rousing sermon “On the Duty of Standing Fast in Our

⁵⁰ (1737-1798). Duché studied in Cambridge for a short time before being ordained an Anglican clergyman by the Bishop of London and returning to the colonies. In 1759 he married Elizabeth Hopkinson, sister of his classmate, Francis Hopkinson. In the same year he was appointed professor of oratory at the College of Philadelphia and for a time combined that post with his duties as rector of Christ Church. From 1774 to 1776 Duché was chaplain to the Continental Congress, delivering the prayer at the first opening of that body. After a letter he wrote to Washington in 1777, in which he urged a cessation of American resistance, he had to flee to England where he was appointed chaplain to the Asylum for Female Orphans in St. George’s Fields, London. Although he was convicted of high treason in his absence, Duché returned to Philadelphia in 1792 and died there six years later.

The Spawns note that Aitken’s waste book records that “in the early years of the [Aitken] shop, that is from 1771 to 1776, the largest number of gilt bindings had been produced for the Reverend Jacob Duché.” - *The Aitken Shop*, p. 425.

Spiritual and Temporal Liberties”, preached on July 7th in Christ Church, Philadelphia, he had heard with mounting enthusiasm. Duché had concluded his sermon as follows:

In a word, my brethren -- though the worst should come -- though we should be deprived of all the conveniences and elegancies of life -- though we should be cut off from all our usual sources of commerce, and constrained, as many of our poor brethren have already been to abandon our present comfortable habitations -- let us, nevertheless, ‘Stand Fast’ as the Guardians of Liberty.⁵¹

Ironically, Duché turned out to be a loyalist and fled to England in 1777, having been convicted of high treason by the State of Pennsylvania and his estate confiscated.

‘Paine’ explains what he means by “spiritual freedom” and how it relates to “political Liberty”:

First. Because till spiritual freedom was made manifest, political liberty did not exist.

Secondly. Because in proportion that *spiritual freedom* has been manifested, *political liberty* has increased.

Thirdly. Whenever the visible church has been oppressed, political freedom has suffered with it.

And he concludes the piece in fine rhetorical style -

As the union between spiritual freedom and political liberty seems nearly inseparable, it is our duty to defend both. And defence in the first instance is best. The lives of hundreds of both countries had been preserved had America been in arms a year ago. Our enemies have mistaken our peace for cowardice, and supposing us unarmed have begun the attack.

Liberty Tree. A New Song (No. 7, July 1775)

This “Poetical Essay”⁵² by “Atlanticus” also appeared in the July 1775 number. It is undoubtedly the best known piece of all that can be assigned with certainty to Paine from the pages of *The Pennsylvania Magazine*. Again it seems possible that “Atlanticus” derived the inspiration to write it from hearing Duché’s sermon -

⁵¹ *The Duty of Standing Fast in our Spiritual and Temporal Liberties, a Sermon preached in Christ-Church, July 7th, 1775. Before the First Battallion of the City, and liberties of Philadelphia; and now published at their request. By the Reverend Jacob Duché, M.A. Philadelphia: Printed and sold by James Humphreys, Junior, the corner of Black-Horse Alley, Front-Street, 1775.*

⁵² Another famous poem of the revolutionary war made its first appearance in the pages of the magazine: the black African former slave, Phillis Wheatley’s (uncontributed) piece *Letter and Verses ... to His Excellency Gen. Washington*. Before the war Aitken had also published (in 1772) Philip Morrin Freneau’s patriotic *A Poem, on the rising Glory of America* which, on the evidence of the waste book, sold well over a period of some years.

From the east to the west, blow the trumpet to arms,
Let the far and the near, --- all unite with a cheer,
In defence of our *Liberty tree*.⁵³

5 The *Magazine* after Paine's departure

In the interval between his break-up with Aitken and the publication of *Common Sense* in January 1776, Paine wrote nothing of substance, beyond a two-part article - which he co-authored with a Captain Thomas Pryor - on the manufacture of saltpetre which appeared in the *Pennsylvania Journal* on November 22 and December 6, 1775.⁵⁴ With the publication of the anonymous pamphlet, *Common Sense*, and its astonishing reception by the public, Paine almost immediately fell out with its printer, Robert Bell, and soon afterwards began negotiations for a rival edition by a different printer, William and Thomas Bradford, publishers and proprietors of the *Pennsylvania Journal*.⁵⁵ The spectacle of Paine quarrelling with his printers was to be a recurring theme throughout his life. Certainly, for Bell's fellow Scot, Robert Aitken, the phenomenal success of *Common Sense* must have been a bitter pill to swallow, even though he may have found some consolation in the acrimonious row between its author and the two rival publishers. More mercenarily, Aitken quickly caught on to the sales potential of the pamphlet and his waste book records that he negotiated from his fellow Scot, Bell, a good discount on bulk purchases: whereas the published price of *Common Sense* was two shillings, the wholesale price was fixed at eighteen shillings a dozen. That was sufficient for Aitken to buy two dozen on January 10, two dozen on January 15, one dozen on January 17, and two dozen on January 22.

⁵³ cf. the poem (probably) by Burns, *The Tree of Liberty*, written in 1795 (?) but not published until its inclusion by Chambers in his collection of 1838.

⁵⁴ "Experiments made since Friday last by Capt. Pryor and Mr. Thomas Pain, for the purpose of fixing some easy, cheap, and expeditious method of making Salt-Petre in private Families, in order to shew the practicability of a plan, proposed by Mr. Pain of forming a Salt-Petre Association for voluntarily supplying the public Magazines with Gun-powder." During Paine's tenure as editor the June 1775 number of *The Pennsylvania Magazine* had published an article (identified as written by Benjamin Rush in his role as professor of chemistry at the College of Philadelphia) on the manufacture of saltpetre and in the August 1775 number an editorial beginning "Many persons having in contemplation to enter upon the manufacture of Salt-Petre ..." prefaces the reprint of an extract from the *Massachusetts Spy* of Franklin's directions for making saltpetre "at Hanover, 1766".

⁵⁵ For a comprehensive account of the printing history of *Common Sense*, see Richard Gimbel, *Thomas Paine: a bibliographical check list of Common Sense: with an account of its publication*, New Haven, Ct., 1956.

After Paine's departure the *Magazine* continued under new editorship, possibly with Francis Hopkinson (who contributed more articles than Paine) at the helm and, also possibly, with assistance from John Witherspoon as well. It seems most unlikely that, as Keane claims, Aitken took on this task himself since he was not a man of letters but always the practical man of business. One of the highlights was the first three (of seven) of *The Druid* articles of Witherspoon, though the series could not be concluded before the magazine's final number in July 1776. They appeared in the May, June and (final) July 1776 numbers. Well before then, however, the magazine – and the Monthly Reports in particular – was beginning to resemble a military campaign bulletin and a digest of the progress of the war.

In the meantime, Aitken continued as best he could with his printing and binding business, supplemented where possible with the odd book or pamphlet publishing venture. He was constantly hampered by an acute paper shortage and had frequently to appeal for rags with which he and others might manufacture paper of an acceptable, but still coarse quality.⁵⁶ In the nineteen month period of the life of *The Pennsylvania Magazine*, for example, he published just six books of which his reprints of Robert Lowth's *A short introduction to English grammar* (1775) and Lord Kames' *Six sketches on the history of man* (1776) are among the most interesting. Other titles germane to the prevailing situation, both military and economic, were *Military instructions for officers detached in the field* (1775), Philip Astley's *The modern riding-master: or, A key to the knowledge of the horse, and horsemanship* (1776) and Robert Treat Paine's *The art of making common salt* (1776). There was one religious work, an edition of *The Larger Catechism; agreed upon by the Assembly of Divines at Westminster* (1775). It was clear that the times, and the publishing business, were increasingly bleak.

In the June 1776 number of *The Pennsylvania Magazine* Aitken found it necessary to insert this note:

Our Customers will excuse us, though the day of publication be sometimes delayed: The great difficulty we have in procuring printing paper, renders it impossible for us to publish always on the first Wednesday of the month.

⁵⁶ e.g. “The highest prices given for any quantity of clean LINEN RAGS.” – concluding an ad. placed by Aitken for “a neat edition of THE NEW TESTAMENT” and for forthcoming “volumes first and second of the elegant new edition of JOURNALS of CONGRESS” (*Pennsylvania Evening Post*, August 28, 1777, and repeated on August 30 and September 6).

The July 1776 number - volume II, number 7, or number 19 in the whole series - proved the last of all. As well as part three of *The Druid* series, “Epaminondas” (Witherspoon) contributed “Reflections on Marriage”. But the final number was inevitably dominated by the contemporary military and political situation. “His Britannic Majesty’s Speech to both Houses of Parliament, May 23. 1776” was followed on the same page by “List of Members of the Convention”. On pages 325-7 appeared Smollet’s [sic] “Ode to Independence” - how Paine would have loved that - and the editor [Hopkinson or Witherspoon?] comments -

That this Poem has high merit no one will doubt, who has the smallest pretension [sic] to taste. It has all the enthusiasm and poetic colouring which suit the ode; and it breathes a spirit of liberty that would not have disgraced a citizen of Sparta, or of Rome.

On pages 328 to 330 Aitken prints the whole text of the Declaration of Independence. There follow the Constitutions of New Jersey, Virginia and Connecticut, then reports on the war from Canada, South Carolina, Virginia, New York and Philadelphia. The final words, appropriately, are from the magazine’s proprietor, Aitken himself -

We designed to give in this number a plan of the harbour and city of New-York and parts adjacent; but were unable to get the plate engraved in time for the publication. The plan will appear in our next.

There was, of course, to be no “next” number.

6 Crises in Aitken’s fortunes -

(a) Jailed by the British and called to account by his Church Session

A serious crisis occurred in Robert Aitken’s life in 1777-1778. First, it seems certain that in 1777 Aitken was thrown into jail by the occupying British. This was not, as Isaiah Thomas supposed,⁵⁷ out of his support for the American cause, but because he had neglected to remunerate the Glasgow firm of printers, Robert and Thomas Duncan, for books and pamphlets they had given him to take over to Philadelphia for sale on commission. From McCulloch’s additions to Thomas’s *History* we learn that Thomas’s account of the story is inaccurate -

⁵⁷ *The History of Printing in America ... In two volumes. By Isaiah Thomas, printer, Worcester, Massachusetts. ... Worcester: From the press of Isaiah Thomas, Jun. Isaac Sturtevant, printer., 1810.* A modern edition, edited by Marcus A. McCorison, was issued in New York in 1970.

You [Thomas, p. 96] are much mistaken in your history of Robert Aitken. His imprisonment did not arise from his attachment to the American cause, although the time of the duration might favour the presumption. He took no active part. “I am na a fechtin mon”, was, in his own dialect, a common expression with him. Duncan ... had sent over a power of attorney to compel Aitken to liquidate the debt he owed The revolution broke out just after the power arrived and prevented a legal process in British form. When the English obtained possession of Philadelphia and the royal government was restored, the suit was prosecuted and Aitken was cast into prison for the debt.

And McCulloch adds for good measure:

That only was the cause of the confinement which you represent him to be suffering for attachment to his adopted country. He was not at all times the most cunning man for his own interests, nor did he at all times evince the most amiable manners.⁵⁸

From late September 1777 for almost nine months until March the following year, the British had re-occupied Philadelphia. Inflation became rampant, “inhabitants at every social level felt anxiety and fear” and

Even those loyal to the king’s cause had reason to fear, for soldiers looking for plunder did not care where they got it.⁵⁹

Among those who suffered most were Quakers whose pacifist sentiments and opposition to the taking of oaths hardly endeared them to either side.⁶⁰ Much the same, however,

⁵⁸ “Two years after the History was published, William McCulloch, one of the leading printers of Philadelphia, wrote Thomas a letter, dated September 1, 1812, offering a few additions and corrections. This was followed two years later by a communication written at various times towards the close of the year 1814 and in the first months of 1815, the whole contained in a MS. volume of 296 pp, and headed “Additional Memoranda for the History of Printing by Isaiah Thomas, communicated by William McCulloch.” - American Antiquarian Society Proceedings, vol. 31, part 1 New Series, Worcester, Mass., 1921, pp. 89-247.

⁵⁹ In 1777 Aitken published no books besides ‘official’ titles - i.e. the United States Journals of Congress, a recruitment pamphlet for Philadelphia County and General and Standing Orders for the Continental Army of the United States. 1778 was a particularly lean year, just one title published from his press - an edition of Dilworth’s *A New Guide to the English Tongue*.

⁶⁰ While on my study visit to the United States (May, 2010) I encountered a bizarre story concerning Aitken and a Philadelphia Quaker which I believe to be true but have been unable to verify from the extremely meagre documentation available to me. It appears that after the British ended their occupation of the city in June 1778, two Quakers, John Roberts and Abraham Carlisle, were accused of high treason and brought to trial in a Court of Oyer and Terminer held in Philadelphia in late September - in the case of Roberts, a prosperous miller, on the ground that he tried to recruit for the British. [*Respublica v. Roberts*: 1U.S. 39 (1778)]. The defence attorney was none other than the Scottish lawyer, James Wilson (1742-98), and one of the judges another of Scots-Irish lineage, the “cold, proud and vain” Thomas McKean (1734-1817), Chief Justice, later Governor of Pennsylvania. Both Roberts and Carlisle were summarily found guilty and hanged. According to what I was confidently informed, Robert Aitken was called by Wilson as a witness for Roberts’ defence and his evidence summarised in McKean’s personal notes of the trial - which, frustratingly, I have so far been unable to locate. The story does not end there, for it also turns out that Aitken had in his possession, at the time of the surrender of the city to the redcoats, the original MS. for his printing of the Journal of the Continental Congress (he had

could be said of Presbyterian dissenters, and of the Antiburghers in particular. The history is tangled, convoluted and often confusing. The facts are these:

We know from the Presbyterian Historical Society of Philadelphia, now located in Lombard Street, that the Scots Presbyterian Church in that city had its roots in the Associate Presbyterian Church ('the Seceders Church') of Philadelphia, first organised in 1768. In 1770 - the year before Robert Aitken removed permanently to America - the congregation divided into Burgher and Antiburgher factions and in 1779 the Antiburghers were separately incorporated as the Scots Presbyterian Church. To complete the picture, the SPC congregation joined the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church when it was organised in 1782 and was then known as the First Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia.⁶¹ Through numerous re-organisations and mergers that church has become the present day 'Third, Scots, and Mariners Presbyterian Church' which "continues as an active congregation of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A)".⁶²

The records of the Scots Presbyterian Church eventually incorporated the records of seven other congregations. The original Kirk Session (or trustee) minute books survive in the library of the PHS of Philadelphia; these include the contemporary records of Aitken's Antiburgher church and represent a fascinating and important insight into another side of Aitken's life and career which until now has only been superficially

published Congress proceedings in 1777). To prevent the valuable document falling into British hands I was told that he gave the MS. to Roberts who buried it on his land, near present day Morristown, where it was later disinterred by soldiers of Washington's army. I am satisfied that both these oral aspects of the Aitken/Roberts episode are substantially accurate even although I am unable to verify either at the time of the printing of this study. [See Willard Hurst, "Treason in the United States? 1. Treason down to the Constitution", *Harvard Law Review*, Vol. 58, No. 2 (Dec., 1944), 226-72).]

⁶¹ However, the minister of the Antiburgher church (usually known simply as the Scots Church or Scots Presbyterian Church), the Reverend William Marshall (and one other minister), refused to accept the union and the congregation continued to style themselves the 'Associate Presbytery'. It is as an elder of Marshall's congregation to which Aitken chose to continue to adhere until 1785; after which date it is uncertain which church (if any) he attended.

⁶² For assistance with the unscrambling of the extremely convoluted story of organised Presbyterianism in Philadelphia I am indebted to (i) a summary sheet abstracted from Kenneth A. Hammonds' *Historical Directory of Presbyterian Churches and Presbyteries of Greater Philadelphia*, Philadelphia, PHS, 1993, and thoughtfully handed out to visitors to the Presbyterian Historical Society Library and Archive in Lombard Street, Philadelphia; and (ii) the Reverend Alexander Mackie's excellent account in the *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, "The Presbyterian Churches of Old Philadelphia", vol. 43, Pt.1, 1953, pp. 217-229.

researched. The minute book covers the period 1768-1821⁶³ and shows that Aitken was admitted a “ruling Elder” at congregational worship on September 28 1775. He is shown as having attended most meetings of the Session over the decade up to 1785 but his name ceases to appear in the sederunt after November 1 in that year.⁶⁴ When I inspected the minutes I found an entry relating to an important incident in Aitken’s life that, so far as I am aware, has remained unrecorded until now.

At a meeting of the Session held on September 7, 1778, just a few months after the British quit Philadelphia, Aitken was brought before a special meeting of the Session and accused of having taken not one but two oaths – or, more precisely, of having taken an oath to the British crown which he then abjured followed by what became known as the ‘State Test’, effectively an oath declaring his loyalty to the United States. The text of the minute is as follows [spelling and punctuation normalised by me]:

The congregation having been broken up by the British army taking possession of the City since September last until lately and now by the kindness of God being partly gathered together again, the Session being met and constituted with prayer by the Moderator, sederunt G. Kennedy, P. January, J. Purdon and R. Hunter, Elders. Wm. Richards and T. Kinsley, Deacons. Appeared R. Aitken who owned that last winter he, being informed of the danger he was in of imprisonment, did go and take an oath of allegiance to the king of Britain. After he had renounced this allegiance by taking the test prescribed by the State, he, being interrogated as to a number of circumstances concerning this and his repentance for it, and given satisfactory replies, was removed [and] the Session agreed just now to rebuke him and intimate this to the congregation for their satisfaction. He, being called in, this was intimated to him. He craved that it might not be intimated to the congregation as he apprehended it might do him a signal injury. The Session agreed to drop intimating as above but in lieu thereof appointed Mr. Richards and Mr. Purdon to go along with Mr. Aitken to the houses of those members of the congregation who knew of the offence and are much offended, and relate the proceedings of the Session for their information and satisfaction. After prayer for the Lord’s blessing, Mr. Aitken was rebuked and the affair dismissed. Closed with prayer.

Ironically, the minutes also record that on May 1, 1779 Robert Aitken himself was “ordered” by the Session to inform a couple by name of James and Margaret Scot that they should present themselves to a meeting of the Session to account for their refusal to

⁶³ MS. ref. MI 46 P528a – Scots Presbyterian Church minutes at the Library of the Presbyterian Historical Society of Philadelphia.

⁶⁴ Other Antiburghers in the printing and bookselling trades, whose names also appear for a time in the Session sederunts alongside Aitken’s, are Peter January, William Young and John McCulloch. For a discussion of Young’s own Antiburgher belief and his relationship with McCulloch and with the charismatic Reverend William Marshall – to whose break-away “Associate Presbytery” congregation Aitken, Young and McCulloch continued to belong – see Sher, *The Enlightenment and the Book*, pp. 547, 550-1 and 592.

take the State test on the grounds of their religious objection to oaths. The Session minute dated Monday, May 3, 1779 reads:

Appeared James and Margaret Scot who are charged with holding principles inimical to the cause of American Liberty ... they owned that for some time after the commencement of the dispute with Great Britain, that [sic] their difficulties on this head arose from reading *The Hind Let Loose*⁶⁵ and the practice of the Martyrs of Scotland who owned the Government a long time after the exercise of several tyrannical acts and James said he scrupled against taking the test to the States in regard he had been bred in Scotland in strong prejudice against all State oaths as they came in the room of our Covenants.⁶⁶

There could be no better example of the “two worlds” of Robert Aitken than these episodes – that is, his strong, Scottish Antiburgher tenets and the “cause of American Liberty”.

(b) Aitken’s edition of the Bible

In 1782 Robert Aitken printed and published

The HOLY BIBLE, containing the Old and New TESTAMENTS: Newly translated out of the Original Tongues; And with the former TRANSLATIONS Diligently compared and revised.
[Arms of Pennsylvania with the motto “Virtue, Liberty and Independence”]
PHILADELPHIA: Printed and Sold by R. Aitken, at Pope’s Head, Three Doors above the Coffee House, in Market Street, M.DCC.LXXXII.

This famous book, known today as the “Aitken Bible” or, tendentiously, as the “Bible of the Revolution”,⁶⁷ was to cause great misery for Aitken in his remaining years as a printer and publisher. McCulloch tells the story that so sickened was Aitken with the protracted negotiations leading up to, and the outcome of, the publication of his Bible that he never again dared to take on that degree of risk. Rosalind Remer [Mrs. James N. Green], paraphrasing McCulloch, puts it more succinctly:

When Carey brought him a Catholic book to print, Aitken was said to have pointed to his shelves full of unsold Bibles and said, “If you would even make good that loss, I would not print your book, I would sooner print the *Woman of Pleasure* [i.e. *Fanny Hill*].”⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Alexander Shields, *A Hind Let Loose*, Edinburgh, 1687.

⁶⁶ See Alexander Mackie, *The Presbyterian Churches of Old Philadelphia*, p. 224.

⁶⁷ See Ronald L. Crawford, *A Note on Robert Aitken, printer of the ‘Bible of the Revolution’* in *The Bibliothek*, vol. 5, Number 1, 1967, pp. 36-7. For this account of Aitken’s Bible, including all extracts from Congress minutes and Aitken’s communications with Congress, I have relied heavily on the Reverend Thomas C. Pears, Jr.’s comprehensive *The Story of the Aitken Bible* in the *Journal of The Department of History (The Presbyterian Historical Society)*, vol. XVIII, June, 1939, No. 6, pp. 225-241.

⁶⁸ *Printers and Men of Capital*, p. 66 and note 75 on p. 174.

Aitken's decision to print and publish an edition of the Bible – the first Bible in English to be printed and published in America – was a financial disaster from which he never entirely recovered. The story of the Aitken Bible is well known and can be summarised as follows. The idea to petition the Continental Congress, inviting them to sponsor or commission the publication of a Bible, originally arose, not from Aitken but from Francis Alison, Vice-Provost of the College and Academy of Philadelphia and minister of the First Presbyterian Church there. The petition, bearing the names of Alison, John Ewing and Aitken's own Antiburgher minister, the Reverend William Marshall, was received by Congress in July 1777 and referred to a committee of three, one of whom was John Adams. The minutes of Congress for September 11 that year record that the idea of an indigenous American Bible was simply not practicable given “the present state of affairs” and concluded that

if Congress shall think it expedient to order the importation of types and paper, your committee recommend that Congress will order the Committee of Commerce to import 20,000 Bibles from Holland, Scotland, or elsewhere, into the different parts of the states in the Union.⁶⁹

Exactly a fortnight later British troops under the command of General Howe occupied Philadelphia.

Just before this, however, Aitken had published his edition of the New Testament “for the use of schools” which he advertised in the *Pennsylvania Evening Post* for August 28, 1777. His waste book records sales on August 23 of 20 copies to three different booksellers but no further sales are entered until the following September, that is after the British had abandoned Philadelphia and marched to New York. Sales then picked up with 136 copies sold over the period from September to November alone.

Two years later Congress appointed another committee to examine the problem of insufficient Bibles in the country to meet the demand, but once more nothing came of it. It was around this time that Aitken made his move and presented his “Memorial”, dated 21 January 1781. Having referred to the success of his New Testament,⁷⁰ Aitken informs Congress that

he hath begun and made considerable progress in a neat Edition of the Holy Scriptures for the Use of Schools. But being cautious of suffering his copy of the Bible to Issue forth without the Sanction of Congress, I humbly pray that your Honors would take this important Matter into

⁶⁹ Pears, *The Story of the Aitken Bible*, [see note 66], p. 227.

⁷⁰ First advertised in the *Pennsylvania Evening Post* for August 28, 1777.

serious consideration & would be pleased to appoint one Member or Members of your Honorable Body to inspect his work so that the same may be published under the Authority of Congress. And further, your Memorialist prays, that he may be Commissioned or otherwise appointed & Authorised to print and vend Editions of the Sacred Scriptures, in such manner and form as may best suit the wants and demands of the good people of these States...⁷¹

A new committee - augmented this time by the Reverend Dr. John Witherspoon and Thomas McKean (Chief Justice of the State of Pennsylvania) - was asked to consider the petition but again with no positive outcome emerging. In March 1782, however, Congress resolved, somewhat miserably it may be thought, to lend Aitken £150 "in small sums" and over the period of one year. On September 1, 1782 the Committee requested the Chaplains of Congress to examine the text of Aitken's Bible and to report. On September 9 Aitken addressed the President of Congress as follows:

Sir, An edition of the Bible having justly engaged the attention of Congress as a desirable and important Object, I take the Liberty of so far intruding upon your Excellency as to inform you that I have at Length compleated one, which I flatter myself will reflect Honour on the United States; More especially when it is considered that such a work, which peace never produced in America, has been accomplished in the midst of the Confusion and the Distresses of War.

However, Aitken continues, the economics of such an initiative should not be ignored by Congress. It was never his intention, he says, to make a profit but to sell the books and to avoid at all cost (as is the clear implication) being left with a diminishing asset on his hands:

... a Work of such Magnitude must nearly crush an individual unless assisted by exterior Aid in supporting so great a Weight; nor will I presume to prescribe the Mode in which such Aid may be afforded; but I beg leave to intimate, that as I apprehend my greatest risque arises from the near Approach of Peace, my utmost Wishes would be accomplished if Congress will purchase a proportion of the Edition on Accot. of the United States. One Fourth of it will not Amount to 200 Bibles for each State; and as I am anxious merely to secure the sale of the Books, it will not be inconsistent with my views to allow a Moderate Credit.⁷²

At last, on receipt of a favourable report from the Chaplains on September 10, 1782 Congress duly passed a resolution granting the Aitken Bible its unqualified approval. The full approval of the committee, including the correspondence (with the exception of Aitken's letter), was printed on a separate leaf of the Bible immediately after the title page, almost reminiscent of the Royal Command and Licence prefacing the Authorised Version of The King James Bible of 1611. The text of the actual Congress resolution was

⁷¹ *The Story of the Aitken Bible*, pp. 229-30.

⁷² *ibid.*, pp. 232-3.

extremely flattering to Aitken who must have taken great satisfaction in his hard-won triumph:

RESOLVED THAT the United States in Congress assembled highly approve the pious and laudable undertaking of Mr. Aitken, as subservient to the interest of religion, as well as an instance of the progress of arts in this country, and being satisfied from the above report of his care and accuracy in the execution of the work, they recommend this edition of the Bible to the inhabitants of the United States, and hereby authorise him to publish this Recommendation in the manner he shall think proper.

It was precisely what Aitken desired.

The resolution of Congress was duly passed on 12 September - though Congress offered no tangible support whatsoever. Two weeks later Aitken wrote to John Hancock, President of Congress, expressing his appreciation and enclosing “one of the first copies, as a specimen of the Work they have honoured with their Patronage.” On the same day, 25 September, 1782, Aitken advertised the publication of the Bible - in a “new and very correct edition” - in *The Freeman’s Journal*, and he proudly announces:

The serious Christian will be pleased to find, that the scarcity of Bibles, of which he has so long had reason to complain, is now removed; and the patriot will rejoice at the advance in the arts, which has at length produced *The First Edition of the Holy Scriptures, in the English Language, ever printed in America ...*

N.B. The Bible will be sold either bound or in sheets, and a suitable discount allowed to those who purchase large quantities.⁷³

The first recorded sale in the waste book is noted on October 2 - “Mr. William Hutchison. To 242 Bibles @ 14/6 ... £175 9 0.” A letter of the same date from Ebenezer Hazard to Jeremy Belknap comments: “Aitken’s Bible sells well here [Philadelphia]”. However, a minute of the Presbyterian Synod of New York and Philadelphia of May 24, 1783 sounds the first discordant note. “Ordering” every member of the Synod to “use his utmost influence in the congregation under his inspection” to try to raise subscriptions for the purchase of the Bible in quantity, and having praised Aitken for his great initiative undertaken “from laudable motives, and with great expense”, the Synod noted that the market situation had radically changed, and was changing further, such that

on account of the importation of Bibles from Europe, [the consequences] will be very injurious to his temporal circumstances.⁷⁴

⁷³ Cited in *The Story of the Aitken Bible*, p. 235.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p. 239.

And in May of the following year, the Synod, admitting that their injunction appeared to have fallen on stony ground, renewed their pleas which were further renewed in 1785 and once more in 1787. But it was then much too late. The flow of cheap Bibles from Europe had already resumed and proved a calamity for Aitken from which, as Richard Sher has observed, his business never really recovered.⁷⁵

James Green of the Library Company of Philadelphia – the keeper of the waste book volumes – clarifies the arithmetic in uncompromisingly stark terms:

At first he [Aitken] had charged 15s a copy wholesale, but in June 1783 he lowered his price to 8s, and by November it was down to 5s; three years later he sold as low as 2s 6d. Aitken later claimed to have printed 10,000 copies though his own account books show only 2,000 copies sold.

And Green concludes –

His venture was disastrous because the price of Bibles in the American market was determined by the cost of imports, not by his cost of production, margin, or profit, or any factor he could control. It was as if culturally and economically America were still a colony of Great Britain.⁷⁶

Sher, endorsing that view, adds:

... his financially disastrous edition of the Bible appears to have sapped much of his money and entrepreneurial energy. ... After 1784 [the date of publication of his first American edition of Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*], Aitken continued in business but never again undertook a major publishing initiative.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ *The Enlightenment and the Book*, p. 538. McCulloch – who relies on memory alone – paints a slightly different picture from Green: “... He could have disposed of the whole edition, at an excellent profit, in a short time. But he kept them up, for a great while, at 17/6, or half a guinea, and at length was glad to sell them for 4/6 each, and the major part of the impression was sold for that low price. ... Wm. Poyntell ... offered him, at one time, 10/- a piece, and promised to take the whole stock; but Aitken, through a blind fatality, refused the offer. Aitken lost vast sums of money by the continental currency, hoarding it up to the last, having embraced the notion that it would be redeemed at its nominal value.” (McCulloch's *Additions*, p. 96). In the latter regard, the waste book records Aitken buying \$2,000 worth of United States' Loan Certificates – for which he paid £750 – in January, 1777.

⁷⁶ James N. Green, *English Books and Printing in the Age of Franklin*, Chapter 8, Part I of *A History of the Book in America*, Cambridge, 2000, vol. 1, “The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World”, p. 297

⁷⁷ *The Enlightenment and the Book*, pp. 538-9.

7 Robert Aitken – the later years

(a) The Ramsay histories and their adverse impact on his reputation as a quality printer

In 1785 David Ramsay, a physician and historian – and the Reverend Dr. John Witherspoon’s son-in-law⁷⁸ – engaged Aitken to bind an initial 200 copies of his *The history of the revolution of South-Carolina*, a two volume set printed by Isaac Collins, a printer in Trenton, New Jersey. Aitken had problems with the commission and in a letter to Ramsay of 26 December 1785 told him apologetically that the job was going much more slowly than he had anticipated:

I rec’d al your letters, but I am exceedingly mortified I cannot answer them to my inclination, my Journeyman having left me in One of his frolics. I have only one Boy & dare not trust him with but a small part of your work. ... I am very sorry for what has happened; I had already schem’d what I should do wt the Money. My finances are so low on Acct of My Losses in trade that I find Cr[editors] ready for it before I am possess’d of my income. It is truly a great disappointment to me. ...⁷⁹

In other words, Aitken was experiencing a chronic lack of cash flow and chronic staffing problems. Worse was to follow. The book did not initially sell well. A few months later Ramsay complains to Benjamin Rush that –

Aitken writes me word on the 4th. that only four copies of my book has sold.⁸⁰

Aitken’s sluggish response to Ramsay’s binding order did not apparently dishearten him for he arranged for Aitken to print his *magnum opus* when it was ready for the press four years later. The work was the first sustained account of the American revolution, now a bibliophile’s rarity:

The history of the American revolution. By David Ramsay, M. D. In two volumes. Volume I [II]. Philadelphia: Printed and sold by R. Aitken & Son, M.DCC.LXXXIX.

As his correspondence makes clear, Ramsay was at times an awkward and haughty individual. His relationship with Aitken steadily deteriorated. The book was ready for the

⁷⁸ Ramsay married Frances Witherspoon in March, 1783. Fifteen months later she died, after giving birth to a son, John Witherspoon Ramsay.

⁷⁹ In Robert L. Brunhouse, *David Ramsay, 1749-1815: Selections from his Writings*, American Philosophical Society, Transactions, New Series, 55, Part 4, 1965: letter 87, p. 95.

⁸⁰ Brunhouse, letter 98, p. 98: Ramsay to Benjamin Rush on February 11, 1786. Ramsay’s letter of January 18, 1786 to Gordon reveals the extent of his losses on the book: “My advances will not be replaced till I have sold 500 copies & my debts contracted and yet unpaid will require the sale of 700 more. The edition has cost me 5,000 dollars. The printers bill is 2500 dollars. The engravings 800 the binding 4/10 a copy. In short I have no brilliant pecuniary prospects before me.”

press in February 1788. In October 1789, writing to John Eliot, Ramsay issues his instructions to his agent, Eliot, to put 200 copies of the title “in the hands of some honest bookseller for sale” and directed that it was to be advertised “six or seven times”.⁸¹ On the same sheet of paper on which that letter is written is another short letter, this time from Aitken to Eliot dated May 3 1790. One can sense Aitken’s flustered and anxious state of mind: the interfering and caustic-tongued Ramsay having clearly upset him greatly:

I send you three hundred copies of Ramsay’s *Revolution* in 2 Vols, agreeable to his letter to me a few days ago. Owing to some Mistakes, I am obliged to send you some pages of several leaves, 8 leaves for Vol. first, & 1 for Vol. second which your binder is desired to attend to.

I am likewise ordered to inform, they are to be advertised & sold for 3 dollars sett in Boards - which I think is one third too dear & cannot miss ruining the Sales - which I cannot help though Sundry advices have been offered to the contrary for his own interest. I find the price ruinous to the Sales already - but is his orders.⁸²

We don’t have the letter of “a few days ago”; maybe Aitken destroyed it in a fit of anger and despair. However, a few days after Aitken wrote to Eliot, Ramsay also wrote to the same individual, complaining that

The printer [Aitken] has made many mistakes. I desired him to print a table of errata but he would not ... If the book takes a second edition will be called for before long. In that case I shall change my printer & most probably get one in New-England.⁸³

In the following year (1791) Ramsay bitterly expresses to Ashbel Green of Princeton his disappointment at the poor job Aitken has made of his book. Nothing has gone right:

It is generous in you to make apologies for Mr. Aitkin [sic] ... Aitkin’s work offends against every principle of good printing. The printing the spelling the ink the form of the lines are in many cases execrable. ... I thought Aitkin because he was a Scotchman must be a linguist & grammarian but I find my mistake. What think you of his stopping the work on the pretence of want of money though 760 dollars were advanced in the time of the work the whole of which was only to cost 1200 dollars?⁸⁴ ... I hope he is an honest man but I am sure he is no printer & either

⁸¹ Brunhouse, letter 172, p. 126: Ramsay to John Eliot on October 19, 1789.

⁸² *ibid.*, p. 126, note 1. Aitken’s letter, dated May 3, 1790, is on the same sheet of paper as Ramsay’s letter to John Eliot of October 19th 1789: Brunhouse, letter 171, p. 126.

⁸³ *ibid.*, letter 176, p. 127: Ramsay to Eliot on May 7th, 1790.

⁸⁴ Brunhouse, p. 225, notes from the waste book that “On August 15, 1791 Aitken went back through his records and brought together the charges and credits in Ramsay’s case. One entry showed a legal charge for Ramsay’s non-payment of £56. In the end, Aitken’s bill amounted to £722 1s 1d; after the deduction of credits of various kinds, Ramsay still stood £344 1s 7d in debt to the printer.” Aitken’s doubts about the saleability of Ramsay’s 1789 *History* proved not so wide of the mark. Brunhouse writes: “Pirated editions appeared in London and Dublin, and the most that Ramsay received from them were a few books in exchange. Five years after publication Aitken still had a supply of copies on hand, while the market in England and Ireland was supplied

from old age forgetfulness or something else⁸⁵ no dependence can be placed in him. ... Aitkin deserves nothing from me.⁸⁶

(b) A fast deteriorating financial situation

Aitken seems to have been obsessed almost throughout his career in America with a desire for official recognition, presumably because of the enhanced business security that went with it. (To be fair, he was by no means the only printer among his contemporaries to seek such recognition). It will be recalled, for example, that for a brief time only he sought and won the recognition of the Continental Congress in being appointed *ad interim* their official printer, the reward for his persistence being Congress authority to print the first two volumes of their proceedings in 1777. But his desire for a more permanent and ‘official’ appointment at the hands of Congress never materialised. In 1791 he tried again and lodged a new petition “to be appointed printer to Congress.” His petition, together with a similar petition lodged by his rival Thomas Bradford, were “read and ordered to lie on the table” where, presumably they rested for long enough for nothing more was heard of them.⁸⁷

Green notes that the printing of the Congress proceedings was the “largest public printing project of the war”, comprising the printing and binding of the annual octavo volumes of the journals of Congress, ranging from 300 to 800 pages or 20 to 50 sheets each. Now

by pirated editions; ... Ten years after the history appeared, there were still some unsold copies, and the author complained that the sales had not repaid the advances he had made.” (p. 223).

⁸⁵ In Aitken’s defence, there certainly was a “something else”. It was at this time that he and his son Robert junior started to quarrel. Eventually Aitken disowned him and they were never reconciled, even though Aitken’s imprint was “R. Aitken & Son” continuously from 1787 through 1796. From 1797 until the elder Aitken’s death, the imprint reverted to “R.” or “Robert” *simpliciter*. It seems that the young Aitken was something of a wastrel and let his father down badly through a combination of financial irresponsibility and idleness. McCulloch describes him as “an idle tippler, and little better than a vagrant”, and adds “His father cut him off with a six pence.” – McCulloch, *Additions*, p. 96.

In both volumes of Aitken’s waste book there are extensive entries showing young Robert’s extravagance – e.g. “a silver cased watch” (£14), “2 suits Clothes” (£19), as well as several cash payments – e.g. “to mend his cellar door” and “for a Counterpain”. The culmination of their row seems to have been in 1788-90 when the waste book ledger (v.2) has a long entry recording young Robert’s debts to his father amounting to £337-10s with the caustic comment “Supposed Ballice. to above [i.e. the aggregate of R. A. Jr.’s debts] supposed unworthy and unjust acct.” Aitken paid his son a nominal 6 dollars per week from 1787 through 1788. The evidence of the imprint, however, may suggest that there was hope of reconciliation even though the waste book tends to contradict that, with no further payments to Robert Jr. after 1788-89.

⁸⁶ Brunhouse, letter 192, p. 130: Ramsay to Ashbel Green on October 4, 1791.

⁸⁷ As reported in *The Federal Gazette, and Philadelphia Evening Post* of November 2, 1791 – “MINUTES of the Business THIS DAY”

constantly plagued by commercial ill-fortune, for the hapless Aitken this seemingly lucrative ‘contract’ was, however, to prove the first in an unfortunate series of ruinous business deals. It was a bad time to be a printer. Green explains:

Inflation raised the cost of printing to unbelievable heights; in 1779 John Dunlap and Robert Aitken submitted bills totalling over \$11,000 for printing the journals. The third volume, printed by Dunlap in York, Pennsylvania in 1778, was limited supposedly to fifty copies, just enough for the legislators’ own use.⁸⁸

Then, of course, there was the calamitous Bible affair. Things became so desperate for Aitken, and his prospects so bleak,⁸⁹ that he took the unusual and altogether demeaning step of writing to the President himself. In a long letter dated 9 June 1790 Aitken craves Washington’s assistance in obtaining “compensation”⁹⁰ from the government of the United States for the losses he has sustained from a combination of unredeemed loans he made to Congress “at an early period of the War” and, of course, the printing of the Bible, the circumstances of which he relates to Washington in some detail.

The letter is of such relevance and importance, revealing as it clearly does the anxiety and precariousness of Aitken’s situation at this time (1790), that I make no apology for reproducing most of it here [the transcription is my own] -

... Your Excellency, I presume, is uninformed of the large sums of Continental money I loaned to the United States at an early period of the War, and which I continued to add to, while in my power. I made these loans under a firm belief of being repaid, according to the pledged faith of Congress; but in this expectation I was disappointed⁹¹ — Some of my certificates I converted into

⁸⁸ James N. Green, *English Books and Printing in the Age of Franklin*, p. 295

⁸⁹ Nevertheless, it seems clear from references in the Jane Aitken Papers held in the library of the APS that, at the time of Robert Aitken’s death in 1802, the main burden of his debt inherited by Jane from her father (over \$3,000, an enormous sum in those days) was the result of notes signed by Robert in favour of his son-in-law, Charles Campbell, the husband of Aitken’s other daughter, Mary Ann. Campbell died before they could be repaid.

⁹⁰ Aitken was by no means the only U.S. citizen to seek compensation from Congress. Francis Hopkinson, for example, claimed to have designed the official “first flag” and sought recompense from Congress, which they refused.

⁹¹ The waste book, vol. 1, for “Monday 30” [June, 1777] records the following - “The Loan Office for the United States of America .. Dr. For the following 5 Certificates dated this Day, Signed Sam: Hillegas, Counter Signed Thos. Smith C.L.O. payable to me on the 30th day of June 1780 with Interest annually at 6%, viz.

No: 1749 ... 400 Dollars

1750 ... 400 ,,

1751 ... 400 ,,

1752 ... 400 ,,

1753 ... 400 ..

2000 Dollars £750”

Specie, at an incredible amount; and purchased the House I now occupy, for the Amount, to the best of my recollection, of £2700 --- The great loss I sustained by this Exchange of property, I felt exceedingly --- I doubt not Your Excellency recollects, that I printed an Edition of the Bible, at a time when the scarcity of that valuable book was such, as to claim the Attention of Congress, and excite their Solitude for a Supply; it was done under the inspection of a Committee of that Honorable Body, though at my sole expence, and the work was highly approved and recommended to the inhabitants of the United States “by the Act of Congress of September 12th. 1782”. The peace which took place soon after, removed the obstructions to importation, and so glutted the market with Bibles that I was obliged to sell mine much below prime cost, and in the End, I actually sunk above £3000 by the impression --- . These two circumstances render my hopes exceedingly heavy, and indeed, almost unsupportable: But, Sir, I flatter myself I may hope for some compensation, in a small share of Public Favour; especially when it is considered, that the Work was undertaken in a great measure at the instance, and under the Patronage of Congress --- Under this impression, together with the perfect conviction of Your Excellency’s benevolence; and your sympathy with all the virtues and feelings of Human Nature; --- I humbly trust that you will be pleased to have me appointed Printer & Stationer to Congress; or in any other way in which I might be of Public service, in the line of my business. --- I had it in Contemplation, to Petition your Excellency for an exclusive right, for a term of years, to print the Bible within the United States, conceiving that my sufferings, in consequence of my former Undertaking would entitle me to a preference: But a faithful execution of this Work would require, in order to carry it on with propriety in good effect, such large sums of money, as I am utterly incapable of commanding; and therefore, however pleasing an employment it would be to me, while I live, I am constrained to relinquish from intentions in this respect, for want of the Means to carry them in effect.

I would respectfully further inform your Excellency, that the house I purchased as before Mentioned, is under Mortgage, on account of a foreign debt, for about £1400, the payment of which will become due in about 11 months, and unless I should be so happy as to obtain some steady employment, to improve a valuable stock in my printing office, I much fear the House must be sold under every possible disadvantage; by which I should be reduced, with a large family in my old age, after having earned by the industry of many years a handsome property. It is not my desire to become rich --- A moderate subsistence [?], in the way of labouring for it, is all I covet.

I now take the liberty of praying Your Excellency’s countenance and support --- Although my feelings might dictate Arguments in my favour, I suppress them; in a perfect confidence that they are rendered unnecessary, by Your Excellency’s known Benevolence & love of Justice (under the Supreme Being) I intirely [sic] rest my plea. ...

With all Duty and Respect
Sir,
Your Excellency’s Most Obedient
Humble Servant
Robt. Aitken

One year later, the waste book, vol.2, has the following entry: “To 1 years Interest due 1778 June 30 @ 6 % ... £45”. Aitken has written “Settled” on the facing Cr. Page. There are no further entries relating to the loan certificates so it would appear that he lost the entire capital together with one year’s interest due.

N.B. Suffer me to Mention,
The Revd. Dr. Mason, & Dr.
Rogers [sic] of N. York,⁹² who have
Known me for many years ---
Likewise the Honble. Robert
Morris, Mr. Boudinot, Mr. Gerry
and some others, are perfectly
acquainted with my Character. ---⁹³

Aitken finally won the recognition of the kind he coveted when he secured from the prestigious American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia the right to print their official Transactions. The job, however, if not a poisoned chalice, proved an immense trial to him. He was well used to climbing mountains in his business affairs but the difficulties he experienced with the capricious men of science and letters of the APS were unlike any he had previously come across. There were two main problems: first, in the middle of his printing of the first volume of Transactions he found he was being plagued by individual authors of articles who, at the eleventh hour, still insisted on making corrections and additions to the text. Secondly, and increasingly, in the rarefied scholarly and academic atmosphere of the APS he felt out of his depth with no one to turn to for advice. Almost in desperation he decided to go to the top and turned to the illustrious founder and President of the Society, Dr Benjamin Franklin himself, once a modest patron of his bookshop in Front Street.⁹⁴

The Franklin Papers at Yale record five Aitken letters to Franklin and one reply from Franklin to Aitken. All are unpublished. The Aitken letters are a little tedious and almost naively self-seeking. They display Aitken in a somewhat whingeing light and, on the whole, they make embarrassing and unedifying reading. Nevertheless, Aitken has some telling points to raise with Franklin and the Society. On 17 April 1788, for example, he complains that

⁹² Dr. John Rodgers preached the funeral sermon for John Witherspoon, “The Faithful Servant Rewarded.” - *WJW*, 1, pp. 9-43.

⁹³ Library of Congress, *The Papers of George Washington*. Washington did not reply personally to Aitken’s letter but his secretary, Tobias Lear, wrote to him in a letter dated June 14: that the President was “sorry for the losses you mention to have sustained by the depreciation of public securities, and the large impression was undertaken in conformity to the wishes and under the patronage of the then Congress ... Yet it is not in his power to gratify his own feelings by affording relief in every instance; and can only be answered by your application to that Body in the appointment of whose particular Officers he can no longer interfere.”. (Washington Papers, *Letter Book*).

⁹⁴ The waste book shows several journal entries for purchases by Franklin e.g. “1 Box of wafers”.

the 2d Vol. of the APS Transactions cannot be sold with any desirable degree of success, unless the first Vol. is likewise brought within the power of the purchaser, I mean reprinted.

And he says that “Mr. Dilly of London labours under the same inconvenience”.⁹⁵

On January 16, 1789, doubtless mindful of his recent bad experience at the hands of David Ramsay, Aitken asks Franklin for the Society’s advice and help on the fraught issue of authors’ corrections which are becoming a real thorn in his flesh, causing him to lay aside the printing of the work altogether until each issue, on an individual basis, is painstakingly resolved between printer and author. He explains –

If I am not pretty punctually answered with the corrections my press must be at rest, and much time left to my disadvantage.

I therefore earnestly request that your Society will take such order in this matter as some person may be appointed to correct the press – And that every individual who have finished pieces in the first vol. may have, their corrections or amendments ready, to save time. I will attend, with pleasure to every correction, or Ammendment [sic] you please to make but at same time, if you allow me to go on at the freedom of my own Will, who am no connoisseur [sic] in these matters and mistakes or rather Matters left in this Edit. not attended to I will find too good a plea of excuse. ...

In a yet unpublished letter dated January 17 1789 – little more than a year before the great man’s death – Franklin answers Aitken and his irritation is almost embarrassingly plain. Writing not just as the Society’s Founder and President, but also as a distinguished former printer in his own right, Franklin comments:

Sir

I was extremely ill in a Fit of the Stone when your Letter was put into my hand yesterday; I was not able to attend the Society, and the laying the Letter before them, which ought to have been done, was omitted; so that I send you no Answer from them ‘till after their next Meeting; and can now only give you my private Opinion and Advice, which is, that you let the author of

⁹⁵ All quotations from the Aitken-Franklin correspondence from the Franklin Papers at Yale (online). Charles Dilly (1739-1807) was, with his one-time business partner, brother Edward (1732-1779), one of the foremost bookseller-publishers in London in the later eighteenth century. He was a friend of Benjamin Rush and John Witherspoon and was always on the lookout for opportunities to take American books to London if he was convinced they might sell there. Thus, Aitken’s waste book records him exporting to Dilly on November 22, 1786 150 copies of volume 2 of the APS *Transactions* at a charge of £67 10s. plus £1 1s. 6d. for “case, ropes & portorage”. Again, on June 2, 1789 there is the following fascinating entry: “Sent Chas. Dilly Booksr. Lond. 150 copies Philos. Trans. Vol.1st on Commission, or to sell on my Acct. as much as they would fetch from or above 9/- a copy in quires ----- Ster. £67 10s. Case & portorage ----- 8s. Payable to Mr. Thos. Allan Lond. ---- £67 18s.” The second (ledger) volume of the waste book confirms both sales on the same dates with confirmation of Dilly’s settlement.

Dilly was James Boswell’s publisher – producing his *Tour in the Hebrides* (1780) and the *Life of Johnson* (1791). See also Sher, *The Enlightenment and the Book, in extenso*, and Oxford DNB entries.

every Piece whom you can conveniently come at, have a Sight of the Proof Sheets of his particular Piece, that he may correct them; and when you cannot have the Advantage of the Author's Corrections, that you procure the Assistance of some other Persons skilled in the Subject to correct such Pieces for you; it being the Duty of a Printer, as well as for his Interest and Reputation, to perform his Work correctly And as some of the Authors may wish to have a few Copies of their particular Pieces [fram'd ?] up separately to give to their Friends and Correspondents, it may be for your Advantage to let them know at the Same time you send them the Proof Sheets, on what Terms you will supply the Number they may think fit to order.

With great Esteem, I am, Sir, Your most obedient humble Servant

B Franklin ⁹⁶

One suspects it was not really the answer Aitken wanted to receive.

Franklin's rebuff notwithstanding, Aitken wrote once more to him in another (unpublished) letter, this time on 11 March 1789: this was a different matter but once more money – or rather the lack of it – lies at the heart of his query:

... It has been hinted to me by Mr. Rittenhouse that some of the Society had a desire of Adding Mr. Rittenhouse's Oration at the end of this 1st. Vol. I desire to know if you would – grant me 2/6 more to each Vol. for this addition, it will make nearly 45 pages More of my type and Measure of the page.

If there was ever a reply, it has not survived.

By the depressed times of 1797 Aitken's business is near total collapse. He writes to John Nicholson in June that year, that he is

pinched beyond measure, Unable to purchase a R[ea]m of paper to retail in my Shop. ...⁹⁷

At the end of 1800 Aitken arranged for the following insertion – his ad. is dated “Decr. 29” – to be made in the *Gazette of the United States* of January 26, 1801 –

Printing Office FOR SALE.

The subscriber in the decline of life, having determined to relinquish the Printing Business, he therefore offers at private sale, two excellent Mahogany Printing Presses, with an extensive assemblage of Printing Types, including an Hebrew and Greek Font, the whole amounting to 34 fonts, well assorted, with every requisite, in excellent order and in good condition, calculated for extensive bookwork, or a daily newspaper, including also a general and useful assortment of Flowers, Cut and Ornaments, with every other implement in the printing business.

He will also dispose of

A two-story Brick House

⁹⁶ Letter in the library of the American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia.

⁹⁷ ALS of Aitken to John Nicholson of 3 June 1797, owned by Mrs. J. Munro Robinson, “an Aitken descendant”. See *The Aitken Shop*, p. 433, note 15.

On the corner of Laetitia-Court and Black-Horse Alley, which he now occupies as a Printing-Office, 28 by 35; the second story has 8 large windows, 24 panes in each, and a lofty garret for drying paper; with a cellar under the whole. The situation and accommodations are inferior to none in this city, and may be sold separate [sic] or together to suit the purchasers. For further particulars apply to

Robert Aitken

No: 22, Market-street.⁹⁸

In its issue of 23rd July, 1802 the *Gazette of the United States* of July 23rd notes a death:

On the 14th in 68th year of his age, Robert Aitken Sen. of this city, Printer: near 40 years a respectable inhabitant of this city; through the whole of an useful life regarded for his integrity and probity: and leaving behind him a family, carefully brought up in the paths of industry and virtue.

At no time could Robert Aitken be called the *primus inter pares* among printers of the revolutionary period in Philadelphia. But he was unarguably one of the great names working in America in that period and no history of printing in the United States would be complete without him. Through his bookstore, only eclipsed in the twilight of his career, he rubbed shoulders with the great and the good.⁹⁹ His fine bindings, as the Spawns have faithfully recorded, were among the most highly prized then, as they most certainly are much sought after today. Aitken took part in, and was personally responsible for, some of the monumental printing and publishing events of his time, including his edition of the Bible, which bears his name, and, despite its ruinous consequences for him and his business, he deserves to be acknowledged as a great symbol of the important part the printing and publishing industry played in the American revolution. Through the pages of *The Pennsylvania Magazine*, Robert Aitken, American, formerly of Paisley, became a true son and conduit of liberty.

With particular reference to the book trade and his role in it, Aitken played his part in helping to bring about, in the words of Richard Sher, “a radical alteration in American book culture”. Whereas another Scot, Robert Bell, showed how European reprinting was possible in America for an American reading public, in Aitken’s case his

⁹⁸ If McCulloch (*Additions* p. 105) is to be believed when he states: “Robert Aitken continued his bookstore and printing office in Front Street till 1779 or 80, when he removed to Market Street (now no. 22) near Front, where he remained till his death”. - then he must have failed to sell his house and office before his death.

⁹⁹ Sher notes that by the end of 1784 Aitken’s bookstore “was eclipsed by a new one opened by Jackson and Dunn, which Benjamin Rush called ‘the largest book store that has ever been set up in Philadelphia.’” (letter of 22 December, 1784 to William Creech). - *The Enlightenment and the Book*, p. 539.

achievement is on a rather different level; he is the man who, without ever being streetwise, was first to recognise the headstrong, wayward journalistic genius of Thomas Paine and gave him employment. In many ways, therefore, despite the awful recurrent financial crises in the latter years of his life - when he seems to have been almost permanently in debt - Aitken remains a shining example of the small-time eighteenth century émigré Scot made good in his adopted United States. Aitken's solid achievement endures, even though, sadly, few in the land of his birth know (or even, it seems, care to know) about it.

8 Postscript - Jane Aitken

After Robert Aitken's death his debts were taken on board by his daughter Jane whose life as a printer was similarly a constant struggle with trying to make ends meet. In many ways, the story of Jane Aitken is a continuation of the story of her father, with precisely the same problems, challenges and disappointments. As a printer, she bravely continued - despite the strictures of David Ramsay - to uphold her father's good name for excellence,¹⁰⁰ until in 1814 her struggling business succumbed to the pressure of her many debts.

Interestingly, in 1808 Jane Aitken also published a Bible, unusually in a new translation by Charles Thomson¹⁰¹ from the Septuagint. She also published individual articles within the APS series of *Transactions*, as well as the first edition of Joseph Priestley's *Socrates and Jesus* (1803). She was an early champion of women's rights and published the *Constitution of the Female Association of Philadelphia for the Relief of Women and Children in Reduced Circumstances*. Jane Aitken, born in Paisley in 1765, died in Philadelphia in 1832.

¹⁰⁰ McCulloch called her "praiseworthy and attentive". - *Additions*, p. 96.

¹⁰¹ Thomson was a former secretary of the Continental Congress.

Chapter Six

Alexander Wilson (1766-1813), poet, radical and ornithologist: liberty, imagined and real

“Let nobody whatever know that you have heard anything of me.”

Alexander Wilson, letter to Charles Orr (formerly of Paisley), from Bloomfield, near Newark, New Jersey, 23rd July, 1801.¹

“In youth I had wrong ideas of life, imagination too often led judgment astray. You would find me much altered from the son you knew me in Paisley”

Alexander Wilson, letter to his father in Paisley, 16 August 1812.²

Bibliographical note - (a) Alexander Wilson

This checklist notes all known Scottish Wilson titles to 1796 - two years after his departure from Scotland - together with the American titles to 1818. Appendix A provides more detailed information on those titles with Paisley imprints, or known to have been printed in Paisley.

1790

[116/90] *The Hollander*: or, light weight. A poem.
[n.p., n.d.] [Paisley, 1790 according to ESTC]

Note: Hunter (p. 36) - “... it was almost certainly the earliest piece [by Wilson] to appear in print.” The NLS copy of the broadside is bound in with the original legal documents relating to the libel brought against Wilson by William Henry. [NLS, MS. 499, Reid Fund.] The broadside may not, however, have been printed in Paisley in the light of a letter dated 26 January 1790 from Wilson to James Kennedy in Edinburgh : referring to the sister poem *Hab’s Door*; Wilson complains to Kennedy that Neilson has refused to print it and he asks Kennedy to look into the possibility that it might be published in Edinburgh. If 1790 is right as its original date, then one is left pondering that if Neilson turned down *Hab’s Door*, it is unlikely that he would have agreed to print *The Hollander* - a much likelier candidate for prosecution one might think, as indeed it turned out to be.

[112/90] Poems. By Alexander Wilson ... [quotation by Goldsmith]
Paisley: printed by J. Neilson, for the author. 1790

¹ Clark Hunter, *The Life and Letters of Alexander Wilson*, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, 1983, p. 183

² *ibid.*, p. 402.

Part Two Chapter 6 *Alexander Wilson*

The tears of Britain. A poem. By Alexander Wilson.

[n.p., n.d. - The NLS catalogue hypothesizes "Glasgow? 1790?". On the basis of the internal evidence I think it is slightly later ; I surmise 1791.]

1791

[127/91] Poems, humorous, satirical and serious. By Alexander Wilson ... The second edition with additions.

Edinburgh: printed for the author, and sold by P. Hill. 1791.

Note: Printed by Neilson in Paisley, though with an Edinburgh imprint. Peter Hill had been William Creech's clerk. Robert Crawford states that Hill set up as a bookseller for himself in 1788 (*The Bard*, p. 305), yet the NLS Scottish Book Trade Index (rev.2010) indicates that he was in business "opposite Canongate Church" in 1784. Sher tells us that the 14 year old Archibald Constable was apprenticed to Peter Hill when he first came to Edinburgh in 1788, (*The Enlightenment and the Book*, p. 434) and the SBTI actually cites the date when this happened - 2nd February. Edinburgh City Library has a copy of Hill's *Sale Catalogue for 1793*, Edinburgh, 1792: Wilson's poems are listed on p. 158 of the catalogue at book number 4072.

The laurel disputed ; or, the merits of Allan Ramsay and Robert Ferguson contrasted ; in two poetical essays, delivered in the Pantheon at Edinburgh, on Thursday April 14th 1791, ... by E. Picken and A. Wilson.

Edinburgh : printed for A. Guthrie, 1791.

1792

[146-92] The Shark, or, Lang Mills Detected. A Poem. ...

1792.

[n.p.]

Note: The Sheriff-substitute's order of 22 January, 1793 was to the effect that "with his whole hands" Wilson should publicly burn "all copies of the said publication that shall have been delivered up to him, or otherwise collected, excepting always the copy libelled upon." - the latter copy having been, of course, in manuscript only. It appears, however, that, more as a symbolic act, only two copies were "committed to the flames" by Wilson (from a legal note dated 6 February 1793 printed by Cantwell, p. 275). The poem may have been printed by Neilson but it is equally possible Wilson went to Glasgow where a radical printer like Brash & Reid may have 'arranged' it for him. To the best of my knowledge, the only extant copy is in the NLS; it is bound in with the account of Wilson's trial (as used by Cantwell). [NLS, MS. 493, Rosebery Collection.]

An Address to the Synod of G*****w and A*r, on their late Meeting for the purpose of preparing an humble and grateful Address to a Great Personage, for his Royal Proclamation against certain Publications. By Lawrie Nettle. [quotation from Burns's poem, *The Ordination* from the Edinburgh edition of 1787, beginning "Auld Hornie did the Laigh Kirk watch ..."]*

[n.p., n.d.]

Note : The only copy of this rare (and important) 8pp. poem I know is in the Wylie Collection at the University of Glasgow Library - ref. Bh 13-a.23. This is Wilson's treatment of the same subject of Burns's satire on the internal tensions within the Church of Scotland at this time, while at the same time pouring scorn on Kirk ministers' obsequious loyalty to the crown, interpreted by Wilson as the Kirk being totally out of touch with the common people. From the reference to "the proclamation" in the ninth stanza it is clear that the poem can be safely dated to 1792. See Grosart, vol. II, pp. 70-5.

* The Canongate Burns, pp. 185-190.

1795

[173/95] Watty and Meg : or, the wife reformed, a tale.
Entered according to order, 1795.

Note : Almost certainly the rare Paisley first edition. Cantwell (p. 64) thinks that Wilson was working on the poem as early as 1791 but he has probably been carried away by the fact that it is a kind of parody of Burns's *Tam O'Shanter* which first saw the light of day in *The Edinburgh Herald* in the same year (18 March) - and in two other sources in 1791, before its inclusion in Creech's Edinburgh edition in 1793. In any event, it is Wilson's most commercially successful work by far (though, it has to be said, hardly his best literarily). The sad thing is that Wilson did not benefit from its enormous popularity. Brash & Reid of Glasgow, in particular, issued many thousands of copies of the poem in successive editions from 1796 when it also appeared in their *Poetry ; original and selected* , volume I (2nd issue). A Philadelphia edition, printed by William M'Culloch, was issued in 1805. The poem was still being published well into the Victorian era.

1796

The loss o' the pack. A true tale. By the author of Watty and Meg, ...
Glasgow : printed for and sold by Brash & Reid, [1796 - according to NLS catalogue]

Note : The NLS holds this title with variant t. pages, probably indicating its popularity. The poem is also included in the publishers' highly popular *Poetry ; original and selected* , volume I (in both the 1st and 2nd issues).

Rab and Ringan. A tale. As delivered in the Pantheon, Edinburgh. (Recited in the character in a poor pedlar) by the author of Watty and Meg. To which is added, The twa cats and the cheese. A tale. Demonstrating the great folly of going to law.
Glasgow : printed for and sold by Brash & Reid, [1796]

Note : Again, there are t.p. variants in the same year - with several other pirate editions issued later by Scottish publishers anxious to cash in on the popularity of the genre, including an edition by John Neilson of Paisley in 1800. Brash & Reid include the poem in volume I (2nd issue) of their 1796 compilation, *Poetry ; original and selected*.

[In addition, from 1790 to 1792 Wilson had individual poems published in journals and newspapers, including *The Bee*, *The Scots Magazine* and *The Edinburgh Herald*.]

1801

Oration, on the Power and Value of National Liberty : delivered to a large assembly of citizens, at Milestown, Pennsylvania, on Wednesday, March 4, 1801 by Alexander Wilson.
[Pennsylvania : s.n.], 1801

1809

American Ornithology, or, The Natural History of the Birds of the United States ; illustrated with plates, engraved and colored from original drawings taken from nature by Alexander Wilson.
Philadelphia : Bradford and Inskeep, 1808 [i.e. 1809] - 1814.

Note : The final volume of Wilson's great work was published in the year after Wilson's death and was edited and seen through the press by his friend, George Ord. *American Ornithology* is

recognised as the precursor of Audubon's *Birds of America* (London, published in sections from 1827 to 1838). The only Scottish subscribers to Wilson's work were "Glasgow University Library" and the "Hunterian Museum". (See Grosart, vol. II, p. xxxiii).

1818

The Foresters a poem, descriptive of a pedestrian journey to the falls of Niagara, in the autumn of 1804. By the author of *American Ornithology*
Miner's Press - Newtown, Penn. Simeon Siegfried, printer [from the colophon]

Note : Much rarer than the much better known 1838 edition printed by Joseph Painter of West Chester, PA which identifies by name Alexander Wilson as the author on the t. page. J. Fraser of Paisley printed the first Scottish edition of Wilson's long poem in 1825.

[References to "Grosart", "Cantwell" and "Hunter" throughout this chapter are to the following sources respectively :

Alexander B. Grosart, *The Poems and Literary Prose of Alexander Wilson, the American Ornithologist*, 2 volumes, Paisley (Alex. Gardner), 1876.

Robert Cantwell, *Alexander Wilson Naturalist and Pioneer*, Philadelphia and New York, 1961.

Clark Hunter, *The Life and Letters of Alexander Wilson*, Philadelphia (American Philosophical Society), 1983.]

Bibliographical note - (b) James Kennedy

These are the pamphlets I have been able to trace as definitely the work of Kennedy, or attributed to him. All items, with the single exception of the *Fragments* of 1800, can be found in the Murray Collection, Department of Rare Books, University of Glasgow. These pamphlets are incredibly rare, on account of their ephemeral and, in the majority of cases, by virtue of their self-professedly (and technically legally) seditious nature, that fact alone, of course, guaranteeing their scarcity:

1795

Treason!!! or, Not Treason!!! *Alias* The Weavers Budget. By James Kennedy, Scotch Exile. ... London, Printed for the Author; and sold by D. I. Eaton, Newgate-street; Smith, Lincoln's-Inn Fields; Burke, Crispin-Street, Spital-fields; and by all the Patriotic Booksellers in Town and Country.

[n.d., but the colophon reads "Liberty Buildings, Spitalfields, 1795.", p. 34]

Note : In Alexander Leslie's 1796-7 catalogue. There are eight individual poems of which the most historically important are the first - "The Exile's Reveries, Dedicated to the Scourge of Scotland, Harry Dundas" - "The following verses were composed in a melancholy mood, while the *Hue and Cry* was raised against the Author, his person described in the Newspapers, and a

Reward offered for his apprehension. June, 1794.” The poem refers to, in turn, Skirving, Muir, Margarot, Palmer and Gerald [sic], the last-named earning four verses alone which makes one feel that Kennedy knew him well (which is highly likely). He also refers to his wife and two children, Margaret (“Peg”) and Citizen. The longest poem in the pamphlet is that of the title – “Treason, or Not Treason! dedicated to the Majesty of the People”.

Sedition!!! Or, Not Sedition!!! *Alias* The Weavers Budget. Number II. By James Kennedy, Late Manufacturer in Edinburgh; formerly a Journeyman Weaver, in Paisley; for sometime past Citizen-Secretary to an Acquitted Felon, in London; and now Prisoner in the Tolbooth in Edinburgh: once charged with Treasonable and Seditious Practices, at present with having connected himself with the Disaffected and Conspirators against our Happy Constitution in London. ...

London, Printed for the Good of the Public: Sold by D. I. Eaton, Newgate-Street; Smith, Lincoln’s Inn Fields, Burke, Crispin-Street, Spital-field’s; and all the patriotic Booksellers in Town and Country. Also, by the Author, at his lodgings, No. 1. Tolbooth, Edinburgh, to whom, *during existing circumstances*, Orders and communications for the Budget may be addressed, – Post paid.

[n.d.]

Note : In Leslie’s catalogue. Compared with the first in the series, this second number in Kennedy’s “Weavers Budget” series is an altogether slighter production, consisting of just the one poem which Kennedy probably composed while serving his sentence. From the evidence of the title page – and their inclusion in Leslie’s list – it seems conclusive that Eaton produced both pamphlets in the same year, 1795.

1796

An Epistle from C. J. K. [i.e. Citizen James Kennedy] Weaveronian To L. J. C. [i.e. *Lord Justice Clerk] Capernonian, Being an Echo to his Lordship’s ever memorable Speech, on opening the *Joost-As-Court* in the City of St. Mungo, 1796. ...

London: Printed for D. J. [sic] Eaton, No. 74. Newgate Street. 1796.

Note : In Leslie’s catalogue. Extremely rare. David Murray has helpfully written on the flyleaf of the GU copy: “The Circuit Court of Justiciary met at Glasgow on 7 September 1796, in presence of the Lord Justice Clerk [Robert Macqueen, Lord Braxfield] and Lord Craig. There were no criminal cases before the court, and only a few civil appeals. After disposing of these the judges proceeded to Inverary. *Glasgow Courier 8 September 1796.*”

*The verse epistle has Braxfield, in the first person, referring to seditious newspapers: “That vile *Scots Chronicle*, I fear,/Will sap our auld foundation,/Unless we, like the *Gazetteer*,/Can stap its publication./While fowks newspapers get to read/They ne’er can live contented,/They get sic notions i’ their head/’Bout being represented.” The other verse I like is: “Bring them to me – withouten fears/I’ll pass the *usual sentence*,/An’ gie the rascals *fourteen years*/To mak sincere repentance.”

1797

The Pitiful Plaint of a Hen-Pecked Prodigal: dedicated to the daughter of Duke Bobadil Manifesto. *Men of Gotham behold your Prince!*

London: Printed for the author, and sold by the loyal booksellers in town and country. 1797.

Note : Extremely rare and not in Leslie’s catalogue. The poem is a crude satire on the Prince of Wales (the future George IV) whose illegal marriage in 1785 to Mrs Fitzherbert (“a twice-widow’d nymph of the town”), a Roman Catholic, was denied in parliament by Fox. The “Brunsy” of the poem is, of course, Caroline of Brunswick whom the Prince married in 1795 – “my own Cousin-

German". It is a rollicking piece and is a good example of Kennedy's comic skills - "Was e'er a poor Prince so hen-peck'd?/By Brunsy the Breeches are worn". However, amidst all the fun, he can never be less than the radical anti-monarchist: "But why of the laws should I speak?/They shackle the subject - not me!/The Law, should a Democrat break,/Hang'd, quarter'd, the Traitor must be."

The important autobiographical note he prints in the pamphlet [unnumbered p. iii] sheds considerable light on the charge and conviction that landed Kennedy in jail in the Tolbooth in Edinburgh for more than ten weeks in 1795. It is reproduced in chapter 2 above.

1800

[Not seen] *Fragments from the Mediterranean Budget* [By J. K.]

Note : The British Library [shelfmark 11641 e. 27] lists this exceptionally rare work which I have not yet seen. In the GU Murray Collection copy of *Treason!!! or, Not Treason!!!* David Murray has written on the flyleaf: "James Kennedy, the author, was a Paisley man. He also wrote *Fragments from the Mediterranean Budget* n.p., n.d. [1800] 8vo pp. 14. This is a poem: Reflections in the English Burying-ground, after the loss of the Queen Charlotte at Leghorn on March 17, 1800. The *Fragments from the Mediterranean Budget* has the look of having been printed abroad. There is a copy in the British Museum with a note of authorship."

1 Introduction : the literary and the historical Wilson

Alexander Wilson is unique among our trio of Paisley emigrants to America as he was a native of the town. He is also the odd man out in the company of Witherspoon and Aitken, in having felt compelled into leaving Scotland for the United States as a fugitive from the law. It is, therefore, as we shall see, inappropriate to think of him sensing (and 'accepting') the call to America. For Wilson, there was really no other option but hasty flight, to avoid further embarrassment for his family and friends, not to speak of even more serious trouble for himself, at the hands of a repressive regime in whose eyes he was a veritable marked man.

One of Wilson's most respected friends in Paisley, Thomas Crichton,³ governor of the town hospital, was the first to write a biographical memoir of Wilson,⁴ published in 1819, just six years after the poet's death. Whereas other, later biographers steer clear of

³ Wilson wrote just one letter to Crichton from the United States, two years before his death; it is written from Philadelphia and dated 28 October 1811. He opens his letter by declaring it had been seventeen years since he had heard anything about him but that throughout that time he had neither forgotten Crichton "nor the many friendly acts he had experienced" from him. Significantly, too, the letter goes on to thank Crichton for sending him information about his "old friends, Neilson, Kennedy, Picken". If only Crichton's letter had survived!

⁴ *Biographical Sketches of the late Alexander Wilson, author of Poems and American Ornithology. Communicated in a series of letters to a young friend. ... Paisley: printed by J. Neilson. 1819*

Wilson's politics, Crichton writes at some length – and obviously with insight – on the subject :

During the two last years of his residence in Paisley and its neighbourhood, the whole population of Britain was thrown into a state of dreadful agitation, from the political ferment arising out of the French Revolution. The writings of Burke, Paine, Macintosh,[sic]⁵ Volney, and many other names of great renown, influenced to a considerable degree the feelings of the public mind, and it was not to be supposed that a young man of such ardency of temper, and enthusiasm of character as Wilson was possessed of, could remain neuter, when questions which so materially interested the Rights of Man were at issue. Like many others of the sons of Song, he avowed himself to be the friend of liberty, and he saw with rapture, in the recent Revolution of France, a new era of political felicity beginning to dawn, and he looked forward in perspective, through the vista of ages, to a period, when the political world would experience a salutary change in the abolition of ancient institutions, and with Barlow, the republican bard of Columbia, he saw a fair and spotless Utopia rise to his view. Wilson read with deep interest the political writings that issued from the press during the years 1792-93, and associated himself with men who had declared themselves the friends of political reform; and when Great Britain declared war against France, in February 1793, with professed feelings of benevolence to the great family of mankind, he deprecated the idea of such hostility and considered, that the government of his country had rashly embarked in an enterprise of tyranny, and in designs, calculated to destroy the opening blossoms of the tree of Liberty, which he trusted had been planted to flourish with perennial bloom on the ruins of the ancient dynasty of France. Wilson, like many others of his associates, declared himself an enemy to the war, and an address was presented to the government, drawn up by one of his friends, in which strong language was used expressive of abhorrence, at what was considered an unjust and unnecessary war, and a strong remonstrance made against the conduct of Britain in her interference with the politics of France. These were times of sad political ferment, which interrupted greatly the happy intercourse of society, and which, in a particular manner, brought some of the bards of our country into difficulties, owing to their ardent spirits having felt so keenly in the great and arduous contest; for by the too free expression of this feeling, Burns had almost lost his place in the excise, and the poor unfortunate Wilson, who was also a man of genius, had his motions strictly watched by the vigilant eye of Power, as a dangerous political incendiary.⁶

Alexander Wilson was born on 6th July, 1766, literally in the shadow of the 12th century Cistercian monastery church, Paisley Abbey, and a few days later (10th July) was baptised by the Reverend Dr. John Witherspoon, Evangelical minister in the Laigh Church, barely two years before Witherspoon's departure for the College of New Jersey and the regenerative political experience that awaited him there. Like his father before him, Wilson was bred to the weaving trade and, by virtue of that, suffered throughout his twenty-eight year life in Scotland the grinding vicissitudes associated with that industry already identified in chapter 2. He was subject to bouts of severe depression and that led him into impetuous and unwise actions resulting in conflict with individuals and the law,

⁵ Sir James Mackintosh (1765-1832). Author of one of the best known of the several replies to Burke's *Reflections* – of which Paine's *Rights of Man* is easily the most enduring – *Vindiciae Gallicae* (1791). Mackintosh was educated at the University of Aberdeen before studying medicine at Edinburgh.

⁶ *Biographical Sketches*, pp. 38-9.

which, in turn, further disaffected him and eventually turned him into a radical in a town of radicals. He became inured, but never reconciled, to poverty and hardship and, as we shall see, many of his Scottish poems offer important contemporary comment on the conditions weavers like him had come to expect, with hunger, even actual famine, almost a constant threat in that most uncertain of times, the late eighteenth century.

Wilson, then, is one of those minor literary figures – of whom there were several others besides him in Paisley in the 1790s – whose writings are infinitely more important from the point of view of their historical *content* than their literary *expression*. In that regard, Wilson excels simply because he is a relevant historical figure, and had historically interesting things to say about his life and times. With Wilson and his like one would have to say it is seldom the poem that moves and excites : what intrigues the reader is rather the historical point of reference his writings highlight and stimulate. At the same time, however, and exceptionally, there are a few writers whose genius succeeds in bridging the divide of history and the poetic imagination, the most obvious example for our purpose being, of course, Wilson’s great contemporary, Robert Burns.

It is important to stress at the outset of this chapter that the treatment proposed here is not in any way a literary analysis, least of all a critique, of Wilson’s poetry. Just possibly Wilson is a better poet than many critics have believed him to be, but I for one do not intend to join the ranks of those who might seek to reappraise his literary output in qualitative terms – even though (as I happen to think is the case) it is perfectly possible that, at least with some of his work, Wilson’s time may have come literarily.⁷ Further, it should not be overlooked that there *was* a time when Wilson was highly regarded *qua* poet. Bibliographers such as Bonnell have reminded us, for example, that the Edinburgh publisher, John Anderson Jr., writing in the 1820s and bemoaning the absence of any “connected and uniform series of her [i.e. Scottish] Classical Poets” over the previous 20 years, did not hesitate to include samples of Wilson’s best pieces in his *The Poets of*

⁷ A good case could, I think, be made in particular for a reassessment of the three industrial protest poems (especially, *The Hollander*) and, perhaps, above all, of the long forgotten *Address to the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr*.

Scotland, locating him in the company of such as Ramsay, Fergusson, Beattie, Blair and Bruce.⁸

What makes Alexander Wilson an especially interesting subject within the overall theme of this study - the making of an American - is the extent to which he has been misunderstood by the majority who have regarded him as only a poet, and as only an ornithologist. I shall argue that the really important side of Wilson - and to date the least satisfactorily explored, Thomas Crichton's comments notwithstanding - is his embracing of, and deep attachment to, working class literary protest in the 1790s and, ultimately, to the cause of radicalism in a town notorious for its radical sympathies and activities. For it cannot be overlooked that in the 1790s, with the possible exception of Dundee, no other town in Scotland outside Glasgow and Edinburgh was potentially more troublesome for the Pitt/Dundas regime than Paisley. Wilson, in my judgment, is *the* authentic poet of popular and industrial protest in Scotland in the last decade of the late eighteenth century.

The big problem with Wilson is to separate out the literary from the historic, the imagined from the real. To do so, it is first necessary to consider the background against which Wilson should be considered as an imaginative writer, as he struggles within his chosen medium of verse to portray and articulate what was to become the Scottish radical movement of the early 1790s, in which he would have a minor, though not insignificant role to play. Of course, Robert Burns is rightly acknowledged as the master of radical verse; but the difference in context between the minor poet Wilson and the all-dominant presence of Burns lies in the fact that Wilson became so entangled with the radical movement that his only escape was to flee the country whereas, eventually, and only after persuasion, Burns managed to suppress his public radical persona which, he reluctantly conceded, simply *had* to be done for his own, and his family's personal standing and their

⁸ Thomas F. Bonnell, *The Most Disreputable Trade - Publishing the Classics of English Poetry 1765 - 1810*, Oxford, 2008, p. 332. The quotation from Anderson is from an ad. "Works Just Published by John Anderson, Jun." printed at the back of *The Poems of James Beattie, LL.D Robert Blair and Michael Bruce*, Edinburgh, 1823, pp. 7-8. At least 4 volumes were published in the series.

immediate economic good. It is necessary, then, to proceed to examine at this point in my study the nature and extent of the ‘radical Burns’.⁹

Though, as we shall see, there were some notable exceptions, like most of his contemporaries Wilson was a great admirer of Burns, regarding him as “the rare Robin Burns” and “the great sportsman”.¹⁰ To that extent, therefore, he was precisely the kind of figure, characterised by David Daiches,¹¹ that lionised Burns and helped create that unfortunate stereotypical image of Scottish literature that was to set the country back in a cultural sense for a very long time – and, Daiches (writing in 1964) cogently argues, might even *still* exist. Memorably, he called it the “pernicious influence” of Burns. It is, incidentally, exactly this same mindset that gives rise to Professor Devine’s sporadic outbursts on what he has famously described as “the Burns supper” school of Scottish historians.

Some biographical accounts of Wilson have him (erroneously) actually meeting Burns in the spring of 1788. Wilson did write to Burns (from Edinburgh, in a letter dated 8 November 1789 and from Paisley on 7 September 1791) but, because the letter-book used by Burns’s biographer, Dr James Currie, is frustratingly now quite illegible, we are left with only a phrase or two – though enough to leave little doubt that Wilson’s purpose on both occasions was simply to fawn on Burns, as so many of his other correspondents clearly did.¹² We do know that Wilson subscribed for not one but two copies of the Edinburgh (Creech) edition of Burns’s *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* in 1793. It is also on record that on 25 January 1792 Mrs. Frances Dunlop was enthusiastically telling Burns that:

All this week I have done nothing but read Wilson’s poems. ... They have inspired me with surprise and a very considerable admiration of their author, who ... is now actually an operative

⁹ Here I am glad to acknowledge my debt, relating to my comments in this section, to leading Burns scholars, especially my namesakes Thomas Crawford and (much more recently) Robert Crawford and, above all, to my former colleague at Strathclyde University, Andrew Noble.

¹⁰ *Ode on the Birthday of Our Immortal Scottish Poet ; set to music by a Bacchanalian Club*, Grosart, pp. 77-8. See also his touching American poem, *On Seeing the Portrait of Robert Burns*, written from Gray’s Ferry and dated April 25, 1806 : “Alas! I knew him when his country’s pride/Yet left dark Poverty’s cold winds to brave;/And those who then the friendly hand deny’d,/Now strew with flowers his green unconscious grave.”- Grosart, vol. II, pp. 358-9.

¹¹ In, for example, *The Paradox of Scottish Culture*, London, 1964.

¹² The damaged précis-book of Burns’s correspondents is preserved at the Burns Birthplace Museum in Alloway.

weaver in the little village of Lochwinnoch. ... This is the production of a manly mind, not degraded by a wholly illiterate education.

On 3 February Burns replied to Mrs. Dunlop :

Wilson's book I have not seen; but will be much obliged to you for a sight of it.¹³

What has Wilson, the minnow, to do with the colossus of Scots poetry, Robert Burns? At least Wilson has this much in common with Burns : they both sought to conceal their radicalism for fear of the consequences. Further – and this is of special importance in the case of Wilson - they both possessed some very dangerous friends. Though, as this chapter will seek to show, it was a different story with Wilson, Burns got away with his relationships among ‘the lower orders’ of society and, from a purely literary point of view, they not only contributed in large measure to the special power of his expressive genius but undoubtedly sustained and nurtured it. Further, Burns was ultimately mature enough to acknowledge the full implications of his more extreme views and the real possibility they could land him in scorching hot water, eventually pulling himself back from the brink just in time. By contrast, the much more naive and conspicuously less self-confident Wilson lacked the inner will to succeed in his poetic aspirations. An all-consuming pessimism dogged and dispirited the whole of his literary career; in time, a brooding disaffection was to lead him to embrace political radicalism. In the last analysis, no attempt to explain Wilson's motives for abandoning Scotland in 1794 for America is meaningful in the absence of a proper consideration of the fundamental dichotomy between his personal and literary disaffection and his consequential espousal of political radicalism.

2 The radical Burns

Recent Burns studies have done much to strip away the myths that once surrounded (and if Andrew Noble is to be believed) still surround his popularist radical sympathies. Noble wonders why it is that it has taken scholars so long to admit to this side of Burns's life and

¹³ Hunter, p. 43. Hunter also notes, p. 42, that: “In March 1791, Burns's masterpiece, ‘Tam O'Shanter’, had appeared in *The Edinburgh Magazine* and *The Edinburgh Herald*, and ... Wilson sent a critical review of the poem to Dr. Anderson, editor of *The Bee*, who had just published his essay ‘The Solitary Philosopher’. Dr. Anderson, however, rejected the review. Wilson then sent it, with a covering letter, to Burns, who liked it even less than Dr. Anderson. There was a brief exchange but the letters are now lost, and all we have is evidence of a tetchy interchange between poets.”

iterates, correctly, that his active radicalism is not only integral to so many of his poems but an understanding of it necessary to ensure their accurate comprehension :

Given the poetry and the letters with this mass of corroborative contextual historical evidence from within and without Scotland, it is hard to understand why not only in current Scottish popular culture but, indeed, in significant elements of Scottish academic culture, there is still [i.e. in 2001] a persistent compulsion to downplay, even deny, the revolutionary Burns.¹⁴

And elsewhere in his essay Noble complains of

the contextually impoverished state of Burns criticism. Most of it has been written with the political dimension quite absent.¹⁵

Easily the most comprehensive account of Burns's radical sympathies is to be found in Noble's introductory essay in the *Canongate Burns* of 2001, in the section entitled "The Radical Burns".¹⁶ The two *Crawfords* and Liam McIlvanney¹⁷ are also full of original insights into this historico-literary side of Burns. Thomas Crawford, in particular, many years ago revealed the extent to which some of Burns's verse is virtually incomprehensible without an appreciation of the political tensions of his age:

Liberty is a key concept with Burns, and he means different things by it at different times.¹⁸

Thomas Crawford was, for example, the first to recognise that, concealed within the iconic words of the song *For a' that and a' that* (composed in 1795 and published anonymously in the August number of *The Glasgow Magazine*), is a coded sub-text amounting to a kind of poetic transliteration of whole passages of Paine's *Rights of Man*¹⁹ - most notably in the stanzas beginning "Ye see yon birkie ca'd 'a lord" [Paine : "The French Constitution says, *There shall be no titles ...*", etc.] and "A prince can mak a belted knight" [Paine : "The patriots of France have discovered in good time that rank and dignity in society must take a new ground." etc.] Noble and Thomas Crawford both note that the London loyalist papers published the song over Burns's name in the following year (1796) - the year of his death - and that in doing so they exposed him to real danger, since to have been outed in this way "could have led to serious trouble" with

¹⁴ *The Canongate Burns*, ed. Andrew Noble and Patrick Scott-Hogg, Edinburgh, 2001, p. xxii.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. xliii.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, pp. xxi - xlvi.

¹⁷ *Burns the Radical - Poetry and Politics in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland*, East Linton, 2002.

¹⁸ Thomas Crawford, *Burns A Study of the Poems and Songs*, Edinburgh, 1960, p. 241.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, Appendix II, p. 365.

the authorities.²⁰ This was always the problem with Burns, as he himself was the first to acknowledge : he loved to twist the tail of authority and officialdom and was confident his swagger, his genius would allow him to get away with it – as indeed he did, at least for most of the time. As we shall see, however, sadly, Wilson was not so fortunate.

Wilson, too, however, saw Scotland as a slave to oppression. Only a year or two before *For a' that and a' that* (1790 or, more likely, 1791) Wilson wrote a somewhat stilted ode²¹ on the ills of the country as he perceived them and, significantly, prefaces his poem with four lines from Goldsmith's *Deserted Village*, including the famous couplet :

... a bold peasantry, their Country's pride,
When once destroy'd can never be suppli'd.

Wilson's concern in *The Tears of Britain* is for the “poor manufacturer” who “yields to despair”, and he goes on :

Her towns are unpeopl'd, her commerce decay'd,
And shut up are all her resources of trade :
The starving mechanic [i.e. weaver], bereav'd of each hope,
Steals pensively home from his desolate shop ...

Oppression may prosecute, Force bend the knee,
But free is that nation that wills to be free.

Wilson's concern is specifically for the weavers, the “mechanics” of Paisley, who are starving – and you get the distinct feeling that he knows all too painfully well what he is writing about, for he has seen and even experienced it for himself, not simply imagined it.

A year later, Wilson writes a very different kind of poem – so politically sensitive that, again, it is omitted from any collection of his works until well into the nineteenth century. His ire this time is reserved for ministers of the established Kirk, while at the same time the poem memorably refers to the contemporary influence among the people of the politics of Thomas Paine. *An Address to the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr* (probably 1792) is notably one of his best, partly because it is written in Scots, and has a self-assurance and ‘bright’, even Burnsian, feel about it :

²⁰ Robert Crawford, *The Bard - Robert Burns, a Biography*, London, 2009, p. 384.

²¹ *The Tears of Britain* – first printed, without author's name , date or place in 1790 or 1791, but not included in his collected poems until 1816. See Grosart, vol. II, pp. 212-216.

The 'Rights of Man' is now weel kened,
And read by many a hunder ;
For Tammy Paine the buik has penned,
And lent the Courts a lounder ;
It's like a keeking-glass to see
The craft of Kirk and statesmen ;
And wi' a bauld and easy glee,
Guid faith the birky beats them
Aff hand this day.

... For British boys are in a fix,
Their heads like bees are humming ;
And for their rights and liberties
They're mad upon reforming
The Court this day. ...

And, in unusually unguarded language, he reserves a special drubbing for ministers of the Kirk, who, he says, are too often guilty of uncritical loyalty to the Crown and its ministers :

Ye think yoursels sae safe and snug,
That ne'er a ane dare strike ye ;
But for your thanks, I'll lay my lug,
Few patriots will like ye :
The Kirk is now on her last legs,
And to the pot she's tumbling ;
And troth my lads ye're aff your eggs,
For a' your gratefu' mumbling,
On sic a day. ...

The power of clergy, wylie tykes,
Is unco fast declining ;
And courtiers' craft, like snaw aff dykes,
Melts when the sun is shining ;
Auld Monarchy, wi' cruel paw,
Her dying pains is gnawing ;
While Democracy, trig and braw,
Is through a' Europe crawling
Fu' crouse this day.

Traditionally bracketed with *For a' that and a' that is Scots Wha Hae* [the full title is *Robert Bruce's Address to His Troops at Bannockburn*]. *Scots Wha Hae* appeared a few months before the former song and, like it, was first printed anonymously in a serial journal - in this case, the London Whig newspaper *The Morning Chronicle*, in its issue for 8th May, 1794. Again, the sub-text is subtle but simple to unravel. As usual, Andrew Noble strikes the right note:

... the subtext is an attack on the Pittite policies of oppression against Scottish radicals in the Scots vernacular and the words of the French Revolutionaries, making the Tennis Court Oath to do or die come from the mouths of fourteenth-century Scottish soldiers. It may be questionable history

but its purpose is to detect semi-mythical antecedents in the Scottish past as precursors for the reintegrated, resurrected nation.²²

A few weeks earlier Burns had written in cautionary terms to Patrick Miller Jnr :

... they are the most welcome to my Ode ; only let them insert it as a thing they have met with by accident & unknown to me.²³

However, it must have come as a shock to him to read the publisher's introduction :

If the following warm and animating Ode was not written near the time to which it applies, it is one of the most faithful imitations of the simple and beautiful style of the Scottish bards we ever read, and we know of but one living Poet to whom to ascribe it.

By the same token, there are several of his poems that only saw the light of day years after his death – in some cases, many years – simply because their content would have been considered legally and technically seditious, had they been released soon after they were written. For Burns would then have become a marked man. It is not far-fetched to conclude that Burns, despite his near-cult status even in his own lifetime, would have been a prime candidate for prosecution by the authorities (who, after all, kept a very close eye on him in Edinburgh and Dumfries) if, somehow, his more extreme radical poems had come into the contemporary public domain. Perhaps it was only by dint of recognition that Burns was the only writer of his age in Scotland at the time who would undoubtedly have attained martyr status in the eyes of the people that he successfully escaped that severe fate. For Burns and his family, the government man of excise could not afford to be exposed in that way. The most offending poems – and there were many – he therefore had little option but to take the necessary steps to suppress.

Easily the most acclaimed in that context is the *Ode for General Washington's Birthday* which he describes in a letter to Mrs. Dunlop of June 25, 1794 :

I am just going to trouble your critical patience with the first sketch of a stanza I have been framing as I passed along the road. — The Subject is, LIBERTY : you know, my honoured Friend how dear the theme is to me. I design it as an irregular Ode for Genl. Washington's birthday. — After having mentioned the degeneracy of other kingdoms I come to Scotland thus —

and he proceeds to quote from the final stanza. This poem was not published until it appeared in the antiquarian journal *Notes and Queries* in March, 1874 – eighty years

²² *The Canongate Burns*, p. xxix.

²³ *ibid.*, p. 467.

after its composition. The third stanza is worth quoting for its passionate detestation of *English* tyranny:

Alfred, on thy starry throne
Surrounded by the tuneful choir,
The Bards that erst have struck the patriot lyre,
And rous'd the freeborn Briton's soul of fire,
No more thy England own. -
Dare injured nations form the great design,
To make detested tyrants bleed?
Thy England execrates the glorious deed!
Beneath her hostile banners waving,
Every pang of honour braving,
England in thunder calls - 'The Tyrant's cause is mine!'
That hour accurst, how did the fiends rejoice,
And Hell thro' all her confines raise th' exulting voice,
That hour which saw the generous English name
Link't with such damned deeds of everlasting shame!

And, in the final two stanzas, privately disclosed to Mrs. Dunlop, Burns dares to compare the American colonists' situation in the war of independence with that of his contemporary Scotland :

Is this the ancient Caledonian form,
Firm as her rock, resistless as her storm?
Shew me that eye which shot immortal hate,
Blasting the Despot's proudest bearing ...

This poem, and others in a nearly similar vein, - written in the fateful year 1794 when Robert Watt stood trial for high treason, was found guilty and executed in public, and when Maurice Margarot was sentenced (as had been Muir and others before him) to the statutory fourteen years' transportation, having been found guilty of the crime of sedition - could well have earned Burns a similar fate, had they been published and then were proved to have come from his pen. Well aware of that awful possibility and of the terrible risks he was taking, Burns conveys his sense of foreboding in *From Esopus to Maria* (1794?), a poem that Robert Crawford describes as "one of the clearest signs of Burns's political anxiety" :

The shrinking Bard adown an alley skulks
And dreads a meeting worse than Woolwich hulks
Tho' there his heresies in Church and State
Might well award him Muir and Palmer's fate.²⁴

²⁴ *The Canongate Burns*, p. xxii and pp. 853-858. The poem was first published by A. Cunningham (in an incomplete version) in *The Poetical Works of Robert Burns*, 1834.

But Burns was not always so painstaking in covering his tracks from the menace of government spies and placemen. Nor, it seemed, at times, did he really care all that much. It was one thing to have *Tam O'Shanter* (1791) published for the first time in the columns of *The Edinburgh Herald*. It was bordering on the foolhardy, on the other hand, to have published – anonymously, of course – *The Dumfries Volunteers* in *The Edinburgh Courant* in the issue of 4th May, 1795. This four stanza poem is Burns at his most mischievously elusive. On a superficial first reading, it seems as if it is a staunch, loyalist, even patriotic piece –

The *kettle* o' the Kirk and State,
Perhaps a *clout* may fail in't;
But Deil a *foreign* tinkler loon
Shall ever ca' a nail in't.

However, the final stanza is intriguingly ambivalent –

The wretch that would a *Tyrant* own'
And the wretch, his true-sworn brother,
Who would set the Mob above the *Throne*,
May they be damn'd together!
Who will not sing God Save the KING
Shall hang as high's the steeple;
But while we sing God Save the KING,
We'll ne'er forget THE PEOPLE!

At first glance, it appears that the song ends on a clear note of loyalism. But, as Noble remarks, it is “sleight of hand” on Burns’s part, his language carefully designed to deceive his readers into carrying away an *impression* of loyalism, while getting his point across so subtly with its clear and unambiguous reference to the trial of Thomas Muir. As Robert Crawford puts it :

In wartime this may have made a Royal Dumfries Volunteer sound utterly committed. However, those last lines sound uncannily like the widely reported rhetoric of Thomas Muir who had told a London audience in 1793 [less than two years since the poem’s appearance in print - RLC] before his arrest, ‘He loved his sovereign but could not on that account forget the people.’²⁵

Ultimately, of course, it has to be said that Dumfries – radical centre though it was – was hardly Paisley where, as we have already seen in chapter 2, feelings ran so high towards the end of 1793 and the beginning of 1794 that Robert Dundas, the Lord Advocate, wrote :

²⁵ See Robert Crawford, *The Bard*, p. 385. His reference (note 213, p. 448) is to the *Morning Post* account of Muir’s speech quoted in Bewley’s *Muir of Huntershill*, p. 53.

You may believe that the present state of madness here, engrosses all our attention ... if we take decided and strong measures against those Rebels, we shall be supported. ... It is the only system that will have effect or, otherways, an Insurrection will be the consequence.²⁶

In the same document, there are reports that “Paisley & its neighbourhood” were in a “state of tumult and unrest”. It was, as we shall see later in this chapter, precisely at this time in January, 1794 that Maurice Margarot came to Paisley in defiance of his bail surety and Alexander Wilson, one of the men he came to see, was up to his neck in trouble with the Sheriff of Renfrewshire concerning his alleged circulation of handbills calling a public meeting in the name of the Friends of Liberty and Reform. Only a few days after his visit to Paisley Margarot was put on trial in Edinburgh and sentenced to 14 years’ transportation. These were dangerous times for poets as for anyone else daring to stand up to the administration.

Burns’s evocation of this ferment of radical activity in the country at large at this time is the “poetic gem”,²⁷ *To Messrs Muir, Palmer, Skirving and Margarot*” first published - of course, anonymously - in *The Edinburgh Gazetteer* on 15th January in that same fateful year. This time, there was utterly no ambiguity - and, significantly, perhaps defiantly, it is written in English:

Friends of the Slighted people - ye whose wrongs
From wounded FREEDOM many a tear shall draw
As once she mourn’d when mock’d by venal tongues
Her SYDNEY fell beneath the form of law.

O had this bosom known poetic fire
Your names, your deeds, should grace my votive songs
For Virtue taught the bard’s far-sounding fire
To lift the PATRIOT from the servile throng.

High o’er the wrecks of time *his* fame shall live
While proud Oppression wastes her idle rage.
His name on history’s column shall revive
And wake the genius of a distant age. ...
Yet what the praise far distant times shall sing
To that calm solace Virtue *now* bestows.
Round the dire bark She waves her guardian wing;
She guides her exiles o’er the trackless snows:
With Joy’s gay flowers She decks the sultry wild
And sheds the beam of Hope where Nature never smil’d.

²⁶ General Register House paper 2/4/74/f.76, cited in *The Canongate Burns*, p. 489.

²⁷ *The Canongate Burns*, p. 488.

2 Wilson and his circle : a company of poets

The earliest letter in Hunter's collection is written by Wilson, then an *ingénu* of twenty-two, from Edinburgh to his friend and erstwhile fellow weaver in Paisley, David Brodie, now a schoolmaster at "Quarreltoun" (modern Johnstone in Renfrewshire).²⁸ It is dated 28 April 1788 and is important on account of Wilson's reference to his having "last week" passed "a whole night in company with three poets". He goes on to explain to Brodie who these three celebrities were :

One was James Kennedy, Ebenezer Picken - who is publishing his works,²⁹ and the last and most glorious was the immortal author of that well-known ballad, "The Battle of Bannockburn", "From the Ocean, &c." Blessed meeting! Never did I spend such a night in all my life. O, I was all fire! O, I was all spirit. I had the honour of being highly complimented by Bannockburn for a poem which I wrote in praise of his sublime song.³⁰

Kennedy has appeared in this study before and will be discussed later in this chapter. Both Sir William Jardine and Hunter speculate on the identity of the third man, "most glorious" - that is, "Bannockburn". Who was he? The first impression is that he must have been Burns himself : after all, the words "the immortal author" could surely only apply to him? Jardine, the editor of the 1832 edition of *American Ornithology*, notes Hunter, had "the benefit of biographical material from Wilson's sister Jean" and he wrote

We find him in frequent society with Gavin Turnbull [the Paisley weaver turned Kilmarnock poet] , E. Picken and James Kennedy who formed part of his companions in his song of "The Group".

Hunter himself, having correctly dismissed any possibility that the third man was Burns, inclines to the "slender" hypothesis that

... the two poems [sic - i.e. *The Battle of Bannockburn* and *From the Ocean, &c.*] may have been by Turnbull and there is some confirmation from Sir William Jardine [that that could have been the case, etc.].

And accurately enough, but still negatively, he concludes :

Whoever the author was, he was not immortal and his work is long forgotten ; his only immortality is this brief mention by Wilson.³¹

²⁸ Wilson includes a poem, *Epistle to Mr. D**** B****** in the 1791 Edinburgh edition of his *Poems*. It does not appear in the Paisley first edition of the previous year.

²⁹ See Appendix A, 84 and 85-88.

³⁰ Hunter, p. 119.

³¹ *ibid.*, p. 122.

Cantwell, like Hunter, simply gives up : the third man

defies a more positive identification, the most assiduous search among forgotten Scottish writers failing to give a clue to the immortal author of a work of that name.³²

To be fair, the answer to the conundrum of the identity of the third poet, the “immortal author”, is by no means obvious and we should not blame Jardine, Cantwell and Hunter for giving up on the problem. Nevertheless, it is surprising to say the least that, until this study, the identity of the third man has not surfaced. They should have searched much nearer Wilson’s roots, the town of Paisley itself. Had they done so, they would have found the answer to the mystery of the third poet in Wilson’s company that night in April 1788. Reference to Appendix A (63-85) of this study shows beyond doubt that the poem was “The memorable Battle of Bannockburn, fought on the 25th of June, 1314. A heroic ballad.” It is the second poem listed in the title page of *Four Excellent New Songs*, the others being :

I. New Song, composed on Lochwinnoch Loch, while observing the famous Curling Match betwixt his Grace the Duke of Hamilton and William M’Dowal, Esq; of Castle-semble, January 5. 1785. [; and]

III. Galloping Dreary Dun. [; and, finally]

IV. Widdle Waddle.

Contrary to Hunter’s perception, there were not two poems but one. “From the Ocean &c.” is simply the opening phrase of the Bannockburn poem, the whole couplet being :

From the ocean emerged bright Phoebus’s ray,
Big with the importance of Bannockburn’s day ...

Hardly the kind of stuff to keep Wilson awake all night and certainly not the product of an author who, in anyone’s wildest imagination, could be described as “immortal”³³ - unless for his banality and, frankly, execrable poetic style, almost, it has to be said, in the manner of an eighteenth century McGonigall. For the third man is none other than James Maxwell, self-styled “Poet in Paisley”, *alias* “S.D.P.” - that is, “Student of Divine Poetry”.³⁴

³² Cantwell, p. 49.

³³ More conventionally, - in a new poem inserted into Peter Hill’s 1791 Edinburgh edition of the *Poems* - Wilson reserves the term “immortal” for Burns : *Ode for the Birthday of Our Immortal Scottish Poet; set to music by a Bacchanalian Club.*

³⁴ 1720-1800. See also chapter 2 and Appendix A *passim*.

Burns knew of Maxwell – and Maxwell certainly knew of Burns, as his *Animadversions on some poets and poetasters of the present age especially R-t B-s, and J-n L-k*. testifies – a very rare title but of esoteric historical, rather than literary interest, especially for Burns scholars and bibliographers :

Of all British poets that yet have appeared,
None e'er at things sacred so daringly sneer'd,
As he in the west, who but lately is sprung
From behind the plough-tails, and from raking of dung.
A champion for Satan, none like him before,
And his equal, pray God, we may never see more ...
He is to this land and this age a disgrace,
And mostly to those who his poems embrace.³⁵

But why did Wilson rave about this man? First, a disclaimer on my part. This is not the place to discuss Maxwell's poetic inadequacies, though his poetry is without doubt, for most of the time, stupifyingly mediocre. Secondly, the important thing to note – and what confounded the best guesses of Wilson's biographers, who, to a man, could not identify the third man - is the bewildering irony behind the make-up of what Wilson called "The Group".³⁶ Setting aside Picken, who does not concern us, and if we also exclude Gavin Turnbull who is, *pace* Jardine, a red herring in this context, we are left with Kennedy and Maxwell. Consideration of Kennedy is deferred until later in this chapter.

As a poet, *simpliciter*, James Maxwell has, deservedly, had an almost universally bad press, though it is perhaps a little unfair to compare his doggerel with the inimitable style and manner of the irrepressible McGonigall. Perhaps with the Burns cult so disliked by Daiches, we have been led astray by Maxwell's *Animadversions* and similar dross to condemn him out of hand without bothering to read his fascinating political rantings – not, I stress again, for their poetry but for the importance of their historical signature. Though much of his work is numbingly tedious sermonizing, and many of his worst poems written to order for the purpose of celebrating someone's birthday or return to health or even his death, Maxwell cannot, and should not be ignored since some of his overtly political verse contains highly charged, directly relevant contemporary comment.

³⁵ Appendix A, 92-88. See also 111-90 and Robert Crawford, *The Bard*, p. 324.

³⁶ Grosart, vol. II, pp. 227-9.

And one suspects it is the naively unaffected patriotic sentiment of the Bannockburn poem, for example, that must have appealed to the young Wilson.

Later - meaning from c. 1795, until after the date of Wilson's arrival in America - Maxwell more and more comes across as an eccentric hack and, more to the point, as an extreme loyalist. There can be no doubt that the later Maxwell would have held himself aloof from the aims and *modus operandi* of Paisley radicalism, and, least of all, would have shunned the likes of James Kennedy, whose company he once enjoyed alongside that of Wilson's. A jailbird like Wilson, a marked man in the eyes of the Sheriff of Renfrewshire, would hardly have been the kind of man Maxwell would wish to be seen with ; nor for that matter, would Wilson have recognised in Maxwell the "most glorious" figure he had swooned over only a few years before.

The following Maxwell titles are the best known of his political poems :

[References inside square brackets are to Appendix A]

1792

[138-92] *On the French Revolution. A moral essay on the rights of man. By James Maxwell, Poet in Paisley. ...*

Paisley: Printed by J. Neilson. 1792.

This panegyric to the French revolution reiterates the great gains it made for the people against the king and the aristocracy and can be said almost to out-Wordsworth Wordsworth. The poem is striking alone for the skill with which Maxwell versifies each of the 17 Articles of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, approved by the French National Assembly on 26 August, 1789:

II. The end of civil government is then
Truth to defend, and guard the rights of men.
These rights are precious nat'ral liberty -
Secure their property, and keep them free
From all oppression, to the last degree. ...

IV. Politick Liberty allows no pow'r
Of doing what may other's hurt procure.
It can no Legislature authorize
To hinder men freely to exercise
The nat'ral rights that unto them belong. ...

XI. The free communication of the mind,
Thoughts and opinions to be unconfi'd,
Is sure one of the precious rights of man,
And none can countermand this noble plan.
Therefore may men speak, write and publish free,

Yet, lo, they still responsible must be,
For each abuse of this their liberty,
In ev'ry case determined by the law,
Else punishment on their own heads they draw. ...

XVI. Communities, who under sep'rate pow'rs
Are rul'd, yet no security procures
Of legal rights, they're void of constitution,
And surely stand in need of revolution.

XVII. Man's right to property is sacred still,
And nowise subject to a Sov'reign's will.
And this no King, nor Members of a State,
Have any right at all to alienate;
Except in cases of necessity
Making the owners full indemnity. ...

[145-92] *A Touch on the Times ; or, Observations on Mr. Paine's Letter to Mr. Secretary Dundas; set forth in the following dialogue. ... Printed in the Present Year [1792]*

Of all Maxwell's productions, this poem has, I think, its moments. Again, however, the real interest lies in its historical reference. It is written in the form of a dialogue, involving, in turn, Dundas, Paine, "Place-Men, Pensioners, &c.", "The Community", and "The Court". It should be pointed out that Maxwell, though basically an unquestioning loyalist, is not blind to the needs of the people and it is 'the Community' that actually holds the balance of the argument and eventually wins the day :

DUNDAS

What is the matter THOMAS PAINE,
That you against us so complain
About our Constitution?
You say, 'tis altogether wrong;
(Tho' we have borne with you too long)
We take this resolution,

To stop the clamours of the Nation,
We publish this our Proclamation,
Lest they grow turbulent :
We therefore must do what we can
To stop your Books, call'd "Rights of Man",
Such evils to prevent. ...

PAINE

Your Mandate points at none but those,
Who truth and honesty oppose,
Seditious and profane :
But no such thing is found in mine,
Truth thro' the whole transparent shine,
All falsehood I disdain.

Examine all my Rights of Man,

And then disprove them if you can,
Or point out ought that's vicious :
Your Place-men all I can defy,
And Pensioners whene'er they try,
To point out what's seditious. ...

THE COMMUNITY

... We can't forget America,
Which did so many millions draw,
To keep a needless war up :
Devoid of justice as of sense.
To sink us in such vast expence,
Above the breeches far up.

And what got we to quit the cost?
Above half of the empire lost,
With thousands of our lives :
Fathers and sons so many slain,
But few returned home again,
To cheer their mourning wives. ...

Tho' they have made a Proclamation,³⁷
Which yet hath giv'n more occasion,
Amidst our deep distress :
But we despise so vain a Plan,
To quarrel at the Rights of Man,
And printing to suppress.

In the most historically interesting part of the poem Maxwell then concentrates his attention on the “cause of the discontent”, identifying in the process that they, the people, not unreasonably

... want a regulation :
That all might represented be,
According to their just degree,
Of men throughout the nation ...

For ev'n the poorest that can be,
Are never from taxation free,
All pay toward the State ;
And therefore have a right to vote
For representatives, why not?
'Tis just, without debate.

³⁷ The historical incident to which Maxwell's poem refers is the letter Paine wrote to Henry Dundas of 6 June 1792 in which he scathingly describes him as “a man rolling in luxury at the expense of the nation”. Keane comments : “In the same open letter, Paine ignored friendly advice not to refer to George III as ‘king or MADjesty,’ in punning allusion to his mental condition, and cheekily signed the letter, ‘I am, Mr. Dundas, Not your obedient humble servant, But the contrary.’” (*Tom Paine A political life*, p. 341). The Proclamation referred to is, of course, the Royal Proclamation issued by the Pitt government on May 21, 1792 against “wicked and seditious writings.” See also the Wilson Bibliographical checklist above, 1792, under *Address to the Synod of G*****w and A*r*.

... Why should not ev'ry place
Be represented in this case,
As they in numbers be?
Why should one Shire a south the Tweed,
In Representatives exceed
All on the North pray see?

Have we not Shires and Boroughs more,
And men in numbers in great store,
Yea more than ten to one?
Is this not inequality,
In numbers to a vast degree?
Let this be thought upon.

Besides Electors here so few.
One of a thousand have not due,
To give their vote at all.
Yea, many men of large estates,
The present law of right defeats :
Who can this justice call?

Here, Maxwell seeks to emphasise that the Community does not intend to take up arms in support of their just cause, least of all to seek to destroy “the kingdom”. Rather do the people fear a different outcome – the depopulation of Scotland and increasing emigration abroad :

Consider this whate'er you do,
For surely you will find it true,
If you your course hold on :
Above half you have drove away,
The rest, perhaps, may not long stay,
But quickly may be gone

At this point, it has to be said, Maxwell's simple poetic statement comes across with a surprising clarity and power. It is not hyperbole to claim that this long forgotten political poem deserves to be remembered, in part at least, as a hymn to the manufacturing classes of Paisley at this dire time in their history, written at the height of the radical movement – ephemeral though it was – which had (and would continue to have for a few years yet) such a peculiarly strong hold on the town. However, in the last two stanzas, and just in time, as it were, Maxwell seems to pause and reassert his loyalties – and the poem, predictably, closes on a much more demure, almost conventional note:

... But after all, we should be glad,
Could peace and liberty be had,
On equitable terms :
'Tis not disturbances to raise,
We make such just complaints as these,
Nor raise up false alarms.
Let Peace and Liberty still reign
In Britain, and just laws let none offend;
But let all ranks united stand,
To guard the bulwarks of the land,
For ever without end.

1795

[170, 171 & 172-95] *Issachar the Strong Ass Overburdened ; or, The Groans of Britannia from the Pitt. A Poem, descriptive of the times. ... Printed in the Present Year.* [Parts I and II] (1795)

The *Issachar* poems also offer important contemporary comment on the spirit of the times seen from the perspective of this “Poet in Paisley”. Though they are anonymous, the preface to the first part is written in the form of a “commission” from Britannia “to my son J. M.”.

1796

[180-96] *A Second Caution against Infidelity. Especially against Paine’s Age of Reason, and others, who are striving to over-throw the authority of the Holy Scriptures.* (1796)

This is a very different Maxwell from the poet of *A Touch on the Times*. Conventionally and entirely predictably Maxwell attacks Paine for the atheism of his *Age of Reason*. Frustratingly, the PCL copy is lost at the time this note is written.

There is no record of any mention of Maxwell by Wilson after the David Brodie letter of April 1788 .

3 Interlude : packman, pedlar and poet

In 1789, Wilson says of himself - in another letter to Brodie, but this time from St. Andrews “written on the last day, and last hour of that last day” - “I am a pedlar”. He is referring to his life as a ‘packman’ or pedlar in 1789-90, an account of which, his prose *Journal*,³⁸ he (a little perversely) included as the final item in the *Poems*, published by subscription by John Neilson of Paisley in 1790.

The *Journal* begins confidently enough :

As youth is the most favourable time to establish a man’s good fortune in the world; and as his success in life depends in a great measure, on his prudent endeavours and unwearied perseverance, I have resolved to make one bold push for the united interests of Pack and Poems.³⁹

But his letter to Brodie of 10 November 1789 reveals that his “bold push” had been a miserable failure :

³⁸ The first entry in the *Journal* is dated September 17, 1789 and the last October 2. However, it is clear from a note he inserts after the last entry that “The foregoing Journal relates only to the collecting of subscribers; ...”. Grosart, vol. I, p. 17

³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 3.

Since I left Paisley, I have met with some encouragement, but I assure you, Sir, that my occupation is greatly against my success in collecting subscribers. A *Packman* is a character which none esteem, and almost every one despises. The idea which people of all ranks entertain of them is, that they are mean-spirited, loquacious liars, cunning and illiterate, watching every opportunity, and using every low and mean art within their power to cheat. When any one applies to a genteel person, pretending to be a poet, he is treated with ridicule and contempt; and even though he should produce a specimen, it is either thrown back again, without being thought worthy of perusal, or else read with prejudice. I find also that a poet's fame is his wealth. Of this the booksellers to whom I applied with proposals have complained, saying "it was a pity I was not better known." I think therefore it will be my best scheme to collect the manuscripts in an orderly manner, and send them to some gentleman for correction.⁴⁰

To be more specific, his travels round the Firth of Forth and west Fife – his itinerary taking in Edinburgh, Dalkeith, Musselburgh, Prestonpans, North Berwick, Dunbar, Burntisland and Kinghorn – not only failed to yield insufficient subscriptions to satisfy Neilson, but in terms of making cash sales from the goods he carried was just as disastrous. Indeed, the total sales of finished textiles advanced to him (probably along with money to meet the expenses of his journey) by his generous and forbearing friend James Kennedy, a former weaver in Paisley turned fairly prosperous Edinburgh gown and fancy goods manufacturer, were quite inadequate to permit any repayment of his outstanding debt to him. When Wilson wrote to Kennedy informing him of the outcome, Kennedy replied indicating his severe displeasure at losing his advance. But that was not all. In a further letter, Wilson told Kennedy that, in desperation, he had undertaken a further journey "to the West Country", but that too had proved a miserable failure, leaving him, as he abjectly explains, with the princely sum of "twelve shillings and a watch" for his pains :

Yet hard as my circumstances may be, I'll a thousand times rather bear approaching misery than hazard your friendship forever; You will therefore receive ... the watch and the two bills [he means settlement of them] at the date desired from me this week by the first opportunity. This is all I can do at present.⁴¹

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 17.

⁴¹ Letter to James Kennedy of 26 January 1790 in Hunter, pp. 131-3. This is an important letter since it is written in reply to a clearly angry letter [now lost] from Kennedy. The letter goes on to describe for Kennedy's benefit Wilson's visit to William McDowall, M.P. of [Garthland and] Castle Semple where he was well received : "After reading [his MS. poems to be published in the 1790 Paisley edition], he asked me what education I had got, where born, and where I staid. Having told him, he said by what he had seen they seemed not amiss ; bade me push prudently on and he was my friend; and sought two proposal papers from me, and said he would get me some subscriptions." So favourable an impression did McDowall make on Wilson – and vice-versa - that in the 1791 Edinburgh edition of Peter Hill, the author replaced the poem *Achtertoul, A Song* from the first (Paisley) edition with a new composition, *To the Hon. William M'Dowal, of Garthland, On his Return from Parliament, July, 1791*. In the same letter to Kennedy, Wilson attempts to pacify him by reporting that "the number of subscribers I believe amounts to about

As he explains, again contritely, to Kennedy, barely six months from the date of his deeply apologetic January letter (during which time Wilson clearly did his utmost to collect enough subscriptions to justify John Neilson proceeding with the *Poems*), he has had only limited success :

I am possessed, indeed, of 600 neat copies, near 400 of which are subscribed for; but these are so scattered up and down through different places in Scotland that were I to take a route through them, with no other business but that of delivering the volumes, my peregrinations would be distressed by numberless disadvantages, and I at the end might be no richer than now. I therefore once more solicit your assistance with boldness and sincerity not to satisfy an inclination of travelling; not to have honour of trudging with a pack, but from hopes of becoming able to repay my creditors, make myself more known, and perhaps procuring a more independant [sic] situation for life.

He has now, therefore, devised a new plan which he sets out for Kennedy's consideration:

I would advertise the publication in some of the Edinburgh papers, declaring the station of the author, and of the method he was taking to dispose of his works. If this were not convenient for a newspaper it could be done in the Review. I would have a number of the proposals thrown off, such as I published last; these I would leave with the different friends I became acquainted with in my travels. In the meantime I would have a genteel copy always along with me that subscribers might know what they were signing for. After taking a circuit for twenty or thirty miles I would return, pack up the number of volumes subscribed for, and proceed to the delivery of them making it my business to address every literary character I found out. This would not much hinder the sale of my goods, and perhaps in some cases assist it: and I have not a doubt but that in two months I could dispose of every copy.⁴²

We don't know how Kennedy responded to this rash and rather naive plan. John Neilson, on the other hand, was left with a substantial number of unsold copies and these he sold on to the Edinburgh bookseller and publisher, Peter Hill, who 'concocted' the 1791 edition from these and from sheets still lying about Neilson's Paisley printshop.⁴³

400", adding "I am convinced that scarce a genteel family in town but will purchase a copy for the sake of *Hab's Door*, and as Neilson refuses to print *Hab's Door*, could you recommend it to any friends in Edin. ? Neilson's refusal of *Hab's Door* would be occasion enough for me dropping him, and I am persuaded the book would take none the worse of being done in Edin." In the event, of course, *Hab's Door, or The Temple of Terror* - a libel on the silk merchant, William Henry (as is the companion poem, *The Hollander*) - was omitted from both the 1790 and 1791 *Poems* and not published until R. Smith's 12pp. pamphlet [Paisley, n.d. but possibly 1815-1820] * and Falconer's Glasgow edition [perhaps 1820]. For more on McDowall, see chapter 2, §10 (a) and Appendix A, 63-85.

* Paisley Central Library, Paisley Pamphlets (Robert Brown Collection), v. 17, no. 12.

⁴² Letter to James Kennedy of 6 August 1790 in Hunter, pp. 133-35.

⁴³ See note to Appendix A, 127-91 where Gardyne's figures are seen to be at odds with Wilson's arithmetic in the letter to Kennedy of 6 August 1790.

4 The weavers' poet : the three verse libels

Though hardly great poetry, in the years 1790 to 1792 Wilson produced three poems that, together, constitute arguably the most remarkable literary expression of what would nowadays be termed 'industrial protest'. Two of them, written at about the same time (1790), singled out as their target a silk manufacturer in Paisley named William Henry - *Hab's Door; or, The Temple of Terror* and *The Hollander ; or, Light Weight*. These are not great poems but they are important documents in the early history of the working class in Scotland and provide an insight into the tensions that existed at this time between the weavers of Paisley and the wealthy men who commissioned them to produce the artifacts they would sell on to distributors. These manufacturers were also known as "corks". Sylvia Clark explains :

... by the 18th century the production and marketing of cloth had grown too complicated for a weaver to do it all himself profitably. Procuring yarns of the right kind and colour for a particular fabric, negotiating with the merchants, finishing and dispatching were all done by someone called a "manufacturer", or more colloquially, a "cork". The cork was the essential link between the basic producer and the distributor, and he was the weaver's paymaster.

A cork had a "ware-room" where he stored everything necessary and where the webs were made neat, and packed by "cloth-lappers". There he handed out the measured amounts of yarn for warp and weft, any special gadgets for achieving a special weave, the specifications, and the pattern, to "his" weavers. In due course they brought in the cloth and presented it at the office half-door to be inspected and measured, were paid for it and got their next assignment. Some of the bigger corks had more than a ware-room, they had a "manufacturing house" which also contained a weaving-shop with looms to rent. Men who had no loom of their own could come and work there, paying a loom-rent which was usually a fixed percentage of the price of the finished cloth, no matter how long the loom had been used for.⁴⁴

Clark's explanation is necessary background information to assist in a better understanding of the bitter dispute between the Paisley weavers and Henry who, according to Wilson, their rhyming spokesman, was cheating them out of the proper remuneration they were due; to be specific, supplying them in the first place with less yarn than they needed for a particular job, with the inevitable result that their take-home wage

⁴⁴ *Paisley a History*, Edinburgh, 1988, p. 25. Wilson was by no means the only weaver poet to expose the cheating practised by corks at this time which persisted into the early nineteenth century. The Wylie Collection at the University of Glasgow [in Bh13-a.23] contains two other poems on the same theme, though later than Wilson's : James Yool's *The Rise and Progress of Oppression ; or The Weavers' Struggle for Their Prices. A Tale*, Paisley, (Stephen and Andrew Young), 1813, and *The Weaver's Lament ... By an Operative Weaver*, Glasgow, (Chapman and Lang for Thomas Stewart), n.d., 1815? Both poems attack corks in general, without singling out any named individual, unlike Wilson.

was much less than foreseen and negotiated. It was the sharpest of practice and Wilson took Henry (Hab) on in a fight he could never hope to win -

Now twiggle twiggle goes the door
In steps the foremost comer ;
Tak's aff his cowl, pu's out his store,
A' shakin, tells the num'er.
The ready scales, a clinkin corps
O' weights, amaist a hun'er ;
Lets Andrew ken what down to score,
Syne heaves it out like lum'r,
In a neive this day ...

... His agents a', wi' sullen gloom
Mute, measure, as he dances
With horrid rage, damning the loom,
And weavers ; soon he scances
Their claith this day.⁴⁵

On 26 January 1790 Wilson informs James Kennedy in Edinburgh that his printer, John Neilson, has taken cold feet and is refusing to include *Hab's Door* in the projected volume of his *Poems* - this despite the poet's belief that "scarce a genteel family in town but will purchase a copy for the sake of Hab's Door". And he asks Kennedy to make enquiries in Edinburgh among his friends if anyone there would be prepared to take it on, being persuaded "the book would take none the worse" of being published in the capital.⁴⁶

It appears that Henry backed down and took no action, presumably because there was actually nothing hard and fast in the poem to identify him as necessarily the grasping and corrupt cork, the fearsome Hab. In the same year, however, Wilson published *The Hollander* which, by its title and content, left no one in any shred of doubt this time that Henry was his target. Perhaps it was a false confidence, deriving from Henry's reluctance (or legal inability) in the case of *Hab's Door* to go to law, that prompted Wilson to take a step too far. Henry, it was common knowledge, had lived in Holland⁴⁷ for a time and, as

⁴⁵ Grosart, vol. II, p. 67.

⁴⁶ Hunter, p. 133.

⁴⁷ It is also quite likely that Wilson intends a *double entendre* by the title. Because he had lived in Holland Henry may well have been an agent for "holland", a linen fabric that originated in the province of Holland in the Netherlands.

his lawyer pointed out in his “Replies” dated 15 July 1790 in answer to Wilson’s limp denial that his poem was meant to refer to the manufacturer, -

It is perfectly obvious where & at whom it is meant to apply In a word it is plain and no person can read the poem without saying and admitting that it insinuates that the person who the poem means to point out has been guilty of cheating and deceiving by not giving weight according to what they charged.⁴⁸

Certainly, *The Hollander* is a much angrier poem than *Hab’s Door*:

Our Hollander (gude help his saul)
Kens better ways o’ working ;⁴⁹
For *Jock*⁵⁰ an’ him has aft a sprawl
Wha’ll bring the biggest dark in.
“Weel, *Jock*. What hast thou screwt the day?”
“Deed father I’se no crack o’t,
Nine holes, sax ounce, or thereaway,
“Is a’ that I could mak o’t,
“This live lang day.”...

What town can thrive wi’ sic a crew,
Within its entrails crawlin’!
Muck worms that maist provoke a spew,
To see or hear them squalin’.
Down on your knees, man, wife and wean,
For ance implore the devil,
To harle to himself his ain,
An’ free us frae sic evil,
This vera day.⁵¹

Curiously, however, the libel case seems to have petered out, with an interlocutor by the Sheriff of Renfrewshire, James Orr, dated 16 November 1790 abandoned - the last document in the series in the NLS MSS. transcribed by Hunter. Hunter can only speculate as to the inconclusive outcome :

⁴⁸ Hunter, pp. 409-428, fastidiously prints as Appendix 1 to his book the entire legal documents relating to the Wilson/Henry libel case. I have seen the MSS. myself in the NLS [MS. catalogue ref. 499] and the Court’s original exhibit of the printed poem - a broadsheet - is actually bound in with the folio. See the bibliography prefacing this chapter and Appendix A, 116-90.

⁴⁹ Better, that is, than other corks whose names are barely concealed in the poem.

⁵⁰ One of the legal documents transcribed by Hunter, pp. 420-24, - “Document F” - Henry’s solicitor’s *Replies To the Answers for Alex Wilson* - points out that this reference to Henry having “a son of the name of Jock carrying on business in the same way” proves that “taking the whole circumstances together there can scarcely [sic] remain a doubt that the poem libelled on is of a scandalous inflammatory & incendiary nature” and that Henry “is the person agt. whom the object of the Satire is intended and that his character has thereby been most falsely attacked traduced Scandalized and defamed.”

⁵¹ Grosart, vol. II, pp. 65-6.

The diet of trial is only a week after it was fixed although the procedure roll has been somewhat leisurely in operation. Could it be that Wilson was still in “the East Country”? He never signed the incidental petition (Document I). Was a warrant to apprehend granted on 23 November 1790 if Wilson failed to appear? If so, was it never executed? Alternatively, was nothing done on 23 November 1790? Was the action allowed to go to sleep? Or was the action settled out of court? Wilson seems to have been less recalcitrant as evidenced by the incidental petition (Document I).⁵²

If Wilson breathed a considerable sigh of relief at having evaded a custodial sentence for his libel against Henry, the third poem in the series, *The Shark, or, Lang Mills Detected* (1792), was to prove his downfall. For the modern reader, the poem may be memorable seen from the perspective of contemporary manufacturing history, but for its author at the time it was a costly and unmitigated disaster.

Wilson’s celebrated poem, *The Shark*, is the only known example in Scottish literature of poetic blackmail. It was specifically written as a means of blackmailing the cork, William Sharp, prosperous owner of the Long Mills in Paisley :

In vain we’ve toiled wi’ head and heart,
And constant deep inspection,
For years on years, to bring this art
So nearly to perfection ;
The mair that art and skill deserve,
The greedier Will advances ;
And saws and barrels only serve
To heighten our expenses
And wrath this day.⁵³

Wilson was determined to expose Sharp on behalf of the entire weaving community who had suffered from his crimes, himself, in all likelihood, included. He had already earned a reputation in the town for fearlessly exposing corruption and cheating on the part of the corks, a practice that according to William Henry’s solicitor in *The Hollander* case, Edward Jamieson, writing just two years before *The Shark* case, was not confined to one Paisley poet alone:

⁵² Document I refers to Wilson still denying the charge but explains that the reason he has been unable to sign the denial is, according to his procurator (solicitor), John Craig, attributable to “his absence in the East Country for sometime past” preventing his having done so to date, but that he will nonetheless “subscribe the petition”. To the possibilities speculated on by Hunter, therefore, might be added that Henry agreed to drop the case, though for reasons we will probably never know.

⁵³ Grosart, vol. II, p. 58.

In the Town of Paisley the rage for defaming peoples characters by writing poems & other papers of that kind have for some time past prevailed too much and if a check was not to be put to such practices it is hard to say to what length these scandalous publications might be carried.⁵⁴

And in the same legal document, Jamieson had gone on to refer to Henry's hope, as an employer, that something might be done to stop the practice before matters got out of hand :

... when you consider how easily the minds of the working people in a manufacturing town are inflamed & particularly those about the Town of Paisley of which we have already had too many instances, it is not doubted but your Lord'p will agree with the pursuer in thinking that a cheque can not be too soon put to such proceedings.⁵⁵

As the later poem makes clear, Sharp had a reputation among the weavers as a cork who cheated them out of their rightful earnings through a combination of greed and cunning exploitation: Wilson calls him "great Squeeze-the-poor". Sharp, it appears, nurtured a longstanding personal ambition to expand his business on the back of his corrupt practices and, as Wilson in an effective pun explains, to "lengthen" the Lang Mills even further. In the poem, we are told that Sharp's speciality was to demand his woven cloth in a fraction of the normal time, but then to pair down his prices, almost imperceptibly, and piece by piece, so that the weavers were constantly working longer hours for less and less money. It was classical exploitation:

Groat after groat, was clippet aff,
Frae ane thing and anither ;
Till fouk began to think on draff,
To help to haud thegither
Their banes that day.⁵⁶

The weavers could do little in response, except continue to feed their brooding hatred of Sharp :

... as a brick or limestane kiln
Wi' sooty reek advances ;
So grateful shall thy mem'ry still
Be to our bitter senses,
By night or day.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Hunter, p. 421.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁶ Grosart, vol. II, p. 59.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p. 60

Unlike the two libels on Henry, however, *The Shark* makes no attempt to encipher the identity of its target : in Sharp's case there was no conceivable ambiguity surrounding "Lang Willy Shark wi' greedy snout", the hated proprietor of the "Lang Mills". And it is clear moreover that Wilson saw no need whatever to conceal the object of his assault and did not bother to do so.

Wilson's foolish error of judgment was to send Sharp a copy of the poem in manuscript - he later had it printed off, in defiance of the Court - and in an accompanying note, signed "A. B.", he demanded the sum of five guineas to be deposited in John Neilson's printshop "within three hours", failing which the writer of the letter would not be in a position to prevent the author proceeding to publish the poem "to the world". This was, of course, blatant blackmail and extortion. On receipt of the letter, Sharp acted immediately. On the following day, Sheriff Orr received from Sharp's solicitor a comprehensive petition dated 23 May 1792 naming as the culprit Alexander Wilson, "weaver in Paisley, a person well known for his productions in this way, some of which are at this moment the subject of inquiry". The Sheriff promptly issued a warrant for Wilson's arrest.⁵⁸

After the usual legal processes had taken their course, on 27 June 1792 Wilson was found guilty as charged by Sheriff Principal Allan Maconochie who granted the complainant, William Sharp, damages of £50 sterling and ordered Wilson to appear in open Court

and beg pardon of God and the complainer, and confess, acknowledge and declare, that the said incriminations thrown out against the complainer's character in the foresaid libel, are scandalous and injurious.⁵⁹

Wilson was also ordered to pay £10 sterling to the Court to deter others from similar crimes, to be imprisoned until payment of these sums was made, and to pay all costs. For Wilson it was a ruinous verdict. But the matter did not end there. Inconceivably, in the meantime and despite the sentence handed down by the Sheriff Principal, Wilson had

⁵⁸ Cantwell, pp. 267-276, prints all the transcriptions of the legal documents in the William Sharp libel case (including the criminal warrants of 4 January 1794) - but fails to provide a reference. I have tracked down all the transcriptions which are to be found in NLS MS. 493, 16pp., Rosebery Collection. An original copy of the printed version of the poem - *The Shark, or, Lang Mills Detected ... M.DCC.XCII*. [12 mo, n.p., 8pp.] (perhaps the only surviving) - is bound in with the documents.* See also Appendix A, 146-92.

* The NLS collection was "Bought from John Grant, Edinburgh for £3" in September, 1929.

⁵⁹ Cantwell, p. 270

carelessly and/or recklessly allowed the poem to be printed. For a second time he was locked up in the Paisley Tolbooth, this time for “aggravated contempt of this court”. Writing from the Tolbooth on February 4 1793, he intimates that his brother in law, John Bell, had agreed to stand surety for his good behaviour “for two years to come” and craved that he might be liberated “tomorrow, February 5”. In a further petition to Sheriff Orr of that date, Wilson acknowledged that “the poem was printed at his expense” but he refused to name the printer responsible – though he named the stationer James Sclater as having sold the poem. He could not say how many copies had been thrown off by the printer and declined to say how many were “sold and disposed of”.

On 6 February 1793 a brief note by the Clerk of Court records Wilson having “delivered up two copies of the poem in his hands to the defender, who, with his own hands, committed the same to the flames”, as ordained by the interlocutor of the previous day’s date.⁶⁰ In May of the same year, Wilson was consequently once more imprisoned in the Tolbooth, having been found guilty by the Sheriff, James Orr, of conduct calculated “to aggravate and not to alleviate the charge.”⁶¹ The whole sorry episode of *The Shark* had proved a colossal disaster for Wilson, his family and his friends.

5 Wilson and his circle : dangerous friends

(a) The events of 4th January, 1794

It would, I think, be tendentious to argue that Wilson’s personal involvement in the radical movement in Paisley was in any sense a direct result of the catastrophic outcome of the two libel cases brought against him by Henry and Sharp – especially the latter, which ended with serial imprisonment. Rather, his radicalism was probably bred in him by a his predisposition to chronic pessimism, leading him too often into impetuous and reckless behaviour, but also, and above all, as a result of his possessing some dangerous friends who, in turn, were responsible for leading him into seriously ‘bad’ company.

The key to an unravelling of the sequence of events prompting Wilson’s departure for America from Belfast, via south west Scotland (Portpatrick), in May 1794 is to be found in the acutely tense period in Scottish radical history from January of the same year and,

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. 275.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p. 276.

however unlikely on the surface it may seem, specifically in the re-arrest and subsequent trial of the English radical, Maurice Margarot.⁶² It is against that essential background that one must look for the deciding factors lying behind Wilson's precipitate flight to the United States in the early summer of 1794.

Margarot, Gerrald and Sinclair had arrived in Edinburgh from London in the first week of November, 1793 to attend the British convention assembled there. Harris notes that

It has been argued that the Scots were led into a new extremism by the English delegates - Maurice Margarot and Joseph Gerrald from the London Corresponding Society, [and] Charles Sinclair from the Society for Constitutional Information. The arrival of Margarot, Gerrald and Sinclair ... galvanized the Scottish radicals causing ... Skirving and the Edinburgh general committee to re-call the the third convention for 19 November. Margarot and his English colleagues played crucial roles in guiding this reconvened convention to adopt several controversial measures and initiatives, notably the idea of the emergency convention, but also the organization of business into French-style divisions

And he adds :

The key question, however, ... is how far Margarot and the other English delegates were working with rather than against the grain of Scottish radicalism at this stage.⁶³

Although Harris is aware of the document which is marked "Sedition",⁶⁴ he appears not to have noted in the "Accompt." of "Allan Maconochie Esqr. Advocate & Sheriff depute of Renfrewshire" to his superior, Robert Walkinshaw - now in the NAS (West Register House) archive of Paisley Sheriff Court papers - the fact that the paper, though ostensibly a note of Walkinshaw's expenses in the course of his duties for that period, *also* sets out in some detail the various incidents and processes that Walkinshaw describes in order to justify his expenses claims. These include the following :

Janry. [1794] The Procurator fiscal being informed that Maurice Margarot had come to Paisley for the purpose of calling Meetings of the people and disseminating unconstitutional principles,

⁶² Margarot (1745-1815), a wine merchant by trade and a graduate of the University of Geneva, was a man of some standing and education. He had joined the London Corresponding Society early in 1792 and had become chairman of its general committee by May of the same year, sharing the administrative load with Thomas Hardy. According to Clive Emsley, the view that Margarot had informed on a plot aboard the transportation ship *HMS Surprise* to kill the captain and crew and take over the ship is now thought, in the light of new research, to have seriously maligned him; and that he was not in any way responsible for the brutal treatment of Palmer and Skirving which followed on the plot's failure. See Emsley's article on Margarot in the Oxford online DNB, 2004-2010.

⁶³ Harris, *The Scottish People and the French Revolution*, p. 101.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, note 201 on p. 266. The NAS reference is SC 58 22 72.

he applied and obtained a Warrant from the Sheriff Substitute to apprehend the said Maurice Margarot. [fee claimed - 3/6d]

... To fees of Alexr. Wilson's Declaration respecting the circulating of a hand Bill calling a meeting of the Friends of Reform. [fee claimed - 2s.]

To fees of Archd. Hastie's Declaration respecting the Meeting called by Margarot and the above mentioned hand Bill. [fee claimed - 4s.]

To fees of William Mitchell's Declaration respecting the same matter.⁶⁵

The NAS document then proceeds to describe in fairly graphic terms the stormy meeting itself:

... Information having been given that in consequence of the aforesaid hand Bill a great body of people had assembled on the Street, in Storey Street of Paisley [off the High Street, the main thoroughway in the town to this day] where many unconstitutional Motions were made & entered into, the Procr. Fiscal applied for a Warrant against Archd. Hastie, William Mitchell and James Smith who appeared to be the most active at the Meeting.

There is no doubt that Margarot was seen as a big fish in the eyes of the authorities, both in Renfrewshire and nationally. The fact that Wilson, a minnow in comparison with Margarot, had sought nonetheless to involve himself directly in the circumstances of the visit by circulating handbills advertising the meeting called by the Friends of Liberty and Reform, would have been the last straw in the eyes of the Sheriff, whose patience would already have been tried to the limit by Wilson's recently proven contempt for the law.

Accordingly, on 4 January 1794 Wilson was back in the Tolbooth, his crime in the words of the bail bond described as

... being concerned in framing and industriously circulating an advertisement addressed to "The Friends of Liberty and Reform." Calling a General Meeting of the friends of Reform to have been held this night in Falconer's Land, Stories Street at five o'clock. Said to be by order of a committee and of having John Neilson Printer in Paisley to print the said advertisement.

⁶⁵ Interestingly, Walkinshaw's paper in the NAS also includes a reference to "John Henning's Declaration respecting the meeting alledged [sic] to have been called by Margarot". Henning (1771-1851) was the famous sculptor in later years who worked on the restoration of the Elgin Marbles. According to his biographer, he was a neighbour of Wilson's and shared his political views. In a letter dated 3 June 1836 Henning writes from London to his brother-in-law in Paisley, Joseph Thomson, a yarn merchant, recalling the events of January 1794 and stating that the authorities had at the time "concocted a list of 185 men [from Paisley and neighbourhood] that they had doomed to imprisonment, under the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act." In time, the list apparently "became a dead letter" when it was known that William Carlike [see Chapter 2, §10 (b)] and other "Whig bodies" were on it. John Malden, "... *A very ingenious Modeller*", Renfrew District Council Museum & Art Galleries Department, 1977, letter 28 [no page numbers].

The bond was signed by his kinsman and fellow weaver, William Wilson. Bail was agreed by Sheriff Orr the same day who authorised the Clerk of Court to issue “Letters of Liberation.”⁶⁶

Margarot’s visit to Paisley was itself the result of his having broken his bail surety. He and Gerrald had been arrested in the Black Bull Inn, Leith Walk, Edinburgh on 5 December 1793 and both were “admitted to bail in 2, 000 merks”, a large sum. He had jumped bail early in 1794 and had come to Paisley where he knew he could be guaranteed a large and sympathetic hearing. An unusually full account of the Storey Street meeting is written up in *The Edinburgh Gazetteer* for 7 January 1794. A warrant for his re-arrest, and his subsequent apprehension, was the only possible outcome.

Though today hard to believe, in the spirit of great haste associated with the sedition trials at that time, after being re-arrested in Paisley, “Citizen Margarot” was tried in the High Court of Justiciary at Edinburgh as early as 13 and 14 January 1794. Predictably, he was found guilty and sentenced by the Lord Justice Clerk, Lord Braxfield, to 14 years’ transportation “beyond seas”. By 2 May 1794, the *Surprise* had set sail for Sydney, with Margarot, Muir, Palmer, Gerrald and Skirving aboard. On 23 May Alexander Wilson, accompanied by his sixteen-year old nephew, Billy Duncan, sailed from Belfast aboard the *Swift*, bound for Philadelphia. In the course of the voyage Wilson would celebrate his twenty-eighth birthday.

In his closing address to the jury – he had conducted his own defence and in the process had infuriated the Bench – Maurice Margarot had something important to say about Paisley and similar industrial centres in Scotland : he refers to the economic impact of the war on the national debt (“a heavy millstone”) and he says:

The neighbourhood of Edinburgh will witness that : look at Paisley, look at Glasgow – “the industrious poor thrown out of employment” – Do we not see that even in Edinburgh, the poor are ready and willing to work if they could get it? Are they not the same at Paisley? Are they not the same at Glasgow?⁶⁷

(b) James and William Mitchell

⁶⁶ Cantwell, p. 276.

⁶⁷ *State Trials*, XXIII, 724.

It would not have gone well for Wilson that for most of his life in Paisley the Mitchell brothers, William and James, were consistently among his closest friends. He had, after all, included three verse epistles addressed to William in the first (Paisley) edition of his *Poems* but withheld two of them from the 1791 Edinburgh edition - not so much fearing that their content (which is beyond reproach) would make things awkward *for him* at that early period in the Scottish reform movement - but more probably in the light of Neilson's insistence that even to breathe Mitchell's name (he used the form "Epistle to Mr. W. M.") was not exactly the best recommendation for a new poet desirous of making his way in genteel circles in the town and beyond at that anxious time.⁶⁸

A study of the major activists in the radical movement in Paisley in the early 1790s reveals the extent to which the Mitchell boys were key figures. When Crichton, writing in 1816, recalled his friend Wilson's involvement in the radical movement at that time, it was such as the Mitchell boys he almost certainly had in mind when he said of the poet that he had "associated himself with men who had declared themselves the friends of political reform."⁶⁹ In Parkhill's *History of Paisley* (Paisley, Robert Stewart, 1857) we learn that

his companionship with these men [i.e. the reformers, and the Mitchell brothers in particular] was the true cause of his emigration.⁷⁰

James Mitchell is one of two signatories - he is named as "Secretary" (with Robert Darroch as "President") - to the statement and resolutions of the Paisley United Societies of Friends of the People in the advertisement that appeared in *The Glasgow Advertiser* (and in other papers of around the same date) of 8 February 1793.⁷¹ In his letter to William Mitchell of November 1790 Wilson asks him to send his respects to James and says of him affectionately :

Was he and two or three more to bid adieu to Paisley, I should consider my solitary native [town] like a body without its soul, nor even express one wish to visit the deserted and unfriendly Town.⁷²

⁶⁸ The two epistles to J**** K***** are, however, in both editions, as is the poem entitled "The Group" which contains references to both Mitchells and possibly to Kennedy as well.

⁶⁹ Cantwell, p. 72, states that "William Mitchell was also a government agent". As usual, however, he fails to cite any evidence whatsoever in support of that assertion and we must take it accordingly with a large pinch of salt.

⁷⁰ Cited by Hunter, p. 44.

⁷¹ Hunter reproduces the advertisement as Appendix II, pp. 429-432.

⁷² *ibid.*, p. 141.

James Mitchell was sworn in as a witness at the trial for high treason of Robert Watt on August 27 1794 ; his brother William was excused on production of “a certificate of bad health”.⁷³

There seems little doubt that James’ younger brother, William, was much the more active of the two in Scottish radical circles. William – Wilson sometimes calls him ‘Billy’ – was a delegate to the second convention and chairman of the Paisley New Town branch of the Friends of Reform.⁷⁴ Harris, for example, does not hesitate to put him in the same league as James Kennedy, whose radicalism he terms “extreme”.⁷⁵ Both Mitchells were weavers who had either become part-time musicians and ‘stage dancers’ or, conceivably, and perhaps less credibly, had abandoned weaving altogether in favour of a career on the stage. With a local baker, Archibald Hastie, Billy Mitchell was clearly one of the ringleaders who had organised the Storey Street meeting addressed by Maurice Margarot in Paisley on 4th January 1794 at which he, Wilson and unnumbered others had been arrested. From the only surviving letter Wilson ever wrote to Billy – from Haddington, on 21 November 1790 – he addresses him “Dear Comrade” and describes him as in possession of “a heart ... susceptible of others woes”. Directing him to reply “to the care of J. Kennedy back of the fountain well, Edinburgh”, he compliments Billy on his musical talents, while at the same time cautioning against relying on his skills as a full-time occupation :

Your merits in the musical way have long been my secret pride and public boast and I now rejoice to think that they will yet shine forth in their genuine splendour to the eye of the world. ... rather practice your favourite study as an Amusement, than rely on it as the means of subsistence, by which precious maxim you will be more independent ...⁷⁶

In the wider context of the history of the Scottish diaspora at this period, the story of the Mitchell brothers is not without importance. In one of his earlier American letters to his father, from Milestown, “Philadelphia County” dated 22 August 1798, Wilson asks the old man if he has heard from any of his Paisley friends and adds that he has not heard “from James or William Mitchell these ten months.” Within three years of that letter –

⁷³ *State Trials*, vol. XXIII, 1181.

⁷⁴ Hunter, p. 44. The convention met on 30 April, 1793. William Mitchell is named in the report of the government spy “J.B.” and, in Hunter’s words, he “led the Paisley delegation” of seven (p. 44). Mitchell chaired one of the sessions.

⁷⁵ *The Scottish People and the French Revolution*, pp. 104-5

⁷⁶ Hunter, pp. 140-1.

his letter to Orr is dated 12 July 1801 - the Mitchells had turned up in New Jersey and, it seemed, everyone was talking about them in “disagreeable accounts” of their antics :

... that Jas. had by too great a fondness for gaming and sometimes taking his scholars along with him, [Wilson doesn't explain this but it seems he had become a teacher - of music?] entirely ruined his reputation and lost his business, and from his own mouth I learned that he expected jail every day for debts to a considerable amount.

And, he goes on, as for William, sadly, his behaviour has become an embarrassment: he

... is lost for every good purpose in this world and abandoned to the most shameful & excessive drinking, swearing, and wretched company - he called on me last Thursday morning in company with a Hocus Pocus man for whom he plays on the clarinet.⁷⁷

Less than a fortnight later, Wilson has heard more of the Mitchells. The news is not good:

In my last I told you Mitchell [i.e. James] was on the threshold of the jail. He has now passed the threshold and is fairly cag'd. Wm. is traversing the country with a Hocus-Pocus man in a poor scurvy plight playing the clarinet.

And, significantly, he pleads with his correspondent to keep things to himself :

Let nobody whatever know that you have heard anything of me.⁷⁸

A few weeks later - 7 August - he tells Charles Orr that

Jas. Mitchell's debts amount, as I have been informed, to 2 or 300 £. Wm. is weaving in an old cellar in Elizabeth Town.⁷⁹

A month after that he informs Orr of a surprising and shameful development :

Jas. Mitchell's Father arrived here [Bloomfield, NJ] last week from Scotland and found his 2 sons, one in Drunkenness and poverty, the other in a Jail. Think with yourself what were the feelings of the poor old man on this occasion. Jas. is since liberated.

And, once more, Wilson confides in Orr regarding his own situation, adding his concern that Orr keep things to himself, especially in relation to news of the Mitchell family :

I remain here perfectly secluded from the world. ... Please to let the circumstances of the Mitchells be confined to your own breast.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p. 181. Letter to Charles Orr, 12 July 1801.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p. 183. Letter of 23 July 1801.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p. 186.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 188-9. Letter to Charles Orr, 14 September 1801.

Michael Durey interprets the situation more bluntly : when the Mitchell brothers finally moved on (to New York) -

Wilson for one was glad to see their backs.⁸¹

Wilson makes no further mention of the Mitchells for eight years. However, in a letter to his father in Paisley dated 15 June 1809 he gives the old man some surprising news :

William Mitchell, formerly of Williamsburgh, who had been supposed dead these several years, is living and in good health at New Orleans - as a common soldier.⁸²

Billy Mitchell died a soldier in the United States army. In a letter to James Gibb from “near Newark”, dated 4 March 1811, having described his encampment in the woods between Nashville and Natchez (Mississippi), in pursuit of bird specimens for the *American Ornithology*, Wilson almost casually records in a postscript :

P.S. When at Natchez I went to Camp where I was informed by his officer that W. Mitchell died on the 10th October 1809 at Point Coupee on the Mississippi of a Fever and Dysentery - 10 perished out of the same boat on their way up to the present Quarters of the Army.⁸³

(c) James Kennedy

Earlier in this study,⁸⁴ the career of the ‘shadowy’ and ‘clandestine’ James Kennedy was summarised in relation to his role as a one-time Paisley weaver, poet of the working class, extreme radical and, it seems, if Bewley is to be believed, associate in France for a time of Thomas Paine. The note that follows in this chapter develops the Kennedy story a little further, with the emphasis this time on his lifelong friendship with Alexander Wilson.⁸⁵ In the Appendix to the second edition of his *Scotland and America*, Andrew Hook

⁸¹ Michael Durey, *Transatlantic Radicals and the Early American Republic*, University Press of Kansas, 1997, p. 210.

⁸² Hunter, p. 314.

⁸³ *ibid.*, pp. 385-6. For further details of the circumstances of Mitchell’s death see also Durey, p. 211.

⁸⁴ Chapter 2, § 10 (c), 109-114 above.

⁸⁵ Outwith this study, the only other source of which I am aware that relates James Kennedy, the radical, to Wilson is Michael Durey in his fine study, *Transatlantic Radicals and the Early American Republic*, University Press of Kansas, 1997. Durey, who has also written on James Thomson Callender, is a faculty member at Murdoch University, Western Australia. See also the same author’s journal article, *Thomas Paine’s Apostles: Radical Émigrés and the Triumph of Jeffersonian Republicanism*, *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 44, No. 4 (Oct., 1987), pp. 662-688.

mentions Kennedy and cites a reference from James Stuart's *Three Years in North America*⁸⁶ concerning a man called Kennedy from Paisley who, with his brother, "now a senator in Maryland", had been extremely active in the Scottish radical movement in the 1790s. It is ironic that in the same Appendix - actually on the very same *page* - Hook mentions Alexander Wilson, but palpably fails to make the connection with the Kennedy he mentions in the preceding paragraphs; nor does he seem to know that the radical we know as James Kennedy was once the bosom friend and correspondent of the poet Wilson and a member of his "Group":

A comment from a letter Wilson wrote to his father some years later [after his arrival in the United States], in November, 1798, might well stand as an epigraph for all those Scots who sought political asylum in America in the 1790s: "Men of all nations, and all persuasions and professions find here an asylum from the narrow-hearted illiberal persecutions of their own Governments."⁸⁷

The same failure to identify the real James Kennedy is evident in Cantwell and, bizarrely, in Hunter too, while literally all of the older authorities on Wilson's life (notably, that is, Crichton, Ord and Jardine) are similarly silent as far as Kennedy's shadowy life is concerned. At the same time, however, I like to think that Thomas Crichton must have known of the 'real' James Kennedy, but discreetly kept silent in deference to the selfsame tacit desire not to cause anyone, Wilson's family least of all, any posthumous embarrassment when he came to write his 1819 memoir of the poet.

Like William Mitchell, James Kennedy earned a place in Wilson's 1790 *Poems*, with the inclusion of two verse epistles, one in Scots the other in English. Unlike two of the three epistles to the younger Mitchell, however, both Kennedy poems survived into the Edinburgh edition of the following year. The Scots poem is infinitely the better of the two: it is written from Crail in the course of Wilson's packman phase and is probably, therefore, from 1788 -

Nae doubt ye'll glower whane'er ye leuk,
An' see I'm maist at Scotland's neuk,
Whare owre the waves black swans o' deuk
Soom far an' near ;
And laden't ships to try their luck,
For Holland steer.

⁸⁶ New York, 2 vols., 1833.

⁸⁷ Andrew Hook, *Scotland and America - A study of cultural relations, 1750-1835*, Second Edition, Glasgow, p. 242.

And let them gang, for me -- nae mair
My luck I'll try at selling ware ;
I've sworn by a' aboon the air
To quat the pack ;
Or deed I doubt baith me an' gear
Wad gang to wrack.⁸⁸

The inferior English poem salutes Kennedy's "superior worth" and, as an indication of Kennedy's political leanings even at that early date, looks forward to the day when "Fame [shall] enrol the patriot and the poet's name".

Wilson's early (i.e. Scottish) correspondence is full of references to Kennedy, predominantly of course on account of Wilson's dependency on him as milch cow for the supply of pack goods (and probably cash loans as well) in relation to his peregrinations in 1789-90 as detailed in the *Journal*. Strangely, however, there is hardly a reference to him after May, 1794 when Wilson and his nephew Billy Duncan set sail for America.⁸⁹ How is that so? Here, the words of Thomas Crichton, a man who lived in Paisley through those bad times in the early 1790s, are important :

Towards the latter end of 1793, the disputes of political party ran very high, and ... those who denominated themselves the friends of social order, trembled for the fate of the civilized world, which they conceived to be in danger of falling a prey to lawless anarchy, while another party, who wished to have themselves ranked among the friends of Liberty, and the Rights of Man, considered that there was a powerful league forming amongst the crowned heads of Europe, designed to crush the rising spirit of Freedom, and to reduce the nations into a state of the most degrading slavery. ... In the beginning of 1794, the government still continued to adopt strong measures, in order to suppress every thing that had the appearance of tumult and insurrection.⁹⁰

In the postscript to his letter to David Brodie, written from Edinburgh and dated 23 November 1792 - the penultimate letter Wilson wrote in Scotland, the last of all (21 May 1793) addressed also to Brodie, but this time from "Paisley Jail" - he asks that any reply be sent "direct to the care of Mr. James Kennedy, manufacturer, at the High School, Cannongate [sic], Edinburgh". As in the case of the Mitchells, Wilson, one senses, is reluctant to mention him by name.

⁸⁸ Grosart, vol. II, p. 102.

⁸⁹ There is just one reference to Kennedy in the American correspondence : in his letter to Crichton from Philadelphia of 28 October, 1811, when he thanks Crichton for giving him information "of my old friends, Neilson, Kennedy, Picken, &c. ... ". (Hunter, p. 392).

⁹⁰ Thomas Crichton, *Biographical Sketches*, p. 40.

There is no doubt that Kennedy was regarded as a dangerous man in the eyes of the law. At the trial of Robert Watt and David Downie for high treason in August 1794, when the authorities chose to have them tried under the special process of Oyer and Terminer under the provisions of the 1709 Treason Act - in order to emphasise its extraordinary status as a case affecting the peace and security of the nation - Kennedy failed to appear as a Crown witness and he is described by Watt's counsel as "extremely important for the defence of the prisoner".⁹¹ He goes on :

... the counsel for the Crown have made every inquiry, both in England and here, to have his person; whether they will be successful in finding him I cannot say, but most undoubtedly, no means have been spared for the purpose.⁹²

Defence counsel then attempted to have the trial postponed until Kennedy was found, whereupon the Crown advocate, Anstruther, informed the Court that :

... this Mr. Kennedy is a person, who upon the first discovery of the treasonable acts charged on the gentlemen at your lordships bar (and who is now stated to be a material witness), thought proper to elope from this country, and to fly from justice, which was in search of him; from the 1st of May to the present hour, none of the officers of justice, either in Scotland or England, ever could lay hands upon, or get sight of Kennedy, or gain the least intelligence where he is to be found, --- rewards have been offered for his apprehension, which have not yet had effect; ...⁹³

It was then intimated to the Court by Downie's counsel, Robert Hamilton, that he similarly

has the same dependence upon the testimony of Kennedy as Mr. Watt has [and consequently] there is any delay granted to the one, I should move the same may be granted to the other.⁹⁴

To which, his patience at an end, Dundas countered that if such a motion were to be made, and succeed, "the trial may be deferred for ever", since "large rewards have been offered for Kennedy's apprehension in vain".⁹⁵ Two points can be argued from that exchange: first, the obvious status and importance of the witness to *both* sides in the case,

⁹¹ From the Lord Advocate's (Robert Dundas's) summing-up we learn that Kennedy "absconded the evening after Watt was seized" and that he "has probably by this time escaped beyond the reach of the justice of this country." - *State Trials*, XXIII, 1793-4, 1380.

⁹² *ibid.*, 1181.

⁹³ *ibid.*, 1182.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*

⁹⁵ *ibid.* [There was a price of 100 guineas on Kennedy's head. In the same notice in the *Edinburgh Evening Courant* of May 29, 1794 Kennedy is described as "about 31 years of age [Wilson was three years younger] size 5 feet 5½ inches or thereby --- long, fair, and smooth sharp visage - short hair, a keen eye, of a slender make, and has a reserved manner --- wore generally a drab coloured coat, black breeches, and white stockings --- formerly a journeyman weaver in Paisley".]

friendly and hostile, and, secondly, the impressive extent to which Kennedy had covered his tracks at a time when the central belt of Scotland was crawling with informers, ‘placemen’ and government spies.

Consideration of the evidence presented in the Watt/Downie trial confirms the importance of Kennedy’s role in relation to the case the Lord Advocate had constructed against the two defendants. Thus, a witness called William Watson, on being cross-examined by Crown advocate Anstruther, admitted that he had received a parcel of papers in Kennedy’s shop in Edinburgh where he had gone from the house of Robert Watt. However, the trial report also discloses beyond doubt the extensive radical activity in the town of Paisley at this time as well as the great concern that represented for government. From the proceedings of the Watt-Downie trial – and, similarly, from those of the Muir and Margarot trials – it seems at times that everyone with something important to communicate to the reforming societies at large felt they had to make their way to Paisley, sooner or later; and, of course, that also meant that government spies and agents went there, too, in their wake.

Of the importance of Paisley at this time as a radical stronghold, there can be little doubt. The witness, Arthur Macewan, a weaver at the Water of Leith and a member of the British Convention, is asked by Anstruther :

Was there any thing particular mentioned with respect to Paisley or the others? [To which the reply was] -- He [another government witness, a spy called John Fairley] said that Paisley was in a state of great readiness. [But, says Macewan, he does not know what that meant.]⁹⁶

It is against that essential backdrop of the 1793-94 sedition trials, and the special horror of the Watt/Downie high treason trial, that Wilson’s flight to America from Belfast in May 1794 should be viewed.⁹⁷ In 1794, from the date of the January warrants for the arrest of Margarot, William Mitchell and Wilson himself (the latter by that time a regular jailbird and obviously profoundly distrusted by the law), throughout the subsequent trials and

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, 1272.

⁹⁷ There is no doubt that 1794 was indeed a terrible year throughout the country. In a work of fiction – *Annals of the Parish* – John Galt highlights it as a year when sides were taken, to the great discomfiture of communities, and when “the sad division of my people into government men and Jacobins was perfected.” It was also the year when William Godwin published his novel, *Caleb Williams*, which sets out to reveal the loss of personal liberties experienced by many ordinary folk at the hands of a repressive government [see chapter 1, §6(c).]

conviction of one after the other of the leading radical figures in Scotland, culminating in the sentence of the most horrendous death imaginable passed on the probable one-time spy, Robert Watt, in September of the same year, there was a climate of fear and suspicion in the country which a man of acute sensitivity like Wilson would have found impossible to confront.⁹⁸ Throughout that same period, Wilson's friend and mentor James Kennedy was at large with a price on his head : the notice of reward for his capture appeared in the papers on 29 May. Just a week before the notice appeared, on Friday, 23 May, Alexander Wilson, accompanied by his nephew Bily Duncan, slipped out of Belfast loch on the *Swift* bound for Newcastle, Pennsylvania and from there "came at length to Wilmington", just "twenty nine miles distant" from Philadelphia. There, intriguingly, he fell in with William Young of Chestnut Street,⁹⁹ the distinguished publisher, friend and colleague of the Paisley émigré bookseller and printer, Robert Aitken. It is possible that Young, like Aitken, a member of the Antiburgher congregation in Philadelphia, had family ties with Paisley and, if that is so, it seems likely that Wilson would have known, or had been advised, to seek him out.

After his sojourn in London for a year or two, where he was probably given sanctuary by the radical publisher, Daniel Isaac Eaton, Kennedy returned to Scotland, first to Edinburgh (South Bridge Street), then to Glasgow where he attempted to resume business as a textiles manufacturer. He was, however, constantly harassed by the authorities, as a notice dated 31 December 1797 he himself had inserted in *The Scots Chronicle* shows:

Two boxes, the one addressed to James Kennedy, Edinburgh, were seized [by officers of the Procurator Fiscal in Edinburgh], and carried to the Sheriff's office ; Mr. Scott, Procurator-Fiscal, himself going with the officers, and acting as a concurrent. The boxes were opened in the office, and an inventory of their contents taken. The one contained body clothes only ; the other, muslins, and a small parcel of the *Weavers Budget*, by J.K. (about the size of the *Confession of*

⁹⁸ The chronology of the 1794 trials in Scotland is as follows:

William Skirving - 6-7 January (sedition).

Maurice Margarot - 13-14 January (seditious practices).

Charles Sinclair - February 17, 24, March 10, 14 (sedition).

Joseph Gerrald - March 3, 10, 13-14 (sedition).

Robert Watt and David Downie - August 14-15, 22, 27, September 3 (high treason).

All these cases came before the High Court of Justiciary, except the trial of Watt and Downie which was heard by a Special Commission of Oyer and Terminer in order to demonstrate its unusual importance from the point of view of the peace and security of the nation.

⁹⁹ See chapter 5, note 64.

Faith). These were kept by the gentlemen; who very shrewdly observed, that it was very improper and dangerous for J.K. to keep any such books in his possession at this critical time. ...¹⁰⁰

According to the (generally unreliable) evidence of a “violent radical” named Robert Watson, cited by Bewley, there is speculation that before he emigrated to the United States himself Kennedy ended up in Paris where he met with Thomas Muir shortly before Muir’s death in Chantilly in January, 1799.¹⁰¹ Durey repeats Hook’s story about Kennedy as the proprietor of a theological bookstore in New York *circa* 1830 but adds nothing to it. Certainly, it seems plausible that he eventually went to the United States where he settled and died; but beyond that, we know nothing. One thing seems certain, however, and that is that Wilson’s and Kennedy’s paths never crossed on the other side of the Atlantic. It is almost as if they strenuously sought to avoid each other’s company. At the same time, however, on the subscription list of *American Ornithology* – Wilson’s American master work – is the name “Kennedy, James” from “district of Columbia”.¹⁰² Like his career, casting a shadow over his friends, the mystery of Kennedy, “extreme radical”, refuses to go away.

6 Scottish radical poet, turned American democrat and scientist

Paisley’s ‘other’ weaver poet, Robert Tannahill, a similarly disaffected spirit (who committed suicide in 1810) but without the talent of Wilson, wrote of his idol :

He bravely strave gainst Fortune’s stream
While Hope held forth ae distant gleam,
Till dasht and dasht, time after time,
On Life’s rough sea,
He weep’d his thankless native clime,
And sail’d away.

The patriot bauld, the social brither,
In him war sweetly join’d thegither;
He knaves reprov’d, without a swither,

¹⁰⁰ Issue of ‘from Friday, December 29, to Tuesday, January 2. 1798’. Harris (p. 293, note 259) cites the wrong number of the paper, listing the Kennedy information in *The Scots Chronicle* of 2 January 1798 – i.e. the *next* issue in which the leader is dated 2 January.

¹⁰¹ *Muir of Huntershill*, pp. 181-2. See also E.W. McFarland, *Ireland and Scotland in the Age of Revolution*, p. 181, where she refers to Watson having “led Muir to believe that the fugitated United Scotsmen Cameron and Kennedy [sic] would soon visit and prove useful agents”. Again, disappointingly however, McFarland – in whose excellent book this is the only reference to James Kennedy – does not seem to know anything of Kennedy’s background, either before or after the Watson reference.

¹⁰² Grosart, vol. II, p. XXX.

In keenest satire;
And taught what mankind owe each other
As sons of Nature.¹⁰³

Tannahill's eulogy of his brother poet - "worthiest of us a" - is said with real feeling and his sense of loss is not just poetic metaphor. By this time, however (Tannahill is writing in 1807), Wilson is long lost to Scotland. As he had said only a few years before in his blatantly Jeffersonian¹⁰⁴ *Oration on the Power and Value of National Liberty*:

In this western woody world, far from the contaminating influence of the European politics, has the great temple of Liberty been erected. Under no government on earth is so large, so equal a proportion of civil and religious freedom enjoyed by every individual citizen. What are the governments of the old world but huge devouring monsters, gorging their ferocious maws with the hard-earned morsels of the oppressed multitude, drinking up their tears and sporting with their bloody sufferings? Read their histories - visit their countries - converse with their most intelligent inhabitants - and the more you see, and hear, and experience, the more you will love and venerate this great, this stupendous, and, as I trust, everlasting monument of the power and value of liberty, which you and your fathers have erected for the refuge, the happiness, and inheritance of unborn millions.¹⁰⁵

In much the same vein, in a song written at about the same time he stirringly proclaims:

Here, strangers from a thousand shores,
Compelled by tyranny to roam;
Still find, amidst abundant stores,
A nobler, and a happier home. ...

These gifts, great Liberty, are thine
Ten thousand more we owe to thee;
Immortal may their memories shine,
Who fought and died for Liberty. ...

¹⁰³ The poem is entitled *Stanzas on A. Wilson's emigration* which is included in his 1807 collection, *The Soldier's Return; a Scottish Interlude in two acts: with other poems and songs, chiefly in the Scottish dialect. By Robert Tannahill. Paisley: printed by Stephen and Andrew Young, Bowling Green. 1807*, pp. 78-80. This is the only collection of his songs and poems to have been published in Tannahill's lifetime.

¹⁰⁴ He writes to William Bartram on 4 March 1805 on Jefferson's re-election as President for a second term, an event he describes as "one of those distinguished Blessings whose beneficent effects extend to Posterity; and whose value our hearts may feel, but can never express." - Hunter, p. 232 - and on 18 March writes a letter to Jefferson himself which Bartram forwards to the President with a covering letter introducing Wilson as an ornithologist of some note. Jefferson replied direct to Wilson from Monticello on 7 April praising his "elegant drawings" of the "new birds" he had found on his tour to Nigara. - Hunter, pp. 232-4 and 236-8.

¹⁰⁵ "Delivered to a large assembly of citizens, at Milestown, Pennsylvania, on Wednesday, March 4th, 1801, the day of which Mr. Jefferson was elected President." Grosart, vol. I, p. 328. In a separate note (p. 322), Grosart states that the speech, like the song, "was extremely popular, and is found in all the important American contemporary newspapers and periodicals."

Rejoice! Columbia's sons rejoice,
To tyrants never bend the knee;
But join, with heart, and soul, and voice,
For Jefferson and Liberty.¹⁰⁶

And, similarly, in his greatest American poem, *The Foresters*, Wilson can't resist making the comparison between the vastness of the American continent, with its tremendous potential, on the one hand, with the pettiness of the *abendländ* and old Europe's politics and her continuing territorial squabbles, on the other :

Our host intelligent, and fond of news,
Long tales of trade and politics pursues,
The States' enlarging bounds, so mighty grown,
That even the bare extent remains unknown;
Of Europe's wars and Bonaparte's glories,
Wolves, rifles, Louisiana, Whigs and Tories;

Meantime young Duncan, as the oar he plies,
With voice melodious bids the song arise,
The theme, Columbia, her sublime increase :
'Blest land of freedom, happiness, and peace :
Far, far removed from Europe's murderous scene,
A wide, a friendly waste of waves between ;
Where strangers driven by tyranny to roam,
Still find a nobler and a happier home :
Hail, blessed asylum! happy country, hail!
O'er thee may truth, but never foe prevail.¹⁰⁷

The Foresters is still one of the most popular long poems of the early frontier days.

Henry Steele Commager says of it:

... An obsession with Nature was to dictate the style of much of the literature of the young Republic for years to come, for with independence and the prospect of westward expansion came a flowering of literature celebrating Nature in all of its manifestations. Alexander Wilson's epic poem, *The Foresters*, (did he know of Dr. Belknap's novel?)¹⁰⁸ is just the right poem for the first and in many ways the greatest of ornithologists and a better poem than Barlow's much touted *Columbiad* or Timothy Dwight's relentless *Conquest of Canaan*.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*, vol. II, pp. 315-16.

¹⁰⁷ Grosart, vol. II, pp. 146 and 159.

¹⁰⁸ *The Foresters, an American Tale: being a sequel to the History of John Bull the Clothier. In a series of letters to a friend. Printed at Boston, by I. Thomas and E.T. Andrews ... MDCCXCII. [1792].*

¹⁰⁹ Henry Steele Commager, *The Empire of Reason*, London ed., 1978, p. 57. Wilson's long poem was written in 1804-5 as he explains to William Duncan in his letter of 20 February, 1805. (Hunter, p. 231).

A few years after the completion of *The Foresters*, in the course of one of his numerous peregrinations in October 1808 while in search of subscribers for *American Ornithology*, with Bradford's prospectus in his coat pocket, there occurred one of the greatest and unlikeliest episodes in his life. The incident must have brought him back with a severe jolt to his Paisley days and the radical struggles for reform:

While in New York I had the curiosity to call on the celebrated author of the "Rights of Man". He lives in Greenwich, a short way from the city. In the only decent apartment, I believe, of a small indifferent-looking frame house, I found this extraordinary man, sitting wrapt in a night gown, the table before him covered with newspapers, with pen and ink beside them. Paine's face would have excellently suited the character of *Bardolph*; but the penetration and intelligence of his eye bespeak the man of genius, and of the world. He complained to me of his inability to walk, an exercise he was formerly fond of; examined the book, leaf by leaf, with great attention - desired me to put his name as a subscriber, and, after inquiring particularly for Mr. Peale and Mr. Benny, wished to be remembered to both.¹¹⁰

Clearly no longer the fiery young radical (for whom years before, and for thousands like him, actually meeting Tom Paine would have been an undreamt of experience), Wilson is remarkably calm and prosaic about the whole episode and the language he uses to portray it is spare and casual. In stark contrast, one can't but recall the dazzle and awe of his meeting the homespun poet of "Bannockburn", James Maxwell, all those years before in Paisley ("Never did I spend such a night in all my life"). Paine died on 8 June 1809 - and with his death Wilson lost his subscription.

Though he wrote home, mainly to his father but on occasion to his brother and brother-in-law, and rarer still, to one or two other friends in Paisley (including Thomas Crichton), there is no evidence that Wilson ever entertained any serious intention of returning to Scotland. Moreover, as he frequently contemplates, for him politics is now a thing of the past: even as early as 1798, barely four years from arriving in the United States, he tells his father:

... it is needless to spend the little time we have in thinking on the badness of the times, for I am persuaded while the world remains there will be Tyrants and Freemen, Reformers and Revolutionists, peace and war, till the end of time; and he is only the wise and happy man who, in following a peaceful employment through private Life, intermeddles with politics as little as possible.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Hunter, p. 287. Letter to Alexander Lawson (from Albany) of 3 November 1808.

¹¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 154. Letter of 22 August 1798 [original in Edinburgh University Library].

In the same letter, however, he makes a fleeting reference to the 1797 Tranent massacre, when a troop of dragoons had fired on a group of people that had congregated to demonstrate their opposition to enforced conscription after the passing of the Militia Act the year before:

I am sorry to see such anarchy and bloodshed in Ireland. From Scotland I hear nothing. I have not seen it mentioned in the papers since the affair of Tranent.¹¹²

In a letter to his father in 1806, he had been uncharacteristically blunt on the different life he was now experiencing in his adopted country; the contrast with ‘home’ was acute -

I do not know a single industrious Scotsman in this country but is in much better circumstances than he ever experienced in Britain.¹¹³

In his poetry and his letters from now on Wilson often compares the life of disappointment and disillusionment he had endured in Paisley with the giddy promise and raw excitement of his new life in America. Two years before his death, for example, in a letter to an unknown Paisley friend he compares life *then* with life *now*:

I was a wanderer when I was in Scotland, and I have been much more so since my arrival here. Few Americans have seen more of their country than I have done, and none love it better. ...

And, he adds almost as an afterthought, written as it is on the eve of the War of 1812:

I love the arts of peace as I do Heaven. ... Everybody wishes for a good understanding with Great Britain. Of the sentiments and views of our government [of the United States, that is] I can say nothing, being little conversant on those matters, and having long quitted the turbulent field of politics.¹¹⁴

Once or twice he tells his father that he doesn’t altogether rule out the possibility of a short visit home to see him and other members of the family - but it never happened. He also writes to his younger brother David - who eventually joins him in Philadelphia, gently admonishing him for having accused him of forgetting his father and the family in Paisley:

By the first safe opportunity I will transmit a trifle to our old father, whose *existence* so far from being *forgotten* is as dear to me as my own. But David, an ambition of being distinguished in the

¹¹² *ibid.* This was “the most serious outbreak” in the succession of riots that followed the 1797 Militia Act. In the mining village of Tranent in East Lothian “a bloody battle culminated in 12 people, including two women and a boy, being killed by a troop of dragoons who, driven beyond endurance by the mob, finally ran amok.” (Devine, *The Scottish Nation 1700-2000*, p. 211).

¹¹³ *ibid.*, p. 258. Letter to Alexander Wilson, Sr. dated 24 August, 1806.

¹¹⁴ Hunter, p. 393. Letter to “a Paisley friend, beginning ‘My Dear Friend’”, of 3 November 1811.

literary world has required sacrifices and exertions from me with which you are perhaps unacquainted, and a wish to reach the glorious rock of *Independence* that I might from thence assist my relations who are still struggling with and buffeting the billows of adversity has engaged me in an undertaking more laborious and expensive than you are aware of and has occupied almost every moment of my time these several years. ... I feel most sincerely for the distressed state of your country and for my poor sister and brother in law who have been so deeply unfortunate. If Mr. Wright is in good health able and willing to work let him not hesitate one moment to come to this country. ... Those who wish to be happy here must abandon *for ever* their country, nor permit regrets & repining at the loss of their old acquaintance or despair at the difficulties they will *certainly* have to meet with *for a short time* to enter their mind.¹¹⁵

A few months later, Wilson – brother David by that time having arrived in Philadelphia – does indeed write to Duncan Wright, married to his half-sister Janet, at “Arkleston near Paisley North Britain”. His letter is one of the classic statements from a Scots émigré of this period to a would be family of immigrants :

The representation you give of the state of trade, and situation of tradesmen in Paisley & around, is truly deplorable. To me, it is not surprising that numbers abandon such a country. My astonishment is that anybody able to leave it should remain in it. ... There are ten thousand avenues for industry here; every man must choose that best suited to his taste and capacity. ...

P.S. Should you determine on coming here, I will render you every assistance in my power; but difficulties must be encountered everywhere in *this* world.¹¹⁶

The “undertaking more laborious and expensive than you are aware of” is, of course, the unbelievably demanding field research he carried out as preparation for his masterwork, the massive nine-volume *American Ornithology*. In October 1807 he sent the printer’s prospectus¹¹⁷ to Thomas Jefferson and received back a subscription order with the comment of the President’s secretary :

[The President] begs leave to become a subscriber to it, satisfied it will give us valuable new matter as well as correct the errors of what we possessed before. He salutes Mr Wilson with great respect.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 386-7. Letter dated 6 June 1811.

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 389-391. In the same letter Wilson tells his brother-in-law that “I have, however, determined with myself never to entice or persuade a man from his native country to a foreign land”.

¹¹⁷ Hunter (pp. 267-272) prints the whole text of Bradford’s prospectus which is dated “Philadelphia, April 6th, 1807”. The great work was published “in large Imperial Quarto, on a rich vellum paper, and issued in Numbers, price Two Dollars each, payable on delivery. ... The Numbers to be continued regularly once every two months, until the whole be completed.” The “whole” took six years to complete from the publication of volume 1 in 1808 to the last, volume 9, in 1814. An Edinburgh edition was published by Constable in four volumes in 1831 and a three volume London edition by Whittaker, Treacher & Arnot in the following year.

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 266. The whole of the Jefferson-Wilson correspondence was first printed by James Southhall Wilson in 1906 and is also, of course, to be found in Hunter.

This was no idle flattery on Jefferson's side. As a man of science himself, Jefferson genuinely respected Wilson's researches at a time when America was trying to play catch-up with Europe following the death, almost twenty years previously, of her greatest scientist, Benjamin Franklin. Robert Plate and Frank N. Egerton have both attested to the singularity of Wilson's scientific achievement, Plate having rightly emphasised Wilson's "ardent nationalism" and his hope to create an American science that would rival or even surpass European science.¹¹⁹ And, in that regard, as Egerton reminds us :

The publication [by Samuel Bradford] of Wilson's treatise was at the time probably the greatest publishing venture ever undertaken in America.¹²⁰

One of Wilson's last letters, to William Bartram, from Philadelphia, dated 21 April 1813, records with justifiable pride that

The [American] Philosophical Society of Philadelphia have done me the honour to elect me a member, for which I must certainly, in gratitude, make them a communication on some subject this summer.¹²¹

Alexander Wilson died that summer. Of his great work, at least the end was in sight. Just a month before his death he had written for the last time to Thomas Crichton in Paisley:

... I am, myself, far from being in good health. Intense application to study has hurt me much. My 8th volume is now in the press and will be published in November. One volume more will complete the whole which I hope to be able to finish in April next.¹²²

Six years after Wilson's death, Crichton, recalling his now famous prodigy, revealingly clarifies not only his impression of the poet's feelings on arrival in America, but, more important, his motive for emigrating there in the first place:

¹¹⁹ Robert Plate, *Alexander Wilson Wanderer in the Wilderness*, New York, 1966.

¹²⁰ According to Egerton, Wilson fulfilled "all six of the requirements which George *Basalla has suggested for defining a member of the third phase (independent scientific tradition) of the establishment of science in non-European countries. This was extremely early, since some American scientists were mentally in the second phase (colonial science) a full century after Wilson's death." - *Isis*, The History of Science Society, University of Chicago Press, Vol. 60, no. 1, Spring 1969, p. 123. [See also *George Basalla, *The Spread of Western Science* in *Science*, 5 May 1967, 156, pp. 611-622, especially pp. 614 and 617.] For a good account of the background to, and contemporary importance of *American Ornithology*, see Laura Rigal, *Empire of Birds: Wilson's American Ornithology*, The Huntington Library Quarterly, Vol. 59, No. 2/3 (1996), pp. 233-268.

¹²¹ Hunter, pp. 405-6.

¹²² *ibid.*, p. 406.

Part Two Chapter 6 *Alexander Wilson*

... having landed on the American shore, he considered himself as transported to the favourite land of Liberty. [He was therefore free] and *delivered from the restraints and shackles of monarchical despotism*. [RLC's italics]¹²³

Making due allowance for the flowery sentiment, perhaps the best expression of Wilson's Americanisation is by his descendant, Professor James Southhall Wilson of the College of William and Mary, at the beginning of the twentieth century:

The love of his own native land was never to fail utterly nor grow dim, but it became second to that which he felt to this land where at last his dreams began to fade into reality. ... As truly representative of the Scotland of his day as he had been, he became no less representative now of the America in which he lived. A republican of the most enthusiastic order, familiar with American men and forests, and cities, from Maine to Florida, a political speaker at times, and a writer of political verse, the man had become an American indeed when he could say in a letter to his father that he would "willingly give a hundred dollars" if he could spend "a few days in Paisley", but that he "would again wing his way across the western waste of water, to the peaceful and happy regions of America".¹²⁴

¹²³ Crichton, *Biographical Sketches*, p. 43.

¹²⁴ James Southhall Wilson, *Alexander Wilson poet-naturalist : a study of his life with selected poems*, New York, 1906.

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“When I see the spirit of liberty in action, I see a strong principle at work; and this, for a while, is all I can possibly know of it. The wild gas, the fixed air is plainly broke loose: but we ought to suspend our judgment until the effervescence is a little subsided, till the liquor is cleared, and until we see something deeper than the agitation of a troubled and frothy surface.”

Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France, and on the Proceedings in Certain Societies in London relative to that Event*. (1790)¹

“From the part Mr. Burke took in the American Revolution, it was natural that I should consider him a friend to mankind; and as our acquaintance commenced on that ground, it would have been more agreeable to me to have had cause to continue in that opinion, than to change it.”

Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man*, “Preface to the English Edition” [omitted from the First edition of Joseph Johnson]. (1791)²

1 The Burke-Paine nexus: a bibliographical template

In his account of Thomas Paine’s unique contribution to the making of ‘Revolutionary America’ Eric Foner writes of Burke’s *Reflections* : that Burke’s was “a brilliant pamphlet” - it is hardly a pamphlet - that had not merely attacked the developments in France, but was notable in

extolling the English political system, [but also] dissecting the entire political philosophy on which the rallying cries of equality, revolution and the rights of man were founded.³

Maybe so. But Foner, an American historian of distinction, fails to mention that Burke’s great political statement - one of the greatest celebrations of the British ‘system’ in the whole of the eighteenth century, elaborated in a book more than twice the length of Paine’s equally celebrated reply - omits any mention whatsoever of the American precedent. Paine’s book (*Rights of Man* 1), by contrast, from its opening words to its end, would be virtually unintelligible without his many references to the success, as he hails it, of the American revolution.

Of the numerous responses to Burke’s *Reflections* that historians agree ‘matter’ - that is, those by Paine himself, Mary Wollstonecraft, James Mackintosh and Thomas Christie - only *Rights of Man* (that is, what today we would term ‘Part One’) defends and glorifies the events in France, not simply on the theoretical grounds of man’s natural rights having

¹ Penguin Classics edition, London, 1986, ed. with introduction by Conor Cruise O’Brien, p. 90.

² Penguin Classics edition, London, 1984, ed. with introduction by Eric Foner, p. 35.

³ *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America*, p. 213.

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been fulfilled, but also, and just as important, from the perspective of the French revolution having been the pragmatic sequel to its great American precedent.

Ironically, of course, while he greeted the news of the signing of the Declaration with unmitigated gloom, Burke would consistently oppose the war with America. Curiously, however, while there are several *classical* precedents cited by Burke in *Reflections*, there is not a single mention of the American revolution, least of all its professedly republican democratic ideals, to which, of course, one might have expected Burke to take special exception. Possibly this had something to do with the embarrassment of Burke's stint as handsomely paid agent for the New York Assembly in 1770-74, though it is more likely that by this time he had no wish to dredge up once more the American cause, given the still remembered public notoriety engendered throughout Britain by his two great 'American' speeches, on *Taxation* (April 19, 1774) and on *Conciliation* (March 22, 1775), as well as the subsequent ill-conceived 'secession' of the Rockingham party.⁴

Whatever the reason, it can, I think, be argued that Paine in *Rights of Man* mercilessly exploits what he clearly perceives as a glaring lacuna in the *Reflections*. Again and again he returns to the principles he first set out in *Common Sense*, a full fifteen years before, in using the American achievement, of which, of course, he had first-hand experience as an actual participant, to mock and condemn Burke's thoughts on the revolutionary events that had lately transpired across the Channel.

The Burke-Paine controversy, and the two great books that together constitute it, represent a kind of symbolic backdrop against which much of this study might be approached; in other words, that there exist legitimately different ways, and different *levels* of interpreting liberty, in regarding the struggles for civil and political reform and, hence, the popular goal of 'liberty' in the broader sense, in the closing decades of the eighteenth century. The sub-title of my study indicates that my primary interest lies in the books that inform my approach. More than that, however, I have tried to argue - and I am certainly by no means the first to have done so - that the two great books I cite here can be regarded as symbolic of a wider truth: that while one of them (Burke's) appeals to

⁴ See the excellent account of this period in Burke's political career by Paul Langford in his 47 page long article in the Oxford DNB, online version, Oxford, 2004. See also F. P. Lock's shrewd analysis: "Burke's speeches on America were delivered knowing that he would not actually persuade his audience. Yet they are energized by his maintaining the fiction that his hearers were open to conviction." - *Edmund Burke, Volume II: 1784-1797*, p. 45.

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a reading public schooled in the traditional conservative epistemology of the period, the other (Paine's) is quite the opposite. Burke's book negatively intellectualises the concept of reform and 'liberty', and in the process gains the high ground against the counter-claims of British radicalism, in a way that modern historians like Harry Dickinson have used, rightly, to justify their claim that, in the last analysis, the British fin-de-siècle radical movement had no real answer to the hostile forces of conservative loyalism – the so-called “‘new’ Dickinsonian consensus”. At the same time, it should be noted that I consider it important to discuss the extent to which there may, as Harris suggests, have been a significantly *different* outcome in Scotland, largely as a result of the notably more vocal forms of religious dissent existing north of the border.⁵

In this study, however, I also seek to make a different, though related point. In considering the writings of Paine it is wrong to conceive of him as a great philosophical mind wrestling with the Enlightenment values of epistemological theory, moving (as, we must acknowledge, does Burke) with consummate intellectual ease through the great classical and renaissance authorities as exemplars. (By the same token, however, I argue that it is just as wrong to think of John Witherspoon, an unlikely associate of Paine in America, as an original creative political theorist of the Scottish Enlightenment). The real importance of Paine surely lies in the astonishing mass power and appeal of his dramatic prose and in the almost unchallengeable – though cynics might argue, in part illusory – force of his argument. No one has made the point better than the Burke scholar, F.P. Lock, commenting on another of Burke's respondents, Sir James Mackintosh:

Vindiciae Gallicae is one of the best of the replies to Burke, in some respects superior to *Rights of Man*. More subtly argued and more stylishly written, *Vindiciae Gallicae* lost the battle to Paine because its audience was the property-owning élite, which soon took fright at the prospect of a

⁵ “From a national, British perspective, H.T. Dickinson has emphasized radical weakness and its limited support as important factors in its failure. Scotland fits this picture well. Support flourished briefly and then decline set in very quickly as the initial optimism and expectation which surrounded its rise were not sustained. Yet if numbers of radicals were not overwhelming, loyalists in Scotland did not carry all before them. In many places in England in the early 1790s a noisy, vocal loyalist reaction, which seems to have reached far into society, cowed radicals from late 1792; north of the border, loyalism was probably confined in this period to rural and urban élite uncertain about the views of many of the ‘middling’ and ‘lower’ sort. It was fed from ‘above’ and directed, to a significant extent, by the authorities in Edinburgh. Significant sections of society resisted pressures to subscribe to a loyalist consensus, mostly obviously religious dissenters, while others viewed loyalist initiatives with apathy if not downright hostility.” Harris, *The Scottish People and the French Revolution*, p. 9.

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revolution in Britain and turned to Burke. *Rights of Man* was better adapted to serve as the gospel of an incipient populism.⁶

It is a brilliant phrase – “the gospel of an incipient populism”.

More generally, this study examines the Scottish sedition trials of 1793-4 in a bibliographical context, an approach that, I suggest, is long overdue. With these tools I have sought to unravel some of the most important aspects of a peculiarly unsavoury side of Scottish history at the close of the eighteenth century.

2 The call of America and the making of three Americans

Part Two of this study is designed to reveal the extent to which some of the ideas of liberty discussed in Part One were acted out, as it were, in the process of contemporary real life through the Scottish and, especially, the American careers of three markedly distinctive, and very different, individuals. The three men of Paisley whose lives I have opted to study here are, I have suggested, of particular historical interest. At one level, they represent archetypal examples of Scots émigrés to America in the later eighteenth century. Witherspoon is, of course, the towering figure of the three since his contribution to the creation of the American republic is remarkable, significant and only now beginning to be fully recognised on both sides of the Atlantic. Obviously, there is much more to link them than the simple fact they all chose to emigrate – though in Wilson’s case, alone of the three, it would be more accurate to state that he was *driven* to do so – from a rapidly expanding textiles manufacturing town in Renfrewshire, Scotland; or even that they are all curiously bound together by the bonding ‘cement’ of some form of close interaction with Tom Paine. What is of real, abiding interest is the *manner* of their individual response to the call of America. For we find a variety of motivation: from the dominant economic and commercially opportunistic drive of Robert Aitken, to the regenerative answering of God’s call to serve on the part of John Witherspoon, to, finally, Alexander Wilson’s ‘fugitive’ necessity to quit Scotland as a jailbird and acknowledged political radical.

What, above all, I have tried to highlight in my study is the actual *process* by which these three individuals, each in their own different ways, became Americans. In doing so, I have, I believe, succeeded in uncovering important new material, which I reiterate now in summary form as follows:

⁶ *Edmund Burke, Volume II: 1784-1797*, p. 347.

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John Witherspoon

1 The important location and ‘re-discovery’ of the ‘missing’ pocketbooks of 1763 and 1768, the contents of which shed significant new light on Witherspoon’s ministry in Paisley and, crucially, help to reveal the details of his trip to London and Holland only a few weeks before his departure from Scotland for the College of New Jersey.

2 The bibliographical and textual importance of *A Supplement to the Ecclesiastical Characteristics* (Glasgow, John Bryce, 1760). None of the acknowledged authorities on religious activity in Scotland in this period – nor any Witherspoon scholar to date – has, to the best of my knowledge, demonstrated his awareness of this very rare work.

Robert Aitken

1 The relevance of the Hugh Simm Papers at Princeton to both Witherspoon and Robert Aitken and, in particular, the identification for the first time in any study of one of the letters as having been written to Aitken by Simm while the former was on his sojourning visit to Philadelphia in 1769.

2 The intriguing bibliographical conundrum of one further book title – the *Curious Letters and Papers* (Glasgow, John Bryce, 1773) – having now to be added to the checklist of known Aitken Scottish imprints, making a total of eight, not seven as previously understood.

3 The nature of the relationship of Aitken to Thomas Paine in the context of *The Pennsylvania Magazine* – both financial and editorial – considered in the light of the information provided in the pages of Aitken’s waste-book.

4 Aitken’s activities as an Elder of the Antiburgher congregation in Philadelphia examined with reference to key entries in the Church Session minute book – especially relating to his difficulties surrounding the swearing of oaths to the British occupying authority in 1778.

Conclusions

Alexander Wilson

1 The identity of the ‘third man’ in the ‘Group’ of three poets (referred to in Wilson’s letter to David Brodie of 28 April 1788), and the author of the poem “Bannockburn”, revealed for the first time in any study, including those by Grosart and Clark Hunter.

2 The events in Paisley of January 1794, leading to the re-arrest of Maurice Margarot and Wilson’s subsequent flight considered and re-constructed from a mix of transcribed and original contemporary Sheriff Court records.

3 A bibliography compiled of the writings of the extreme radical, James Kennedy – whose career is discussed as the friend and confidante of Wilson (a key relationship missed by the majority of scholars such as Hook, Cantwell and Hunter) – presented for the first time in any study.

The Alexander Leslie day book and associated papers

A detailed study is presented of the significance of the papers of the radical Edinburgh bookseller and publisher, Alexander Leslie, including his daybook listing his trading with other bookmen and suppliers in Scotland and England, as well as his political catalogue.

Appendix A

Checklist of books and pamphlets printed in Paisley from 1769 to 1799

In terms of the number of titles listed, this checklist represents a much expanded version of Appendix 1 (i.e. volume 2) of my 1965 Glasgow B.Litt thesis which listed all Paisley imprints I was at that time able to trace, covering the period 1769 to 1830. After some 45 years it is hardly surprising that a re-appraisal is overdue. At the same time, it is pleasing that my original version continues to be listed by the National Library of Scotland as a reference source within their *Scottish Book Trade Index* (SBTI), now of course available online.

Since 1965 my ongoing revised list of Paisley imprints has grown steadily over the years as, from time to time, new titles have come to light from a variety of (sometimes unexpected) quarters. Thus, my original 1965 bibliography listed a total of 159 titles printed in Paisley from 1769 up to and including the year 1799; contrast that with the 223 titles I can now cite over the same period - a remarkable increase of almost 40%.

Of course, the availability of online databases, some of them offering actual facsimiles of the originals, has helped me enormously, and, it has to be said, almost effortlessly compared with the labours I still associate with the (part-time) slog of my B.Litt research all those years ago. In that regard, I am indebted most of all to the Gale ECCO (*Eighteenth Century Collections Online*) database and to the new online version of the British Library *English Short Title Catalogue* (ESTC).

As far as editorial policy is concerned it should be noted that I have retained my original bibliographical descriptions where appropriate and have supplemented these with notes on 'new' holdings identified after 1965 where warranted by the sole criterion of providing useful additional information. That is, where I know and have seen a title in Paisley Central Library I have ignored other copies that may exist in other libraries (including those noted in the ESTC) - *except* in cases where such other copies reveal new data (see, for example, title 25-74). As usual in this thesis, I have normalised all Roman dates to Arabic ; otherwise I have stuck to the usual conventions of short bibliographical description as instilled in me by Philip Gaskell when I was a Glasgow University research student.

Holding libraries in roman type refer to my 1965 thesis; holding libraries in italics refer to post-1965 identifications.

PCL - Paisley Central Library, High Street, Paisley.

BL - British Library

Mitchell - Mitchell Library, Glasgow

NLS - National Library of Scotland

EUL - Edinburgh University Library

Appendix A

GUL - Glasgow University Library

ESTC - English Short Title Catalogue (British Library)

1769

Printed by Weir and M'Lean

- 1-69 An essay on Christ's cross and crown. To which are subjoined, six sermons. By the Reverend Mr. George Muir, minister of the gospel at Paisley. The second edition.

Paisley: printed by Weir and M'Lean. And sold at the shop of A. Weir, near the cross. 1769.

8vo pp. v, 314

PCL

Note The dedication - "To Charles Maxwell, of Merksworth, Esq." - is dated "Sept, 4th., 1769". Alexander Weir was admitted to the burgh roll in Paisley in 1758 and Archibald M'Lean in 1771.

- 2-69 The works of the reverend and pious Mr. Andrew Gray, late Minister of the Gospel in Glasgow. Containing ...A Letter from Mr. Gray, to my Lord Wartston.

Paisley: printed by Weir and M'lean [sic in ESTC]. And sold at the shop of Alex. Weir, near the Cross, 1769

8vo pp. viii, 584

ESTC - BL/Mitchell/NLS

Note A variant has the imprint "Paisley: printed by Weir and M'Lean. And sold at the shop of A. Weir."

- 3-69 Christ the builder and foundation of the church. A sermon preached on the 20th of April, 1769. At the admission of the Reverend Mr. Collin Campbell, to the parish of Renfrew. By the Reverend Mr. George Muir, minister of the gospel at Paisley.

Paisley: printed by Weir and M'Lean. And sold at the shop of A. Weir near the cross. 1769.

8vo pp. 37

PCL

- 4-69 A new spelling-book, in which the rules of spelling and pronouncing the English language are exemplified and explained. Entered in Stationers Hall, according to Act of Parliament. By William Adie, Schoolmaster in Paisley.

Paisley: printed by A. Weir and A. M'lean [sic] for the author, 1769.

12mo pp. 18

ESTC - BL

Appendix A

- 5-69 Ascanius; or, the young adventurer. Containing an impartial account of the late rebellion in Scotland. The third edition: ...
Paisley; printed by Weir and M'Lean. For James Davidson and Co. at Fergusley near Paisley. 1769.

12mo pp. 286, i [advert]

PCL

Note The advert is for the impending publication of Flavel's Works (see 9.70 below).

- 6-69 Dying thoughts, in three parts ... By the late Reverend Mr. William Crawford minister of the gospel at Wilton. The fifth edition.
Paisley, printed by A. Weir and A. M'Lean: for A. Weir bookseller at the Cross. 1769.

8vo pp. xii, 228

PCL

Printer not cited

- 7-69 A prophecy concerning the Lord's return to Scotland, ... in three prophetic sermons, ... Preached by that faithful and glorified martyr of Jesus Christ, Mr. James Ranwick. The second edition.
Paisley: printed for and sold by George McKimmen travelling merchant. 1769.

8vo pp. 56

PCL

Note M'Kimmen (erroneously called "M'Kinnon" by Bushnell) is described as a "travelling merchant" on the t. page but this is a euphemism for a less respectable profession - that is, M'Kimmen was a hawker and belonged to the notorious company of 'flying' or 'running' stationers. In the 18th century the term 'merchant' covered a multitude of sins.

- 8-69 Schema sacrum, or, a sacred scheme of natural and revealed religion: ... By Thomas Blackwell ...
Paisley: printed for J. Davidson and Co. at Fergusley. [n.d. - 1769?]

8vo pp. 343

PCL

1770

Printed by Weir and M'Lean

- 9-70 The whole works of the Reverend Mr. John Flavel, late minister of the gospel at Dartmouth in Devon. In eight volumes ... The eight [sic] edition.
Paisley: printed by A. Weir and A. M'Lean. And sold at the shop of A. Weir, near the Cross. 1770.

8vo pp. 8 vols.

EUL

Appendix A

Notes (i) See advert noted at 5.69 (ii) title to vol. 5 only. (iii) There is a fascinating reference to Flavel's works in David Gilmour's Victorian classic *Paisley Weavers of Other Days* (Paisley, 1876) in which Gilmour recalls how a certain Mrs. Brown "visited my mother now and then with a letter from Matthew to read, and always had a volume of Flaval [sic] under her arm, which she said was 'gran fat meat'". (iv) See also 82-88.

- 10-70 A treatise on the soul of man. By Mr. John Flavel, ... To which is prefixed, the life of the author.
Paisley: printed by A. Weir and A. M'Lean. And sold at the shop of A. Weir, 1770.

8vo pp. iv, 397

ESTC - Czartoryski Library, Poland

Note This work is usually referred to as "Pneumatologia".

1771

Printed by Weir And M'Lean

- 11-71 A new collection in prose and verse, for the use of English schools.
Paisley: printed by A. Weir, and A. M'Lean. Sold at the shop of A. Weir, near the Cross., 1771

8vo pp. [8], 328

ESTC - NLS

- 12-71 Gospel sonnets; or, spiritual songs. In six parts ... The fourteenth edition ... By the late Reverend Mr. Ralph Erskine, minister of the gospel at Dunfermline.
Paisley printed by A. Weir and A. M'Lean. Sold at the shop of A. Weir, near the Cross. 1771.

8vo pp. 368, [4] advert

PCL

Note The advert for books printed and sold by A. Weir includes the following - "Dr. Witherspoon's essays, 3 vols."

- 13-71 The parable of the tares: in twenty-one sermons ... By the Rev. Dr. George Muir, late minister of the gospel in Paisley.
Paisley: printed by A. Weir and A. M'Lean. 1771.

8vo pp. 316

PCL

Appendix A

- 14-71 The French convert being a true relation of the happy conversion of a noble French lady, from the errors and superstitions of popery, to the reformed religion, by means of a Protestant gardener, her servant ... The fourteenth edition.
Paisley: printed by A. Weir and A. M'Lean. Sold at the shop of A. Weir, near the Cross. 1771.

8vo pp. vi, 113

PCL

- 15-71 A view of the covenant of grace, from the sacred records ... By the Reverend and learned Mr. Thomas Boston, late minister of the gospel at Ettrick.
Paisley: printed by A. Weir and A. M'Lean. Sold at the shop of Alex. Weir, near the Cross. 1771.

8vo pp. 407

PCL

1772

Printed by Weir and M' Lean

- 16-72 A practical discourse of God's sovereignty: with other material points derived thence; ... By Elisha Coles ... The fifteenth edition.
Paisley: printed by A. Weir and A. M'Lean. Sold at the shop of Alex. Weir, near the Cross. 1772.

8vo pp. 349

PCL

- 17-72 The pilgrim's progress, from this world to that which is to come ... By John Bunyan.
Paisley: printed by A. Weir and A. M'Lean. Sold at the shop of A. Weir, near the Cross, 1772

12mo pp. 415, [1]

ESTC - NLS

- 18-72 The nature, power, deceit, and prevalency of the remainders of indwelling sin in believers. Together with the ways of its working, and means of prevention. Opened, envinced and applied. With a resolution of sundry cases of conscience thereunto appertaining. By John Owen, D.D.
Paisley: printed by A. Weir, and A. M'Lean. Sold at the shop of A. Weir, 1772.

12mo pp. 306, 257, [1]

ESTC - BL/GUL

Note Includes *Of temptation* - see next title - with separate t. page and pagination.

Appendix A

- 19-72 Of temptation, the nature and power of it, the danger of entering into it, and the means of preventing that danger. With a resolution of sundry cases thereunto belonging. By John Owen, D.D.
Paisley: printed by A. Weir and A. M'Lean. Sold at the shop of A. Weir, 1772.

12mo pp. 257, [1]

ESTC - NLS

- 20-72 The afflicted man's companion: or, a directory for families and persons afflicted with sickness or any other distress. ... By the Rev. Mr John Willison, ...
Paisley: printed by A. Weir and A. M'Lean. Sold at the shop of Alex. Weir, 1772.

8vo pp. xxv, [1], 266

ESTC - University of Delaware

Printer not cited

- 21-72 A cry from the dead; or, the ghost of the famous Mr James Guthrie appearing. Being the last sermon he preached in the pulpit of Stirling, before his martyrdom at Edinburgh, June 1661. To which is added, his last speech upon the scaffold.
Paisley: printed for Gilbert Hunter, 1772.

8vo pp. 34, [2]

ESTC - GUL/NLS

- 22-72 A plan agreed upon by a great many farmers and others, in the shires of Dumbarton, Clydesdale, and Renfrew, &c. for erecting a company of farmers, ... for purchasing and improving of lands within His Majesty's dominions in North America, ...
Paisley: printed in the year, 1772.

12mo pp. 18

ESTC - NLS/Princeton

1773

Printed by Weir and M'Lean

- 23-73 A letter to the west country farmers, concerning the difficulties and management of a bad harvest. Written in the end of the year 1772.
Paisley: printed by A. Weir and A. M'Lean. Sold by A. Weir bookseller there ... 1773.
Price eightpence.

8vo pp. 76

PCL

Note Robert Brown, the Paisley collector of local pamphlets, has added in his own hand on the title-page "By Revd. John Warren, Kilbarchan".

Appendix A

Printer not cited

- 24-73 A short historical account of Lochwinnoch Parish, with its curiosities, &c. With an appendix: wherein are dialogues upon scripture queries, Speeches, Portraits, Remarks upon Beggars, Robbers, the Dumb Proctor, &c.: with new songs and old proverbs. Paisley: Printed in the Year 1773.

8vo pp. 38

Mitchell - with incomplete t.p. ; *ESTC - BL, NLS*

1774

Printed by Weir and M'Lean

- 25-74 The secession testimony, abundantly consistent with liberty of conscience: in a letter to a friend. Paisley: printed by A. Weir and A. M'Lean. 1774.

8vo pp. 52

PCL; ESTC - NLS

Note The NLS copy is signed at end "James Morison" [sic]. According to Burleigh's *A Church History of Scotland*, Edinburgh, 1983, p. 333, "James Morrison of Kilmarnock was cast out because as an Evangelical he denied the doctrine of Election ...".

Printed by Alexander Weir

- 26-74 The Psalms of David in metre ... Allowed by the authority of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, ... Together with the annotations of Mr David Dickson,... Paisley: printed and sold by Alexander Weir, 1774.

12mo pp. 360

ESTC - GUL, Bodleian

- 27-74 Meditations and contemplations. In two volumes ... By James Hervey, A.M. Rector of Weston-Favel, in Northamptonshire. A new edition ... Paisley: printed and sold by Alex. Weir; John Tait, and James Brown, booksellers in Glasgow. 1774.

8vo pp. - vol.1, [xx], 200; vol.2, [x], 210, [2 (advert)]

PCL/ESTC - Cambridge U library

Note One of the rarest of all Paisley printed books. The Paisley library copy has both volumes bound together and seems to have been available for sale in that way. The advert in vol. 2 is for "Books printed and sold by Alexander Weir, Paisley; John Tait, and James

Appendix A

Brown, booksellers in Glasgow.” Vol. 2 of Hervey’s book – the 25th edition – was printed in Glasgow in 1768 “for Alexander Weir”.

- 28-74 The much-esteemed history of the ever-famous knight, Don Quixote de la Mancha: containing his many wonderful adventures and achievements: very pleasant and diverting ...
Paisley: printed and sold by Alexander Weir, bookseller, 1774.

8vo pp. 112

PCL

- 29-74 A poem on the last day. In three books. By Edward Young, Fellow of All-souls College, Oxon. ... The twelfth edition.
Paisley: printed and sold by Alex. Weir, near the Cross. 1774.

12mo pp. [x], 36, [2 (advert)]

Mitchell

1775

Printed by Alexander Weir

- 30-75 A narrative of the sufferings and relief of a young girl; strangely molested by evil spirits and their instruments, in the west: collected from authentic testimonies, with a preface and postscript ...
Paisley: printed and sold by Alexander Weir. 1775.

12mo pp. 120

PCL

- 31-75 The history of Tom Jones, a foundling. By Henry Fielding, esquire ... In three volumes ...
Paisley: printed and sold by Alex. Weir, bookseller, 1775.

8vo pp. [xvi], 271 [vol. 1]; [viii], 343 [vol.2]; [vi], 300 [vol.3]

NLS

Not traced

- 32-75 The Renfrewshire witches ...
Paisley: printed and sold by A. Weir. 1775.

Note Referred to in anonymous letter headed “Old Paisley Printers” in *Paisley and Renfrewshire Gazette* for 30th June 1870.

Appendix A

1776

Printed by Alexander Weir

- 33-76 The grave. A poem. By Robert Blair ... the tenth edition.
Paisley: printed and sold by Alexander Weir near the Cross. 1776.
- 12mo pp. 28 Mitchell
- 34-76 Jemmy Twitcher's jests; collected by a member of the Beef-Steak Club; and now first published by Daniel Gunston. Interspersed with variety of entertaining articles from his own Budget ... To which is now added, several anecdotes of eminent persons. With the favourite song in Love in a village, and Shakespeare's Jubilee, at Stratford upon Avon, &c. Paisley: printed and sold by Alex. Weir, Bookseller, 1776.
- 12mo pp. 120 *ESTC - Bodleian*
- Note* ESTC (University of Texas holding) refers also to a Second Edition with the imprint variant thus - *Paisley: printed and sold by Alex. Weir, 1776.*
- 35-76 A copy of a letter sent to a reverend minister at Norham. To which is now added, a postscript, or continuation. Likewise a dialogue betwixt Inquisitive and Plaintruth. Paisley: printed by Alex. Weir, Bookseller, 1776.
- 8vo pp. 20 *ESTC - NLS*
- 36-76 The New-England primer improved, for the more easy attaining the true reading of English. To which is added, the Assembly of Divines catechism. Paisley: printed by A. Weir, and sold at his shop, 1776.
- 16mo pp. 80 *ESTC - NLS*

1777

Printed by Alexander Weir

- 37-77 The holy war, made by Shaddai upon Diabolus, for the regaining of the metropolis of the world; ... By John Bunyan, the author of the Pilgrim's Progress ... Paisley: printed by A. Weir, and sold at his shop near the Cross. 1777.

Appendix A

8vo pp. 276

Mitchell

- 38-77 Articles and regulations of the Renfrewshire Farmer Society for Charity. Paisley: printed by Alexander Weir. 1777.

8vo pp. 15

PCL

- 39-77 Articles taken from the bond of association, entered into and signed, January 1765, by twenty-four farmers and others, the original members of the Kilbarchan Farmer Society for Charity. Paisley: reprinted by Alexander Weir, 1777.

8vo pp. 20

ESTC - NLS

- 40-77 The antiburgher presentor detected and his lies exposed. Being a vindication of my own character, which John Hunter, senior, in Greenock, in his pamphlet, has been endeavouring to sully. Likewise propose to befriend a pamphlet, signed A poor man. By John Glen, Port-Glasgow.

Paisley: printed by Alexander Weir, for the author. Sold by the author, and by Robert Yuil, Greenock; by John Selchrig, weaver in Calton of Glasgow, and others, 1777.

8vo pp. 24

ESTC - NLS

Note See also 45-79. John Glen was an interesting character. He was a 'merchant' and travelling bookseller operating out of Port Glasgow from 1777 to 1801. Glen gave in lists of subscribers to various titles published by John Howie of Lochgoin in Glasgow in the early 1780s. Janet Gordon's *An account of the covenant engagements* (Paisley, Neilson, 1801) was printed for Glen, by which time - according to his entry in the Scottish Book Trade Index - he presumably had a shop and had ceased to be a travelling chapman.

- 41-77 The declarations of the witnesses, that survived the late persecution. Published at Sanquhair. The first, August 10th, 1692; the Second, Novem.6th, 1695; the Third, May 21st, 1703; and the Fourth, October 2d, 1707.

Paisley: printed by Alexander Weir for the publisher. 1777

12mo pp. 55, [1]

PCL

Note See also next title.

Appendix A

1778

Printed by Alexander Weir

- 42-78 The declarations of the witnesses that survived the late persecution. ...
Paisley: printed by Alexander Weir for the publisher, 1778.

12mo pp. 55,[1]

ESTC - BL

- 43-78 [The Apocrypha]
[Paisley: printed by Alexander Weir, bookseller. 1778.]

4to pp. [152] – i.e. unnumbered leaves

PCL

Note Lacking a title-page, the imprint is from the colophon. See also 48-81.

- 44-78 The articles of the Paisley Ayr-Shire Society.
Paisley: printed by Alexander Weir for the Society. 1778.

8vo pp. 16

PCL

1779

Printed by Alexander Weir

- 45-79 A wonderful surprize, to see a professed Presbyter cutting the very nerves of Presbyterian principles: ... By John Glen, Port-Glasgow
Paisley: printed by Alexander Weir, for the author. 1779.

8vo pp. 43

PCL

Note See also 40-77.

1780

Printed by Alexander Weir

- 46-80 An essay on man. In four epistles. By Alexander Pope, esq;

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Paisley: printed and sold by Alexander Weir. 1780.

8vo pp. 56

PCL

47-80 Arithmetic in the plainest and most concise methods hitherto extant ... With considerable additions, and curious improvements, by the author, Geo. Fisher, accomptant.
Paisley: printed by Alexander Weir, bookseller. 1780.

8vo pp. 334

PCL

1781

Printed by Alexander Weir

48-81 [The Apocrypha]
[Paisley: printed by Alexander Weir, bookseller. 1781.]

4to pp. [152] - i.e. unnumbered leaves

ESTC - NLS

Note Lacking a title-page, the imprint is from the colophon. See also 43-78.

1782

Printed by Alexander Weir

49-82 The history of the shire of Renfrew ... Collected from the public records, ancient chartularies, the works of the best historians, &c. Brought from the earliest accounts to the year MCCCX, by Mr. George Crawford: and continued to the present period, by William Semple.

Paisley: printed and sold by Alex. Weir, bookseller near the Cross, and by the author. 1782. Price 4s.6d. Coarse, and 6s. Fine, Bound.

4to pp. [xiv], 334, [5 - subscribers' names and errata]

PCL

50-82 The history of the town and parish of Paisley. Containing, the history of the Abbey-Church, or Monastery of Paisley ... Brought from the earliest accounts to the year MDCCX, by Mr. George Crawford: and continued to the present period, by William Semple.

Paisley: printed and sold by Alex. Weir, bookseller near the Cross, and by the author. 1782. (Price 1s. 4d. Fine, and 1s. Coarse, in blue paper.)

Appendix A

4to pp. [iv], 112 PCL
Note This is simply the Paisley section of the preceding title, separately gathered and bound.

- 51-82 A general description of the east coast of Scotland, from Edinburgh to Cullen. Including a brief account of the Universities of Saint Andrews and Aberdeen; ... In a series of letters to a friend. By Francis Douglas.
Paisley: printed by Alexander Weir. 1782. (Price two shillings and six-pence in blue paper.)

8vo pp. [viii], 310, [14 - subscribers' names] PCL

Notes (i) Among the subscribers listed are "David Hume esq; advocate"; (ii) Andrew Crawford has the following note on the author in *Cairn of Lochwinnoch Matters* (volume XXVI - between 326 and 327 - located in Paisley Central Library) : "Francis Douglas was a printer in Aberdeen. He died at Abbotsinch, in Renfrew parish about 1792. ... It is certain that he was the author of the Poem, entitled *A Panegyric on the Town of Paisley by a North-Country-Man.*" ESTC gives the imprint of this 24pp. pamphlet as "Printed in the year, 1765" and suggests Paisley as the place of publication. I consider that very unlikely and offer Glasgow as its probable provenance. Copies are listed in GUL and NLS.

- 52-82 The schoolmasters assistant: being a compendium of arithmetic, both practical and theoretical. In five parts. ... To which is prefixed, an essay on the education of youth; humbly offered to the Consideration of Parents. By Thomas Dilworth, Author of the New Guide to the English Tongue; Young Book-Keeper's Assistant, &c. and Schoolmaster in Wapping.
Paisley: printed by Alex. Weir, Bookseller, 1782.

12mo pp. xiv, [10], 192, table *ESTC - Harvard*

1784

Printed by John Neilson

- 53-84 Articles and regulations of the Lochwinnoch Town and Parish Society for Charity.
Paisley: printed by John Neilson. 1784.

12mo pp. 16 Mitchell

- 54-84 The scots rogue: or, the life and actions of Donald Macdonald, a Highland Scot. Relating his being found in the High way, and carried home by Curtogh Macdonald to his wife; and how he was brought up by them: his early Waggeries and Villanies [sic] when he came to riper Years. His Love Intrigues, and how many various Fortunes he went through, and the Miseries that he endured: his extraordinary Wit and Courage, and how

Appendix A

he extricated himself out of divers Difficulties, into which his Rogueries had brought him. The whole being very pleasant and diverting.

Paisley: printed by John Neilson. For George Caldwell, Bookseller, near the Cross,

1784.

12mo pp. 107, [1]

ESTC - BL/NLS

Note Cf. 129-91. Although ESTC lists a variant title as *The Scots rogue: or, the life and actions of a Highland robber ... Paisley: John Neilson [sic], 1784*. I have not chosen to include it here as the accuracy of the description is in my view highly questionable. The only copy of this so-called variant noted in ESTC is in the E. A. Hornel Art Gallery and Library but I have yet to see it.

55-84 Twenty-eight divine songs. Attempted in easy language for the use of children. By I. Watts, D.D.

Paisley: printed by John Neilson, for George Caldwell, 1784.

12mo pp. 24

ESTC - BL

Note The 18th. Edition.

56-84 The patron right for once; or, the happy settlement. A poem. Inscribed, with all cordial respect, to Archibald Speirs of Elderslee, esq; to Mr. George Crawford, to the Reverend Mr. John Monteith, Junr. And to the whole parish of Nielston, [sic] by their most obedient and faithful humble servant, James Maxwell, a native of said parish. [dated *Paisley, Nov. 18th, 1784.*]

Broadside sheet, printed 1 side.

PCL

Note Neilson's imprint appears at the bottom of the broadside, *Paisley: printed by John Neilson for the Author.*

1785

Printed by John Neilson

57-85 Paisley. A poem. Being a general description of the Town and places adjacent; with the manners and character of the inhabitants. By James Maxwell, author of the New Version of the Psalms, etc.etc.etc.

8vo pp. 16

PCL

Appendix A

Note In 1773 a Glasgow printer, William Smith, printed Maxwell's "New Version of the Whole Book of the Psalms in Metre". On the title-page the phenomenally prolific Maxwell is described as "S.D.P." (Student of Divine Poetry). For Maxwell's outpourings on Robert Burns see Robert Crawford's *The Bard* (London, 2009) p. 324, 92-88 and 111-90 below.

58-85 A paraphrase on the Epistle of St. James; together with the VIII. and XI. Chapters of the Epistle to the Hebrews ... By James Maxwell ...
Paisley: printed by John Neilson for the author. 1785.
8vo pp. 40 NLS

59-85 A birth-day poem for the honourable Sir Michael Bruce of Stonehouse, Bart. Who is now entered [sic] his seventy-seventh year of his age, Dec. 8th, 1784. Inscribed, with all cordial respect, to Mrs. Brisbane of Brisbane, his daughter, by her much obliged, and most obedient faithful humble servant, James Maxwell.
Paisley: printed by John Neilson for the author, 1785.

Broadside sheet, printed 1 side. *ESTC - NLS*

60-85 The wonder of wonders; or, the cotton manufacture. A poem. Being a general account of the rapid progress of that branch, and others, at the new Town of Johnston; with a particular description of that Town and places adjacent. By James Maxwell, author of the New Version of the Psalms, &c.
Paisley: printed for the author, by John Neilson. 1785.

8vo pp. 8 NLS

Printer not cited

61-85 A new song, the fumbler detected; or, the cautious maid's escape. A true story. In four parts. ...
[Paisley]: Printed for James Maxwell, 1785

12mo pp. 8 *ESTC - NLS*

62-85 Poetical fragments. Containing, I. The farmer's blunder. II. The faithful monitor. III. On the Rev. Mr. Scott's horse, named Bucephilus. [sic] IV. On seeing Bearco's Wax-work representing Count de Grasse delivering up his sword to Admirals Rodney and Hood, April 12, 1782.
Paisley: printed for James Maxwell. 1785.

8vo pp. 8 Mitchell

Appendix A

- 63-85 Four excellent new songs. I. A new song, composed on Lochwinioch Loch, while observing the famous curling match betwixt his Grace the Duke of Hamilton and William M'Dowal, Esq; of Castlesemple, January 5. 1785. II. The memorable Battle of Bannockburn, ... III. Galloping dreary Dun. IV. Widdle waddle.
[Paisley]: Printed in the year, 1785.

8vo pp. 8

ESTC - NLS

Notes (i) By James Maxwell (and, therefore, almost certainly a John Neilson production) though why Maxwell chose to remain anonymous is not clear; (ii) the Duke's curling partner, as celebrated by Maxwell, is William McDowall II of Castle Semple whose father made his huge fortune from his sugar estates - and, it has to be said, from the concomitant traffic in slaves - in St. Kitts in the Caribbean. The third William McDowall suffered financial ruin in 1809-1810. See S. Nisbet's *Castle Semple rediscovered* (Renfrewshire Local History Forum, 2009) and Ronald L. Crawford's *New Light on Robert Tannahill, the weaver-poet of Paisley* [Oxford University Press, Notes and Queries, 13, no.5, May, 1966]; (iii) See Clark Hunter, *The Life and Letters of Alexander Wilson* (Philadelphia, 1983), pp. 119-122. My study is the first to identify Maxwell as the 'third man' - as the author of "that well-known ballad, 'The Battle of Bannockburn', 'From the Ocean, &c'". - in the triumvirate of poets described by Wilson in his letter of 28 April 1788 to David Brodie, the other two being his friends Ebenezer Picken and James Kennedy.

1786

Printed by John Neilson

- 64-86 A commentary upon the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians ... By Mr. Martin Luther. To which is prefixed, an account of the life of the author.
Paisley: printed by John Neilson, for Robert Reid, the publisher. 1786.

8vo pp. 572

PCL

Note With the text in the Authorised Version, and a list of subscribers. Among the latter are "James Maxwell, poet", "John Laidly, printer" and "Matth. Moodie, bookbinder", all of whom subscribed in Paisley.

- 65-86 A rare soul strengthening and comforting cordial, for old and young Christians: ...
By John Stevenson, land-labourer in the Parish of Daily, in Carrick; who died in the year 1728 ...
Paisley: printed by John Neilson, for George Caldwell, bookseller, near the Cross. 1786.

8vo pp. 56

PCL

- 66-86 Directions for the poor in fevers. Containing plain rules for the management of

Appendix A

the sick ; which have been found highly useful.
Paisley: printed by John Neilson. Sold by A. Dove, bookseller, Paisley ... 1786.

8vo pp. 16

PCL

- 67-86 The English archer; or, Robert, Earl of Huntingdon, vulgarly called Robin Hood.
Paisley: printed by John Neilson, for George Caldwell, 1786.

12mo pp. 84

ESTC - Notts. County Library

- 68-86 A welcome home, and birth-day poem, for the right honourable George, Earl of Glasgow. To which is added a song. By James Maxwell, poet in Paisley.
Paisley: printed by John Neilson for the author. 1786.

12mo pp. 8

NLS

- 69-86 The seasons. Considered as representing the different periods of man's life ...
By James Maxwell, poet in Paisley.
Paisley: printed by John Neilson for the author. 1786.

12mo pp. 20 (*Spring*), 20 (*Summer*)

Mitchell

Note There are, of course, four parts to this work, of which two were published in 1786 and two in 1787. See 77-87 below.

- 70-86 Happiness. A moral essay. Shewing the vain pursuits of mankind after happiness, in every stage of life. ... By James Maxwell, poet in Paisley.
Paisley: printed by John Neilson for the author. 1786

12mo pp. 16

BL

Printer not cited

- 71-85 A poem descriptive of the ancient and noble seat of Hawk-Head; ... A country seat belonging to the right honourable, the Earl of Glasgow.
Paisley: printed for, and sold by the author. 1786.

Mitchell

12mo pp. 8, [1] (note in verse)

Note Almost certainly by James Maxwell and, thus, printed by Neilson.
See also 68-86.

Appendix A

- 72-86 Paisley dispensary. A poem. To Baillie Andrew Brown, praeses, with the rest of the managers; to Dr. Farquharson, physician, Messrs. John Whyte, Robert Thynne, and David Wardrop, surgeons; ... the following poem is most respectfully inscribed, by their very humble servant, James Maxwell.
Paisley: printed for, and sold by the author. 1786.

12mo pp. 8

BL

- 73-86 The mercies of God thankfully recorded: occasioned by the kind interposition of divine providence, in the miraculous preservation of the author hereof, when he wandered a whole night in Colmonel Muir, in the most eminent danger, faint and destitute, between the 3d and 4th of October, 1785 ...
Paisley: printed for and sold by the author. 1786.

12mo pp. 8

BL

Note The same poem is included in Maxwell's 1795 autobiographical production entitled *A brief narrative etc.* [see 168-95 below].

1787

Printed by John Neilson

- 74-87 A token for children. Being an exact account of the conversion, holy and exemplary lives, and joyful deaths of several young children. By James Janeway, minister of the gospel. The thirteenth edition.
Paisley: printed by John Neilson, for George Caldwell, bookseller. 1787

12mo pp. 119

PCL: PC 792

Notes (i) Janeway's *Token* was one of the best known religious works of its time and is said to have been the most popular book in the nursery after the Bible and *The Pilgrim's Progress*. It figures prominently, for example, among the books used by the Sabbath School Society in Paisley during its early years of existence. (See 206 and 207-98 in the Appendix to Ferrier's *Two Discourses*, pp. 171-176.) See also Ronald L. Crawford's unpublished B.Litt. thesis, Appendix II - *The Paisley Sabbath Schools*. (ii) The *Token* was equally popular over the same period in America where both Franklin (in 1749) and the Paisley emigrant bookseller, Robert Aitken (1781 and again in 1791) re-printed it.

- 75-87 Theologia; or discourses of God. Delivered in CXX sermons. In two volumes ... By Mr. William Wisheart, senr. Principal of the University of Edinburgh, and one of the ministers of that city
Paisley: printed by John Neilson, for Robert Reid, the publisher. 1787.

8vo pp. 512 (vol.1), 484 (vol.2)

*BL

**The BL copy has most of the subscribers' pages missing. Other, intact copies are available in GUL, NLS and the Library of Congress.*

Appendix A

- 76-87 Divine miscellanies; or, sacred poems. In two parts ... By James Maxwell, poet in Paisley. The second edition, corrected, enlarged and greatly improved. Paisley: printed by John Neilson, for the author. 1787.

8vo pp. 376

PCL

Note The first edition was printed in Birmingham by T. Warren, jun. in 1756 (Mitchell 75425). Maxwell published other works in England - e.g. *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* in London in 1759 (Mitchell 91712) and two years earlier, also in London, a sermon in pamphlet form sub-titled *The first sermon ever preach'd by James Maxwell* (Mitchell 75401).

- 77-87 The seasons. ... [etc.]
Paisley: printed by John Neilson for the author. 1787.

12mo pp. 20 (*Autumn; or Harvest*), pp. 20 (*Winter*)

Mitchell

Note See also 69-86.

Printer not cited

- 78-87 A collection of choice pieces, composed on different persons. (First published in 1784.)
I. Verses on the Reverend Mr. Thomas Walker, Minister of the Gospel in Dundonald, for his testifying against the Defections and Corruptions of the Church.
II. Verses addressed to the Reverend Mr. James Oliphant, on his leaving Kilmarnock and going to Dumbarton. By one of his hearers. III. Some pleasant Verses on the Death of a Godly Old Man. To which is added, The happy man and true gentleman, or the character of a Christian.
Paisley, printed for Charles Stewart, Kilmarnock. 1787.

12mo pp. 16

Mitchell

Notes (i) This is a very rare book. The doggerel bears all the hallmarks of James Maxwell, self-styled "poet in Paisley". ESTC lists the 1784 version with the imprint variant: *Printed for Charles Stewart, Kilmarnock, M.DCC.LXXXIV.* and suggests Kilmarnock as the place of publication. I concur with that attribution. We know that the first printer working in Kilmarnock was Peter M'Arthur who is described by *Careen Gardner as "mainly a jobbing printer". In 1780 M'Arthur printed a pamphlet for John Wilson "bookseller" [and, in 1786, renowned printer of the Kilmarnock Edition of Burns]. We also know that M'Arthur printed two titles in Paisley in 1788 (see 94 and 95-88) . It seems likely, therefore, that both editions of *A collection of choice pieces* were printed for Stewart by M'Arthur, the first in 1784 in Kilmarnock and the second in 1787 in Paisley. He seems to have reverted to the simpler life of a bookseller for he was working in that role in Paisley as late as 1793: *A mirror: or, looking-glass for saint and sinner. ... Glasgow: printed for Peter M'arthur, [sic] bookseller, Paisley 1793*

Appendix A

(ii) Gardner's description of M'Arthur's unpretentious background as a book printer is fully borne out in this 1787 version where the line on the title-page "printed" to "Kilmarnock" has been set upside-down! One instinctively feels that by that slip alone the book cannot, surely, be identified as the work of the infinitely more experienced John Neilson.

*Caren S. Gardner: *Printing in Ayr and Kilmarnock* [Ayr, 1976]

79-87 Life of faith, exemplify'd and recommended, in a letter found in the study of the Revd. Mr. Joseph Belcher, late of Dedham in New-England ... To which are added, a few verses by the late Revd. Mr. Killinghall, upon reading of it ... Paisley, printed for Charles Stewart, Kilmarnock, 1787.

12mo pp. 8

PCL

1788

Printed by John Neilson

80-88 Christian magnanimity; a sermon. Preached at Princeton, Sept. 1775, ... To which is added, an address to the senior class, who were to receive the degree of Bachelor of Arts. By John Witherspoon, D.D. LL.D. President of the College of New-Jersey. Princeton: Printed - 1787. Paisley: re-printed by J. Neilson, for R. Reid. 1788.

12mo pp. 36

PCL

Note See also 94-88 below.

81-88 Articles and regulations of the Corresponding and Improving Society of Farmers in Renfrewshire. Paisley: printed by John Neilson. 1788.

8vo pp. 8

PCL

82-88 A token for mourners: or, the advice of Christ to a distressed mother, bewailing the death of her dear and only son ... By John Flavel, preacher of the gospel of Christ, at Dartmouth in Devon ... Paisley: printed by John Neilson, for George Caldwell, bookseller. 1788.

12mo pp.132

PCL

Appendix A

Note See note (iii) at 9-70 above.

- 83-88 Pious memorials; or, the power of religion upon the mind, in sickness, and at death: ... By the late Mr. Richard Burnham, minister of the gospel. With a recommendatory preface, by the Reverend Mr. James Hervey, author of the *Meditations, Dialogues, &c.* A new edition. To which is now added, a large appendix, Containing many valuable Lives of Ministers of the Gospel, and other eminent Christians, many of whom died since the Author wrote.
Paisley: printed by John Neilson, for George Caldwell, bookseller. 1788.

8vo pp. 563, [1-advert]

PCL

Note A list of subscribers is printed on pp. 557 -563. Among the 697 names is Alexander Wilson, the weaver-poet and author of *American Ornithology* (see 112, 116-90 and 127-91 below).

- 84-88 Poems and epistles, mostly in the Scottish dialect. With a glossary. By Ebenezer Picken ... Paisley: printed by John Neilson, for the author. 1788.

8vo pp. 252

PCL

Notes (i) Picken was a good friend of Alexander Wilson, both of whom took part in an Edinburgh Pantheon poetry competition ‘debate’ in April, 1791 with one Robert Cumming. The debate was on the theme “Whether have the exertions of Allan Ramsay or Robert Fergusson done more honour to Scotch Poetry?” Cumming, Wilson and Picken won the laurels in that order. See Hunter, pp. 41-42. (ii) The last two pp. contain details of *Proposals for printing by subscription, I. A Glossary, containing most of the common, or provincial terms, now used in the Scottish Dialect. II. A Collection of all the Scottish Proverbs, now extant. III. Songs, &c. mostly Scottish ... Price One Shilling. By Ebenezer Picken ... Subscriptions taken in by J. Neilson, Printer, at whose Shop, near the Cross, may be seen Proposals at large.* No evidence has come to light to confirm that this title went beyond the proposal stage.

- 85-88 Fate. A poem. By Ebenezer Picken ...
Paisley: printed by John Neilson, and sold at his shop, near the Cross. 1788.

8vo pp. 32

Abbotsford library/NLS

- 86-88 Three discourses on the divine and mediatorial character of Jesus Christ. By Patrick Hutchison, Minister of The Gospel In Paisley.
Paisley: printed by John Neilson, 1788.

8vo pp. 76

ESTC - BL/NLS

Appendix A

- 87-88 Select remains of the Reverend John Mason, A.M. Late rector of Water-Stratford, in the county of Bucks. Containing a variety of devout and useful sayings, on divers subjects, digested under proper heads; religious observations; serious advice to youth; occasional reflections; and Christian letters. Recommended by the late Reverend Isaac Watts, D.D. Paisley: Printed by John Neilson, for Robert Reid, 1788.

8vo pp. viii, [1], 10-124, [3], cxxviii-cxxxvi, [1], 138-288 [p.201 misnumbered "101"]

ESTC - NLS

- 88-88 The great canal; or, the Forth and Clyde navigation. A poem, ... By James Maxwell, poet in Paisley.
Paisley: printed for the author, by J. Neilson. 1788.

12mo pp. 16

NLS

- 89-88 On the reformation of manners. A moral essay. Occasioned by the late opening of sunday-schools in Paisley. By James Maxwell, poet in Paisley.
Paisley: printed by John Neilson, for the author. 1788

12mo pp. 12

NLS

- 90-88 Five curious anecdotes. To which is added, on fashions, a moral essay. By James Maxwell, poet in Paisley.
Paisley: printed by J. Neilson, and sold by the author. 1788

12mo pp. 32

NLS

- 91-88 The water of Stinsiar. A poem, ... By James Maxwell, poet in Paisley.
Paisley: printed by J. Neilson, and sold by the author. 1788.

12mo pp. 24

NLS

- 92-88 Animadversions on some poets and poetasters of the present age especially R-t B-s, and J-n L-k. With a contrast of some of the former age. By James Maxwell, Poet in Paisley.
Paisley: printed by J. Neilson, and sold by the author, 1788.

12mo pp. 24

Copy in private hands/*ESTC BL & NLS*

Notes (i) In his *Bibliography of Robert Burns*, Edinburgh, 1965, p. 28, J. W. Egerer comments: "Extremely rare. I have seen but one copy." (ii) See also Robert Crawford's *The Bard* [London, 2009], p.324, for a discussion of Maxwell's attitude to Burns the

Appendix A

poet and, in Maxwell's eyes, the more unsavoury aspects of Burns the man. See also 111-90 below.

- 93-88 On the King's indisposition. A poem. To which is added, a hymn for his recovery. By James Maxwell, poet in Paisley.
Paisley: printed by John Neilson, for the author. 1788.
- 8vo pp. 12 Mitchell

Printed by Peter M'Arthur

- 94-88 An address to the senior class of students, who were to receive the degree of Bachelor of Arts, and leave the College. Sept. 23. 1787. By John Witherspoon, D.D. L.L.D.. [sic] President of the College of New Jersey.
Paisley: printed by Peter M'Arthur. 1788.

12mo pp. 23 PCL

Note Cf. 80-88 above printed by Neilson. See note on M'Arthur's career as printer and bookseller at 78-87 above.

- 95-88 A cry from the dead. Or, the ghost of the famous Mr. James Guthrie appearing, ...
Paisley: printed by Peter M'Arthur, for Thos..[sic] Stevenson, the publisher.
[n.d. 1788?]

12mo pp. 32 PCL

Note Cf. 21-72 above.

1789

Printed by John Neilson

- 96-89 The whole works of the Reverend Robert Millar, A.M. Late minister of the Gospel in Paisley. In eight volumes ...
Paisley: printed by John Neilson, for Robert Reid. 1789.

8vo pp. [xx], 412 [v.1], 436 [v.2], 440 [v.3], 432 [vol.4], 439 [vol.5], 428 [vol.6], 455 [vol.7], 439 [vol.8] PPL

Note List of subscribers' names (1,382 in all) in vol.8, pp. 409-439.

Appendix A

- 97-89 The practical figurer; or, an improved system of arithmetic. Containing, A large Exemplification of the several Rules in common Arithmetic, with the Doctrine of Vulgar and Decimal Fractions; ... By William Halbert, schoolmaster at Auchinleck. Paisley: printed by John Neilson, 1789.

8vo pp. 308

Mitchell/*GUL/NLS/BL*

Note A total of 312 subscribers' names are listed on pp. 299-308. These include "Robert Burns of Parnassus". It seems most likely that Burns would have subscribed because he knew Halbert, and not out of a desire to improve his numeracy. Burns scholars will have noted that a fair number of the subscribers are school-masters in and around Ayr and district.

- 98-89 Humble congratulations to the royal family, on the King's happy recovery. Likewise, to his loyal subjects of all ranks, on the happy occasion. By James Maxwell, poet in Paisley, author of the poem on the King's indisposition. Paisley: printed by J. Neilson, and sold by the author. 1789.

8vo pp. 16

Mitchell

Note The earlier poem referred to on the t. page is at 93-88.

- 99-89 Brief observations on the wonderful things in and about London. To which is added, an humble address to His Majesty, the King. As also a hymn of thanksgiving to almighty God, for restoring him to perfect health, after a long and dangerous indisposition. To which is added, an epistle to the Right Honourable William Pitt, esquire. By James Maxwell, poet in Paisley. Paisley: printed by John Neilson, 1789.

8vo pp. 16

Mitchell

- 100-89 Four poetical dialogues, viz.:- Between contentment and avarice; between truth and falsehood; between a father and his son; and between a mother and her daughter. By James Maxwell, poet in Paisley. Paisley: printed by J. Neilson, and sold by the author, 1789.

8vo pp. 52

ESTC - NLS

- 101-89 The temple repaired: a poem on the wonderful and elegant repairing; or, rather renewing of that ancient and noble Fabric, the church of the Abbey, at Paisley, in the year 1789. To which is added, some brief remarks on the Earl of Abercorn's burial-place; commonly called, The Sounding Isle. By James Maxwell, Poet in Paisley. Paisley: printed by John Neilson, and sold by the author, 1789.

8vo pp. 8

ESTC - BL

Appendix A

- 102-89 The rent veil of the temple; or, access to the Holy of Holies, by the death of Christ. A sermon, preached on Matthew xxvii,51. Immediately after the Administration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, at Carnock, the 12th day of July, 1719. By Mr. Ralph Erskine, Minister of the Gospel at Dunfermline.

Paisley: printed by J. Neilson, for G. Caldwell, Bookseller, 1789.

8vo pp. 48

ESTC - BL, EUL

- 103-89 A clear and remarkable display of the condescension, love, and faithfulness of God, in the spiritual experiences of Mary Somervell. Wherein is shewn her near access to the throne of grace; her remarkable discoveries and sweet enjoyment of the love of God; the sensible and particular returns of prayer she received; as also her personal engagements to the Lord. Who died at Ayr, Jan. 1762, aged 84 years. Printed from her own manuscript.

Paisley: printed by J. Neilson, for Geo. Caldwell, bookseller, 1789.

8vo pp. 48

ESTC - EUL, GUL, NLS

- 104-89 The humours of Greenock fair; or, the taylor made a man. A musical interlude. As it was performed at the theatre in Greenock, with universal applause. Written by A. M'laren.

Paisley: printed by John Neilson, 1789.

8vo pp. 24

ESTC - Harvard

Note Without the music attached. An example of the verse-drama highly popular at this time, of which a better-known example is Robert Tannahill's *The Soldier's Return* [Paisley, printed by Stephen Young, 1807]. See also 167-94.

- 105-89 A catalogue of the Paisley Circulating Library, consisting of above one thousand volumes, in history, biography, voyages, travels, miscellaneous literature, poetry and plays, religious and church history; which are lent to read, By the year, half-year, quarter, month, or single night, by George Caldwell, bookseller and stationer, at his shop, opposite the head of Dyer's Wynd, near the Cross, Paisley. ... Exchange or Ready money given for any parcel of old books. Price two-pence.

Paisley: Printed by John Neilson, 1789

8vo pp. 36

PCL

Note Caldwell's catalogue is a fascinating insight into the books that were being read at precisely the time when levels of literacy were rising in the towns just prior to the radical movement of the 1790s when popular works of philosophy and religious books were especially much in demand. However, by far the largest number of books on offer belong to the category of "Novels and Romances". The pamphlet also lists magazines that could be borrowed - but only "for the use of Extraordinary-Subscribers": these included *The Critical Review*, *The Literary Magazine*, *The Gentleman's Magazine*, *The Scots Magazine*, *Town and Country Magazine* and *Lady's Magazine*. These would not have been read much by the artisan class of weavers since no less than "Twelve Shillings" was

Appendix A

required as a deposit. The “Conditions to be observed and consented to, by every Subscriber to the Paisley Circulating Library” are also of interest: e.g. every book listed has its price indicated opposite, since Condition VI stipulates that “If a book is lost or written in, or a leaf torn or damaged, that book, or, if it belongs to a set of a book, that set to be paid for at the price marked in the catalogue.”

- 106-89 Copy of the charter and acts of the Wrights’ Society in Paisley.
Paisley: printed by J. Neilson. 1789.

8vo pp. 35

PCL

Printer not cited

- 107-89 The history of the state and sufferings of the Church of Scotland, from the Restoration to the Revolution ... By William Crookshank, A.M. Minister of the Scots Congregation in Swallow-street, Westminster. In two volumes ...
Paisley: printed for George Caldwell, bookseller. 1789.

12mo pp. [viii], 513 [vol.1], 532 [vol.2]

PCL

Note Vol. 2 contains as p. 524 a tipped-in double page with six crude engravings. Also in vol. 2 (pp.529-532) is a list of subscribers’ names, most of whose occupations are given as “weaver”.

Title without date, place or printer

- 108-89 A curious and entertaining letter, addressed to the Right Honourable Candidus Publicus, on the spirit and manners of the town of P**sl*y. By a P**sl*y freeman. Printed in the Present year. [“1789” written in below this.]

8vo pp. 20

PCL

Not traced – printer unknown

- 109-89 Poems on several occasions. By J. Ballantyne and A. Thom. Paisley, 1789.

Note Alexander Gardyne, whose MS. bibliography of Scottish poetry is located in the Mitchell Library, Glasgow, comments: “ The P. are said to be of considerable merit & abound in local allusions. This is a joint publication with a preface by Thom & has become a very scarce book - & one I never saw.” The same work, but listed as “Poems by D. & A. Ballantyne”, is item 116 in the sale catalogue of the “extensive and valuable library of books” which belonged to the local historian and author, Robert Brown of Underwood, Paisley. The sale took place in the rooms of Robert Paterson and Son, auctioneers, Orchard Street, Paisley from 20-27 March 1900.

1790

Printed by John Neilson

- 110-90 The religious education of children. A sermon, on Mark X. 13, 14, 15, 16 ... Preached in the Old Presbyterian Church in New-York, on the second Sabbath in May, 1789. By the Rev. John Witherspoon, D.D. President of Princeton College, New-Jersey, in America, and late minister of the gospel in Paisley.
Paisley: printed by John Neilson for G. Caldwell. 1790.

8vo pp. 16

PCL

Note Cf. Other Witherspoon titles at 80 & 94-88.

- 111-90 The divine origin of poetry asserted and proved: the abuse of it reproved; and poetasters threatened. To which is added, a meditation on May; or the brief history of a modern poet. Two moral essays. By James Maxwell, poet in Paisley.
Paisley: printed by J. Neilson, for the author. 1790.

12mo pp. 24

PCL

Note See note at 92-88 above. This title is of even greater interest to Burns scholars since it brackets Burns with other Ayrshire poets

“Making a mock of ev’ry sacred thing,
And rankest treason too against the king.”

This was obviously an extremely provocative allegation to make at any time – but especially in 1790.

- 112-90 Poems. By Alexander Wilson ... [quotation by Goldsmith]
Paisley: printed by J. Neilson, for the author. MDCCXC

8vo pp.[engraving illustrative of the poem *Hardyknute* opp. t.p], 300

PCL

Note Cf. 127-91 below. In a letter from Paisley dated 6 August 1790 Wilson writes to his friend James Kennedy - “Along with this you will receive a copy of my poems, which are now happily completed. ... I am possessed ... of 600 neat copies, near 400 of which are subscribed for.”

[See Hunter, C. *The Life and Letters of Alexander Wilson* - American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, 1983.]

- 113-90 The psalm-singer’s assistant. Being a collection of the most approved psalm and hymn tunes. Mostly in four parts ... to which is prefixed, a dictionary of words and phrases, frequently used in music. By Robert Gilmour, teacher of music, Paisley.

Appendix A

Paisley: printed by J. Neilson, and sold by the author. 1790.

12mo pp. 76 [16 text, rest music]

PCL

Note Cf. 121-91 and 152-93 below.

114-90 A new history of Scotland; from the earliest accounts to the accession of George III. Adorned with Plates of Fergus I. Fergus II. Kenteth [sic] II. Sir William Wallace, and all the Kings and Queens who have reigned since Alexander II. ...

Paisley: Printed by J. Neilson, And Sold wholesale by J. Lumsden, Engraver, Glasgow. [Price Eight-Pence.]

16mo pp. [4], 144, plates

ESTC - Cambridge UL

Note (i) Incredibly rare. N.d. but ESTC suggests 1790. This is a reprint of a 24mo title printed in Glasgow in 1785 by Robertson and Duncan "Price Six Pence". Apart from the imprint and format, the t. pages are almost identical except for the price and that the Glasgow edition uses the word "Cuts" instead of Neilson's "Plates". (ii) See note on Lumsden at 222-99.

115-90 The famous history of Whittington and his cat. Shewing, how from a poor country boy, destitute of parents or relations, attained great riches, and was promoted to the high and honourable dignity of Lord Mayor of London. Adorned with copperplates.

Paisley: printed by J. Neilson. And sold wholesale by J. Lumsden, engraver, Glasgow.

24mo pp. 23, [1]

ESTC - Rhode Island Historical Society

Note Very rare. N.d. but ESTC suggests 1790.

Printer not cited

116-90 The Hollander: or, Light Weight. A poem. [quotation from Blair]
[n.p, n.d] [Paisley, 1790 according to ESTC]

Broadsheet

ESTC - NLS/Bodleian*

Notes Extremely rare. Though anonymous, the poem is a libel by Alexander Wilson on William Henry, silk merchant of Paisley, well-known for his Dutch business connections, though it is possible that the title is also a double-entendre for "hollander" = a linen fabric originally from the Netherlands (OED). See Hunter, p. 36: "Although Wilson had already built some local reputation as a poet, his first poem to have any extensive circulation was 'The Hollander, or Light Weight', and it was almost certainly the earliest piece to appear in print with a few copies thrown off by Neilson. Possibly Neilson and Wilson felt that the humorous attack on a well-known silk manufacturer, William Henry, would stimulate interest in the volume of poems which they planned, [see 112-90 above]

Appendix A

and it certainly aroused amused attention in some quarters and concern in others when it began to be widely circulated in February 1790.” See also note on 173-95.

* The NLS copy [ref. MS. 499] is bound in with the original documents relating to the legal case initiated by William Henry, silk manufacturer in Paisley, who brought the action for libel against Wilson [See Hunter, Appendix I, pp. 409-428.]. The first document - subscribed by the Clerk of Court - is dated 10th June, 1790.

- 117-90 The book of knowledge; treating of the wisdom of the ancients. Containing I. A short prognostication concerning children born every day in the week. ...
Paisley: printed for and sold by the booksellers in town and country, 1790.

12mo pp. 22 ill.

ESTC - University of Kentucky

Note Obviously a rare chapbook. Most editions attribute authorship to “Erra Pater”, a pseudonym.

- 118-90 An oration on the virtues of the old women, and the pride of the young; with a direction for young men what sort of women to take, and for women what sort of men to marry dictated by Janet Clinker, and written by Humphray [sic] Clinker, the clashing wives clerk.

[Paisley]: Printed for the Company of Flying Stationers, 1790.

8vo pp. 8 ill.

ESTC - NLS

- 119-90 The scheme of redemption exhibited: errors detected and refuted; especially those of Dr. M’—ll, lately published, and now under review of the church. By a layman ...
Printed in the year 1790, for J. M. and other booksellers. Price six-pence.

8vo pp. 80

Mitchell/NLS

Note “J.M.” is undoubtedly our old friend James Maxwell and so the title was in all likelihood the work of Neilson. The NLS copy bears a MS. signature on the t. page “John Motherwell”.

- 120-90 Poems and songs, by Alexander Tait. Printed for, and sold by the author only. 1790.

8vo pp. 304

PCL

Note Egerer, p. 34 (see note at 92-88) comments: “... probably printed by John Neilson, Paisley.” The book contains a number of poems about Paisley. Andrew Noble writes in *The Canongate Burns* ed. Noble and Scott-Hogg : “Sandy Tait was the author of three unpleasantly frivolous poems on Burns and his family, *Burns in His Infancy*, *Burns in Lochly* and *Burns’s Hen Clockin in Mauchline*.” - Edinburgh, 2001, p. 441.

Printed by John Neilson

- 121-91 The psalm-singer's assistant, etc. ...
Paisley: printed by J. Neilson, and sold by the author. 1791
- 12mo pp. 76 [16 text, rest music] PCL
- Note* A re-print of 113-90. The title must have sold well since Neilson re-printed it yet again in 1793, calling it a second edition "with improvements": see 152-93.
- 122-91 Macgregor's lecture on the art of defence. In which he attempts to prove the antiquity of fencing, and shew the usefulness of it, even now when fire arms are in use; ...
Paisley: printed by J. Neilson, and sold at his shop near the Cross. 1791. Price one shilling and sixpence.
- 8vo pp. 80 (with 2 engravings) PCL; *BL
*though not in ESTC
- 123-91 The history of the reformation of the Church of Scotland. ... In two volumes. By the Reverend Mr. John Knox, sometime minister of God's word in Edinburgh. To which is added, the life of the author, and several curious pieces written by him, viz. I. His appeal from the cruel and most unjust sentence pronounced against him, ... II. His faithful admonition to the true professors of the gospel ... III. His letter to Queen Mary, regent of Scotland. IV. His exhortation to England for the speedy embracing of Christ's gospel. V. The first blast of the trumpet against the monstrous regiment of women. VI. A sermon on Isaiah xxvi.13, &c. ...
Paisley: Printed by Johh Neilson, for David Gardner, 1791.
- 8vo pp. 649 [vol.1], 592 [vol.2] + index and list of subscribers ESTC -BL/NLS
- Note* According to ESTC, the main section was previously published [though not in Paisley] as *The history of the reformation of religion within the realm of Scotland* - clearly a more accurate description of the content than on the t.page of this title. J. Galbraith printed Knox's book in Glasgow in 1761 as did H. Inglis in Edinburgh in 1790. It is interesting to find a copy of this rare Paisley title by Neilson in the Pontificio Collegio Scozzese library in the Vatican.
- 124-91 Testimony-bearing exemplified: a collection. Containing, I. Gillespie against association with malignants; ...II. The inforamatory vindiction [sic]; ... to which is added, a declaration of the Assembly, July ult. 1648, ...Also, a seasonable warning ... by the Assembly, July 27, 1649.
[t.p. imprint variant "A"] Paisley: printed by John Neilson, for the publishers, 1791.
[t.p. imprint variant "B"] Paisley: printed by John Neilson, 1791.

Appendix A

12mo - pp. "A" variant - xxii, [2], 15-484 with a list of subscribers on pp.465-484; "B" variant - xxii, [2], 15-472 with a list of subscribers on pp.[465] - 472.

"A": NLS

"B": *ESTC - GUL/E.A. Hornel Art Gallery and Library*

Note On p.464 we read in one of those notices so beloved of bibliographers: "It is hoped, that the Subscribers will excuse the delay of this Publication, when they are informed, that it was not owing to the negligence of the Publishers; but solely to the Printer's running out of Paper, owing to an increase in the number, and the throngness of the Press." In other words, say the publishers, 'Don't blame us, blame John Neilson for failing to anticipate the demand for the book AND, in any event, our printer is so busy these days that we had no alternative but to take our place in the queue.'

125-91 The glorious state of the saints in Heaven. A sermon on Psal. LXXXIV. II ... By the Reverend and learned John Gill, D.D. Late dissenting minister in London. Paisley: printed by J. Neilson; for G. Caldwell, bookseller. 1791.

12mo pp. 40

PCL

126-91 David and Goliath. A poem; from Sam. chap XVII. To which is added, a brief sequel, from chap. XVIII. &c. By James Maxwell, poet in Paisley. Paisley: printed by J. Neilson. 1791.

8vo pp. 16

NLS

127-91 Poems, humorous, satirical and serious. By Alexander Wilson ... The second edition with additions. Edinburgh: printed for the author, and sold by P. Hill. 1791.

8vo pp. 332

PCL

Note Though, of course, with an Edinburgh imprint, I have included this title here since it is the work of Neilson. Gardyne (see note at 109-89) comments: "This is the same book as the foregoing [i.e. the first edition listed at 112-90 above]. The impression (700 copies) not going off readily, (remains 500), a new title is supplied ... over the word Finis on p.300 - where the book originally finished a typographical ornament has been impressed but too weakly to hide the deception." The contents pp. are not exactly the same as in 112-90, certain new poems - e.g. "Epistle to Mr. D**** B*****" and "Ode for the Birth-Day of our immortal Scottish Poet" [i.e. Burns] having been added in substitution for others deleted. Another notable addition is "To the Honourable William M'Dowal".

Appendix A

Printed by John Weir

- 128-91 The history of the twelve caesars, first emperors of Rome ... With a poem and picture of every emperor. Collected from the most authentic historians, both ancient and modern. By Edward Leigh, esq;
Paisley: printed by J. Weir, bookseller. 1791.

12mo pp. 119

PCL

Note John Weir was a printer and bookseller in Paisley and active - in the latter context only - until 1827. He may have been a son of Alexander Weir (q.v.). In 1791 Weir printed a few titles as noted here but his name does not recur until 1798 when, in that year and in each of the following years, a number of titles carry the joint imprint "Neilson & Weir". John Neilson's takeover, however, was not to mean the end of Weir's independent bookselling activities; indeed, he survived in that branch until 1827 when his shop was *acquired by Archibald Henderson.

**Paisley Advertiser*: 16th June, 1827

- 129-91 The Scots rogue: or, the life and actions of Donald Macdonald, a Highland Scot: ...
Printed by J. Weir, 1791.

12mo pp. 119, [1]

ESTC - McMaster University library

Note Extremely rare. Cf. the Neilson/Caldwell title at 54-84 and the suspect variant t. page referred to in ESTC.

- 130-91 The grave. A Poem. By Robert Blair ...
Paisley: printed by J. Weir, bookseller. 1791.

12mo pp. 24

Mitchell

Note The Paisley émigré bookseller Robert Aitken printed this title - with Gray's Elegy added in for good measure - in Philadelphia in 1773. Also, George Caldwell had it printed (printer not cited) in Glasgow in 1781.

- 131-91 A lamentation for the declining state of Christianity in Scotland; and especially in the town and shire of Ayr ... By James Maxwell, poet in Paisley ...
Paisley: printed by J. Weir, bookseller. 1791.

12mo pp. 32

Mitchell

1792

Printed by John Neilson

- 132-92 Rules agreed upon by the Paisley Protecting Society, against theft, or reset of theft.
Paisley: printed by J. Neilson. 1792

8vo pp. 8

PCL

- 133-92 Thoughts on liberty, and on Mr. Paine's writings. In a letter to a friend. By David Lawson. Published at the desire of several respectable persons in this place.
Paisley: printed by John Neilson. 1792.

8vo pp. 24

PCL

Note David Lawson was a journeyman weaver, and master in the Incorporation of Old Weavers in Paisley. The register of sasines in 1776 names him, and another weaver (Archibald Munro), as sitting tenants, with their respective families, in what is now 14 Shuttle Street, Paisley. Lawson died in 1800.

- 134-92 Liberty without licentiousness. In two letters to a friend.
Paisley: printed by John Neilson. 1792. (Price Four-pence.)

8vo pp. 60

PCL / ESTC - Bodleian

Note ESTC names the author as William Taylor, associate minister of Renton.

- 135-92 The traveller's guide to Loch Lomond, and its environs. Illustrated with a map. By Charles Ross, of Greenlaw ...
Paisley: printed by John Neilson. 1792. (Price four-pence)

8vo pp. 111

PCL

Note Engraving of "Garscadden Gate" opp. t. page. Folding map of Dunbartonshire tipped in at end of book.

- 136-92 Overture concerning Dr. M'Gill's errors and process, ... Prepared by the Reverend Mr. James Robertson, in Kilmarnock, and offered to the Associate Synod of Glasgow, as an overture, March, 1792. Revised by a committee of said Synod, according to appointment.
Paisley: printed by John Neilson. 1792.

8vo pp. 103

PCL

Appendix A

Note There are 12pp. of preliminaries, but the numbering of these stops at p. VIII and the book proper begins on p. [9]. There was probably an eleventh-hour insert of 4pp. and these appear between p. VIII and p. [9] and are not numbered.

- 137-92 The Shunamite. A sacred essay, on 2d Kings, chap. IV. ver. 8 &c. By James Maxwell, poet in Paisley.
Paisley: printed by J. Neilson. 1792.

12mo pp. 16

NLS

- 138-92 On the French revolution. A moral essay on the rights of man. By James Maxwell, poet in Paisley ...
Paisley: printed by J. Neilson. 1792.

12mo pp. 16

NLS

- 139-92 Acrostics and songs, reciprocal between lovers. By James Maxwel [sic] poet in Paisley. N. B. The same author makes acrosticks and songs, or any other poetical pieces in rhyme or blank verse, on all proper subjects, natural, moral, or divine, by commission on, reasonable terms, for all ranks and degrees of mankind.
Paisley: printed by J. Neilson. 1792.

12mo pp. 8

Mitchell

- 140-92 An introduction to reading, for the use of schools.
Paisley: printed by John Neilson, M,DCC,XCII.

12mo pp. 120, [2] - with a final errata leaf

ESTC - BL

- 141-92 The everlasting espousals betwixt Jesus Christ and believers: being a sermon, preached at the administration of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. By the late Rev. Mr. Thomas Boston, ...
Paisley: printed by J. Neilson, for George Caldwell, 1792.

8vo pp. 48

ESTC - EUL/Mitchell

- 142-92 Sermons on various subjects, divine and moral: with a sacred hymn suited to each subject. In two volumes, formerly printed in three ... By Isaac Watts, ...

Appendix A

Paisley: printed by J. Neilson, for James Duncan, Sen., John and William Shaw, and James Gillies, Glasgow; J. and J. Fairbairn, James Dickson, George Mudie, William Laing, and Silvester Doig, Edinburgh; and Ogilvy and Speare, London. 1792.

12mo 2 vols.

ESTC - NLS/Harvard

- 143-92 A select collection of poems, viz. An Essay on man, An essay on criticism, The Messiah, &c. By Alexander Pope, Esq; Together with an account of the life of the author. Paisley: printed by J. Neilson, for Robert Smith, Bookseller, M,DCC,XCII.

12mo pp. 132

ESTC - BL

- 144-92 Meditations upon various and important subjects; and short prayers annexed. With a preface by the Reverend Mr. Hervey, ... To which is now added, Submission to the righteousness of God: ... In two volumes. By Benjamin Jenks, ... Paisley: printed by J. Neilson, for D. Robertson, 1792.

8vo 2 vols. With a list of subscribers

ESTC - Library Company of Philadelphia

Note Extremely rare. I have not seen this title which was first published in 1701. Other titles by the same author were printed in 1792 in Berwick and York.

Printer not cited

- 145-92 A touch on the times; or, observations on Mr. Paine's letter to Mr. Secretary Dundas; set forth in the following dialogue. ... To which is added, by way of appendix, a paraphrase on the sixth chapter of Daniel; with practical observations, remarks, &c. By James Maxwell, poet in Paisley. Printed in the present year.

12mo pp. 32

BL/ESTC - BL

Note Robert Brown (*Paisley Poets, I* - Paisley, 1889, p. 20) gives 1792 as the date of publication whereas ESTC suggests 1793. I prefer Brown's attribution. The title immediately above the opening of the poem on p. [3] is "A touch *of* the times".

- [146-92 The Shark, or, Lang Mills Detected, A Poem. [quotation from Pope]
1792.
[n.p.]

12mo pp. 8

NLS

Note The NLS copy [ref. MS. 493] – the only one I have ever seen, for it is not listed

Appendix A

in ESTC - is, like the copy of *The Hollander* at 116-90 above, a legal production - which explains why it has survived, the Court having ordered "every copy to be handed over which Wilson had in his possession, or which he knew of." I have enclosed this title in square brackets since it is possible that Neilson turned it down and that it was taken to Brash & Reid in Glasgow, a firm Wilson had used before.]

1793

Printed by John Neilson

147-93 *Hamlet*. By Will. Shakspeare: printed complete from the text of Sam. Johnson and Geo. Steevens, and revised from the latest editions ...
Paisley: printed and sold by John Neilson. 1793.

16mo pp. 107

PCL

148-93 Proposals for printing by subscription, in one volume octavo, a miscellany of poems, consisting of elegies, odes, &c. including Edwin and Katharine [sic], or the distressed lovers, a new tragedy. By T. Scott and J. Pasley ... Subscriptions will be taken in by Mr. L. Smith, bookseller, Carlisle; Mr. W. Chambers, bookseller, Dumfries; Mr. W. M'craken, writer, Dumfries; Mr. M'lauchlan, Bookseller, Dumfries; Mr. F. Irving, Merchant, Lochmaben; Mr. Jardine, Post-Master, Lockerby; Mr. Scott, Post-Master, Ecclefechan; Mr. W. Waugh, Merchant, Amman.
[Paisley, Neilson, 1793?]

8vo pp. 11, [1]

ESTC - BL

Note See next title where James Pasley is merely named among the list of subscribers.

149-93 *Poems, with Edwin and Catherine, or the distressed lovers. A tragedy*. By Thomas Scott ...
Printed by John Neilson, for the author. 1793.

8vo pp. 407, [1] (Errata) + "acknowledgment" slip

PCL/*Bodleian*

Note The Bodleian copy contains a MS. note referring to Thomas Scott as "Schoolmaster at Langholm, in Eskdale". See also next title.

150-93 *Edwin and Catherine; or, the distressed lovers A tragedy*. By Thomas Scott.
Paisley: printed by J. Neilson, for the author. 1793.

Appendix A

8vo pp. 16

ESTC - BL

- 151-93 Seneca's morals. By way of abstract. To which is added, a discourse, under the title of an after-thought. By Sir Roger L'Estrange, ...
Paisley: printed and sold by J. Neilson, 1793.

12mo pp. 448

ESTC - NLS

- 152-93 The psalm-singers's [sic] assistant ... By Robert Gilmour, teacher of music, Paisley. The second edition, with improvements.
Paisley: printed by J. Neilson, and sold by the author. 1793.

12mo pp. 76 [16 text, rest music]

Mitchell

Note See also 113-90 and 121-91 above.

- 153-93 On the divine attributes of God, a sacred, philosophical, and poetical essay. By James Maxwell, poet in Paisley ...
Paisley: printed by John Neilson, 1793.

12mo pp. 16

PCL

- 154-93 Sacred songs and hymns, on various passages of scripture. To be sung in the worship of God.
Paisley: printed by J. Neilson, 1793.

12mo pp. [4],224,[2]

ESTC - NLS

- 155-93 Letter from the Reverend Mr. James M'Gregor, minister, at Pictou, Nova Scotia, to the General Associate Synod, April 30th, 1793; published by order of Synod.
Paisley: printed by John Neilson, 1793.

12mo pp. 16

ESTC - NLS/Harvard/ Library Co. of Philadelphia

- 156-93 False delicacy. A comedy. As it is performed at the Theatre-Royal, Drury-Lane. By Hugh Kelly.
Paisley: printed and sold by J. Neilson, 1793.

12mo pp. 55,[1]

ESTC - GUL/NLS

Appendix A

Note Kelly (1739-1777) was a popular Irish critic, political commentator and playwright who came to London as a staymaker in 1760. He received a pension for his political writings which included *Memoirs of a Magdalen* (1767).

157-93 Articles and regulations of the Beith Trades' Society.
Paisley: printed by John Neilson, 1793.

8vo pp.8

ESTC - NLS

1794

Printed by John Neilson

158-94 Poems, in English, Scotch, and Latin ...
Paisley: printed by J. Neilson, for the author. 1794.

8vo pp. 140

PCL

Notes (i) By James Grahame who, also anonymously, had the same volume published in 1793 in London but with a t. page significantly different, viz: "Poems, in English, Scotch, Latin, and Gaelic/London: printed in the year, 1793." Some of the poetry is clearly juvenilia, probably written by Grahame while a student at Glasgow University. It seems to me possible that - taking account of the contents (e.g. the satirical "England's faithfulness to her faithful allies" and the comic poem "Cloacina's Complaints to the College of Clutha", the latter with its thinly veiled reference to Professor John Millar) and, also bearing in mind that Grahame was a trainee advocate at the time of the trial of Thomas Muir of Huntershill, barely a year before this title was published - it was for these reasons that Grahame did not choose to be readily identified as the author. In a MS. note [by George Chalmers or Chambers?] on the t. page of the BL copy with the 1794 Neilson imprint we learn that Grahame was "the son of a respectable Gentleman of Glasgow. He was bred to the law and began his career as a Writer to the Signet Edinr. In 1795 he passed his trials and was admitted Advocate." The word "Neilson" in the imprint is asterisked and the reference reads in the same hand: "Neilson says that a part of these Poems were previously printed in 12mo. But never published: The copy from which he printed this was part print and part MS. *The author imposed secrecy as to his name.* [RLC's italics] This volume was but little circulated and is now rare. The Poems contained in it have never been republished."

(ii) W. L. Renwick in a bibliography of Grahame's published works (p. 274 of his volume in the *Oxford History of English Literature - English Literature 1789-1815*) includes the following title - *The Rural Calendar*, Paisley, 1797. Many years ago I wrote to Professor Renwick seeking further details of this title which was (and is) unknown to me as a Paisley imprint. He replied indicating he had taken the reference from the *Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature* vol. II, p.991 - "an unsatisfactory procedure, I admit." We must surely conclude, therefore, that the date and imprint are spurious.

Appendix A

- 159-94 Three sermons, on the present and future state of the Church. Preached to the society, which support the Wednesday's evening lecture, in Cannon-Street, London ... By John Gill, D. D. The fifth edition ...
Paisley: printed and sold by J. Neilson. 1794.

12mo pp. 58

PCL

- 160-94 The duty of prayer for kings. A sermon, preached in the Presbyterian church of Montreal, April 28. 1793. By the Rev. John Young, ...
Paisley: printed and sold by J. Neilson., 1794.

12° pp. 12

ESTC - NLS

- 161-94 Fifteen sermons preached on various important subjects. By George Whitefield, A. B. late of Pembroke College, Oxford. Carefully corrected and revised According to the best London edition. To which is prefixed a sermon, on the character, preaching, &c. of the Rev. Mr. Whitefield. By Joseph Smith, V.D.M.
Paisley: printed by J. Neilson, for J. Gillies, Bookseller, above the cross, Glasgow, 1794.

8vo pp. 300

ESTC - BL

Note George Whitefield (1714-1770) was a charismatic English evangelist who was invited by the Associate Presbytery of the Seceders to come to Scotland in the hope his presence would strengthen their cause. Between 1741 and 1768 he paid 14 visits to Scotland. (John Wesley also made Scotland part of his mission field and visited it 22 times between 1751 and 1790.) Whitefield went to America finally in 1769 - he had visited the country three times previously in 1744-48, 1751-52 and 1754-55 - and died there, at Newburyport, Massachusetts, in 1770. According to Jeffrey H. Morrison in his *John Witherspoon and the Founding of the American Republic* [Notre Dame, Indiana, 2005] Whitefield was among those who persuaded Witherspoon to finally accept the call to the Presidency of the College of New Jersey in 1768.

- 162-94 The whole prophecies of Scotland, England, France, Ireland, and Denmark. Prophecied by Thomas Rhymer, Marvellous Merling, Beid, Berlington, Waldhave, Eltrain, Banestar, and Sybilla. Containing many strange matters, which have happened, and will be known for times to come from the year of our lord 1622 to 1822. ...
Paisley: printed by John Neilson for G. Caldwell, 1794.

8vo pp. 48

ESTC - BL/NLS

Printer not cited

- 163-94 Declaration and address of the Presbytery of Paisley, to the people under their charge. Paisley, 5th. February, 1794.

12mo pp. 4

PCL

Appendix A

Note No t. page.

- 164-94 Six original essays, or discourses concerning the moral law of God, and the gospel; ... By John Brown, lender and seller of books, midst of the east-side of the water wynd of Paisley ...
Paisley: Printed in the year 1794.

12mo pp. ["vol. 1"] 456, ["vol.2"] 224

PCL

Note 2 vols. bound into one. The "Introduction" is dated "May 28, 1794". The end of Essay III is also, we are informed, the end of Volume 1 "to those who chuses [sic] to bind the Essays in Two Volumes. Place the Map of the World here, or at the Title Page." In this copy the map is tipped in opp. the t. page.

- 165-94 Seven sermons; viz. I. Of the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost; ... II. The Saint's duty and exercise: ... III. The accepted time, and day of salvation. IV. The end of time, and beginning of eternity. V. Joshua's resolution to serve the Lord. VI. way to heaven made plain. VII. The future state of man; or, a treatise of the resurrection. By Robert Russel, ...
Paisley: printed for J. Gillies, Glasgow; and sold by the booksellers of Great-Britain, Ireland, and America, 1794.

12mo pp. 107, [1]

ESTC - GUL/BL/Lochgoin Farmhouse library

- 166-94 The wonderful life and most surprising adventures of that renowned hero, Robinson Crusoe. ...
Paisley: [printed] for J. Gillies, Glasgow, and sold by the booksellers in Great Britain, Ireland and America, 1794

12mo pp. 108 with illustrations

ESTC - McMaster University library

Note Extremely rare. I have not seen this title.

Printed by John Neilson

- 167-94 The Scottish volunteers. A musical farce. In two acts. Written by Archibald M'Laren, ...
As it was performed at the theatre, Greenock.
Paisley: printed by J. Neilson, for the author, and R. Smith, bookseller. 1795.

12mo pp. 28

PCL

Notes (i) Cf. 104-89. (ii) Robert Smith was a publisher and bookseller in Paisley from 1795 to 1823. He combined his bookselling activities with those of an auctioneer. Robert Brown comments: *"The books he dealt in were mostly of the pamphlet and chap-book kind, which he sold to the hawkers or flying stationers." It was Smith who had Neilson print for him in 1802 the famous (at least in the eyes of bibliographers) two volume so-called "Peastrae edition" of the works of Burns. (iii) Smith's name also figures quite prominently in the 1797 daybook of Alexander Leslie, the radical Edinburgh bookseller (see chapter 2 of thesis). He was the publisher of one of Paisley's rarest of all books of this period - the *Letter, from Thomas Paine to Cammille* [sic]- *Jordan* (1797) - see 201-97 below.

* *Paisley Burns Clubs 1805-1893* (Paisley, 1893).

- 168-95 A brief narrative: or, some remarks on the life of James Maxwell, poet, in Paisley. Written by himself, at the beginning of his entering the seventy-sixth year of his age. Paisley, May 9th, 1795
Printed by J. Neilson, for the author, 1795.

12mo pp. 32

NLS

Note See also 73-86 above.

- 169-95 The loss and recovery of elect sinners: with the difficulty of their coming back again to glory. Methodically held forth Under the Similitude of Captives ransomed and returning from Slavery. By Mr. John Adamson, late preacher of the Gospel.
Paisley: printed by J. Neilson, for James Gillies, Bookseller, Glasgow, 1795.

12mo pp. 272

ESTC - GUL/NLS

Printer not cited

- 170-95 Issacher [sic] the strong ass overburdened; or, the groans of Britannia from the Pitt. By James Maxwell, poet in Paisley. Printed for the author. [n.d.]

12mo pp. 8

Mitchell

Appendix A

Note See also next two titles. William Motherwell, though he spells the name “Issachar”, comments on this title: “This, though without date, place, or printer’s name, was published in Paisley from the press of John Neilson, 1795.” *Paisley Magazine*, Paisley, 1828, XIII, p.678.

- 171-95 Issachar, the strong ass over-burdened; or, the groans of Britannia from the Pitt. A poem, descriptive of the times ... Printed in the present year. [n.d.]

12mo pp. 8

NLS

Note Cf. 170 and 172-95. Most uncharacteristically, not only is Maxwell’s name absent from the t. page, but it is no longer stated that the work has been printed “for the author”. It is entirely possible that it was Neilson himself who insisted on these changes in the light of current sensitivities concerning the printing of political material. But see the restoration of at least Maxwell’s initials in the next title.

- 172-95 Issachar, the strong ass, over-burdened; or, the groans of Britannia from the Pitt. A poem, descriptive of the times. Part II. By J. M. author of the first part. Printed in the present year. [n.d.]

12mo pp. 8

Mitchell

- 173-95 Watty and Meg; or, the wife reformed, a tale. [crude engraving] Entered according to order, 1795.

12mo pp. 8

Mitchell

Notes (i) By Alexander Wilson, this is the rare Paisley edition. It was at first believed that this enormously popular poem, with a story along the same lines as *Tam O’Shanter*, was the work of Burns. Clark Hunter comments: “It may even be that it was published anonymously in the hope that it would be mistaken for the work of Burns. Many thousands of copies of the poem were sold with little or no profit accruing to Wilson. The first and many of the succeeding printings were by Neilson, who had been tolerant of Wilson’s difficulties in paying for the printing of his first edition; Wilson repaid his generosity with such profit as was earned by ‘Watty and Meg’.” [Hunter, C. *The Life and Letters of Alexander Wilson*, Philadelphia, The American Philosophical Society, 1983, p. 43]. Brash and Reid in Glasgow also printed the poem in successive editions from 1796.

(ii) This poem and its companion-piece *Rab and Ringan* - also printed and published on its own by Brash and Reid in Glasgow almost certainly in the same year as *Watty and Meg* - feature in the first vol. of a 4 vol. *anthology printed and sold by them to satisfy the unprecedented thirst for poetry in the Scots dialect immediately following the death of Burns in 1796.

* *Poetry; original and selected* Glasgow, n.d. [ESTC states vol. 1 came out in 1796 with the other vols. at intervals thereafter to 1798.]

Appendix A

174-95 Bonny Paisley. To which are added Robin A' Boon. My deary an thou die. And now or never. [crude engraving] Entered according to order, 1795.

12mo pp. 8

PCL

1796

Printed by John Neilson

175-96 Description of above three hundred animals, ... with a particular account of the manner of catching whales in Greenland ... Illustrated with copperplates ... Paisley: printed by J. Neilson, for James Lumsden, engraver, Glasgow. 1796.

12mo pp. 206

PCL

Note A book for children. See note on James Lumsden at 222-99 below.

176-96 Poems on various subjects by Robert Fergusson. In two parts. Paisley: printed by J. Neilson, for R. Smith, bookseller. 1796.

12mo pp. 226, 2 [contents]

NLS

Note Another example of a printer attempting to cash in on the upswell of popular demand for all things poetical - especially if it was in the Scots vernacular - after the death of the 'Master', Robert Burns. Note that after p.199 the type is in a smaller fount. See also next title as well as 186-96 and 221-99 below.

177-96 A selection of Scots and English poems. From the most approved authors. Paisley: printed by J. Neilson; for R. Smith, bookseller, 1796.

18mo pp. 35,[1]

ESTC - Buffalo and Erie County Public Library

Note Obviously extremely rare. I have not seen this title. Apparently, the little book is gathered in 6's.

178-96 A concordance to the Holy Scriptures: with the significations and applications of the words contained therein. Also, all the Hebrew and Greek names of Persons and Places mentioned in the Old and New Testament, rendered into English, and placed in Alphabetical Order. To which are added, the titles and appellations given to Christ and the church. The third edition. By John Fisher, Philadelphus.

Paisley: printed by J. Neilson, for J. & A. Duncan; J. & W. Shaw; J. & M. Robertson, booksellers, Glasgow; and G. Caldwell, Bookseller, Paisley, M.DCC.XCVI.

8vo pp. iv,[308]

ESTC - EUL/BL/NLS

Appendix A

- 179-96 The Psalms of David in metre. ... Allowed by the authority of the General Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland, ...
Paisley: printed by J. Neilson, for James Gillies, Glasgow, 1796.

12mo pp. [72]

ESTC - GUL/NLS

- 180-96 A second caution against infidelity. Especially against Paine's Age of Reason, and others, who are striving to over-throw the authority of the Holy Scriptures. By James Maxwell, poet, in Paisley.
Paisley: printed for the author, by John Neilson. 1796.

Broadside, printed 1 side.

PCL

Note Of historical and bibliographical, but not much literary interest. Maxwell had not always such a rare loathing for Thomas Paine : see the titles at 145-92 (*A touch on the times*) and the *Issachar* poems at 170 to 172-95. [At the time of preparing this checklist, the PCL copy could not be found by library staff.]

- 181-96 The believer's charter: or, the Holy Scriptures vindicated ... Written and published for the defence of the truth, and for the comfort and confirmation of all true believers. By James Maxwell, poet, in Paisley. N. B. the first six lines are by another hand.
Paisley: printed for the author, by John Neilson, 1796.

Broadside, printed 1 side.

PCL

Note Another of the same.

- 182-96 The atheist's mistake; or, the infidel's warning piece. To which is added a serious thought on the final judgment of the world. By James Maxwell, poet in Paisley.

Not traced

Note William Motherwell comments in his 1828 article on Maxwell in the *Paisley Magazine* : "No date nor place but printed by Neilson, Paisley." Probably 1796.

- 183-96 Prospects of providence respecting the conversion of the world to Christ. A sermon ...
By John Snodgrass, D.D. One of the ministers of Paisley.
Paisley: printed by J. Neilson, bookseller, 1796.

8vo pp. 52

PCL

Note Uniquely, Neilson is designated in this and the next title as "bookseller".

Appendix A

- 184-96 Right reformation; or, the reformation of the church of the New Testament, ... By William Dell, minister of the gospel, attending on His Excellency Sir Tho. Fairfax. ... Paisley: printed by J. Neilson, bookseller, 1796.
- 12mo pp. 48 PCL
- 185-96 Regulations respecting the management, &c. of the pay of the Renfrewshire Yeomanry. Paisley: printed by J. Neilson, 1796.
- 8vo pp. 16 *ESTC - The National Archives*
- Printer not cited**
- 186-96 The ghaists: a kirk-yard eclogue. By Robert Fergusson. Paisley: printed for R. Smith, 1796.
- 8vo pp. 8 *ESTC - NLS*
- Note* See note at 176-96 above.
- 187-96 Seven new sermons to asses. By the author of Sermons to asses. Paisley: printed for R. Smith, Bookseller, M.DCC.XCVI. 12mo pp. 108 *ESTC - BL/NLS*
- 188-96 The Dover vision; a poem. With political remarks. By a North British volunteer ... October 25th, 1796.
- 12mo pp. [xiv],[56],[6] Mitchell
- 189-96 Poems including Pope's "Eloisa to Abelard", Smollett's "Ode to Independence", Allan Ramsay's "The Monk and the Miller's Wife", etc.]
- 12mo pp. 83 Mitchell
- Note* Referred to in the Mitchell catalogue of Scottish Poetry - ref. Mitchell 74071 - as 'Paisley, 1796'.
- 190-96 The Song of Solomon paraphrased in metre; with explanatory notes and practical observations, in prose. By James Maxwell, poet, in Paisley. Printed for the author, and sold by him, 1796.
- 8vo pp. 64 NLS

Appendix A

191-96 To the honourable Society of Writers in Paisley.

Broadside, printed 1 side.

Mitchell

Note The letter is in the form of an acknowledgment for “the generous Donation I have received from your benevolent hands; so unexpected, unmerited, and unsolicited; yet so very seasonable.” There follow two stanzas from “the Poor Old Bard” and the poem is signed “James Maxwell” and dated “Paisley, Nov. 21st, 1796.”

192-96 War against Heaven openly declared by multitudes in this degenerate age; ... A seasonable and serious exhortation for all sorts to consider of their ways, before it be too late. By James Maxwell, poet, in Paisley.
Paisley: printed for the author, 1796.

12mo pp. 8

Mitchell

193-96 Translations and paraphrases in verse, of several passages of sacred scripture. Collected and prepared by a committee of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. In order to be sung in churches.
Paisley: printed for J. Dickson, Edinburgh, and J. Gillies, Glasgow, 1796.

12mo pp. 19,[1]

ESTC - GUL/NLS

1797

Printed by John Neilson

194-97 The last letters of Thomas Potts, who was executed, at Paisley, August 17, 1797. Written to his wife and friends, while under sentence of death. (Entered at Stationers' Hall).
Paisley: printed by J. Neilson. 1797.

12mo pp. 15

PCL

195-97 A guide to the English tongue: in two parts. ... By T. Dyche, Schoolmaster at Stratford Bow. 101st. edition.
Paisley: printed by J. Neilson, 1797.

12mo pp. 156, plate

*Lochgoin Farmhouse library -
[catalogue compiled by W. E. Tyler]
in Andersonian Library,*

Note Re-printed as the 102nd edition by Neilson & Weir in Paisley in 1800.

Printer not cited

- 196-97 Observations on the awful execution of Thomas Potts, an Irishman, who was executed at the Cross of Paisley, upon Thursday the seventeenth of August, 1797, for house-breaking and robbery. A memorandum poem, by James Maxwell, poet in Paisley.

Broadside, printed 1 side.

PCL

Note Cf. 194-97. "Price, one penny" is printed at the bottom of the sheet, after the poem.

- 197-97 An elegy on the much lamented death of that faithful minister of Christ, the Reverend John Snodgrass D.D. late minister of the gospel in Paisley, ... [dedicatory address to Snodgrass' widow which is signed "James Maxwell" and dated "Paisley, June 28th, 1797."]

Broadside, printed 1 side.

PCL

Note This title is not listed in either Brown's or Motherwell's lists of Maxwell's published works.

- 198-97 An elegy on the much lamented death ... [as title immediately above]

Broadside, printed 1 side.

PCL

Note The same text as 197-97, but with an entirely different typographical layout.

- 199-97 An elegy, on the much lamented death of that noble patriot, Robert Cross, late of Greenlaw, esq; who departed this life, on May 21st, 1797, in the 56th year of his age, after a few weeks illness, universally lamented by all who knew him ... [dedicatory address to "his amiable and disconsolate surviving lady" signed "James Maxwell" and dated "Paisley, May 29th, 1797."]

Broadside, printed 1 side.

Mitchell

- 200-97 The last sickness and death of a beautiful young lady, who was suddenly called off the stage of mortal life in her prime, before she came to the twenty first year of her age ... By James Maxwell, poet in Paisley. Printed 1797.

12mo pp. 16

Mitchell

Note Not listed in either Brown or Motherwell.

Appendix A

- 201-97 Letter, from Thomas Paine, to Cammille [sic] - Jordan, of the Council of Five Hundred. Occasioned by his report on the priests, public worship, and the bells. Paisley: printed for R. Smith, 1797.

12mo pp. 8

ESTC - Cambridge UL

Note Extremely rare. ESTC lists only the Cambridge copy extant anywhere. It is also one of the least known of Paine's works, not cited, for example, in any of the modern biographies of Paine nor is it reproduced in modern anthologies of Paine (e.g. Foot and Kramnick's *The Thomas Paine Reader*). The work was published in the same year, 1797, in *London but, interestingly, the Paisley edition is not a mere reprint of that version, Smith's title being duodecimo and the London title octavo. The London edition is also extremely rare, ESTC listing just one copy in the library of the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia. See note on Robert Smith, bookseller and publisher, at 167-94.

**Letter, from Thomas Paine to Camille-Jordan, of the Council of Five Hundred. Occasioned by his report on the priests, public worship, and the bells. London: printed, and sold by all booksellers, 1797.*

Titles not traced - printer not known [but likely to have been Neilson]

- 202-97 The dawning of the glorious latter days, which seem now approaching, set forth in a new celestial song. By James Maxwell, poet in Paisley. Price one penny. Paisley: printed for and sold by the author. 1797

Note As listed by Brown, vol. I, p.21.

- 203-97 The final downfall of antichrist, with all his votaries, &c., &c., and the eternal establishment of Christ's kingdom. An evangelical essay. By James Maxwell, poet in Paisley. Price one penny.

Note As listed by Brown, vol. I, p.21.

- 204-97 On peace with Heaven, then peace on earth. A sacred maxim and moral essay. By James Maxwell, poet in Paisley. Printed for the author and sold by him. [n.p.] 1797.

Note As listed by Brown, vol. I, p.22

1798

Printed by John Neilson

Appendix A

- 205-98 A preservative from the sins and follies of childhood and youth. Written by way of question and answer. By I. Watts, D.D.
Paisley: printed and sold by J. Neilson. 1798.

12mo pp. 52

PCL

Printed by Neilson and Weir

- 206-98 Two discourses: - - - The first, preached June 17. 1798, before the Associate Congregation in Paisley, on occasion of the death of the Rev. James Alice, their senior pastor: the second, preached July 1. 1798, in the High Church of Paisley, before the Friends of the Sabbath Schools: ... By W. Ferrier, minister of the Associate Congregation in Paisley. There is added, a short authenticated account of the the rise, progress, and present sate [sic] of the Sabbath Schools in Paisley.
Paisley: printed and sold by Neilson & Weir; sold also by the other booksellers in town ... 1798

8vo pp. 176

PCL

Notes (i) John Neilson's partnership with John Weir survived only until 1800 in which year there are some titles bearing, as in this title, the joint imprint and others the more familiar "J. Neilson" who resumes printing on his own account later that year. The bookseller John Weir - who had, of course, himself printed a few titles independently in 1791 - continued in his bookselling business until 1827 when his shop was acquired by Archibald Henderson. (ii) for an account of the rise of the Paisley sabbath schools, see my 1965 B. Litt. thesis, Appendix II, p. 285. (iii) second edition with revised t. page and imprint in next title.

- 207-98 Two discourses: - - - preached, the first, on occasion of the death of the Rev. Mr. Alice; and the second, before the friends of the sabbath evening schools in Paisley, by W. Ferrier, ... There is added, a short authenticated account of the rise, progress and present sate [sic] of the sabbath schools in Paisley. ...
Paisley: printed and sold by Neilson & Weir; sold also by the other booksellers in town; Vernor & Hood, R. Chapman, J. Mathews, J. Murgatroyd, and W. Button, London; [and by 3 booksellers in Edinburgh, 2 in Glasgow, 1 in Kilmarnock, 1 in Ayr, 1 in Greenock, 3 in Perth, 2 in Dundee and 1 in Aberdeen], 1798.

8vo pp. 176

ESTC - BL/GUL

Note Cf. the first edition of the previous title. The addition of the word "evening" on the t. page between "sabbath" and "schools" is interesting and significant - as is the irresponsible carry-over into this 2nd edition of the misspelling "sate" for "state".

Appendix A

Printer not cited

- 208-98 On riches and poverty, or the poor rich man, and the rich poor man. These two divide most of the world. Being a faithful and friendly warning to mankind, collected from several scriptures. By James Maxwell, poet in Paisley.
Paisley: printed for, and sold by, the author. (Price one penny.) 1798.

12mo pp. 8

NLS

- 209-98 Victory obtained over the French fleet, on the memorable first of August - 1798. The Honourable Sir Horatio Nelson met the French fleet at the mouth of the Nile ... By James Maxwell, poet in Paisley.
Paisley: printed for the author, and sold by the booksellers. (Price, one penny.) 1798.

12mo pp. 8

NLS

- 210-98 The second Pentecost; or, the wonderful and amazing out-pouring of the spirit of God. ... A very seasonable essay, by James Maxwell, poet in Paisley ...
Paisley: printed for, and sold by the author (Price, one penny.) 1798.

12mo pp. 8

Mitchell

Note Not listed by Brown or Motherwell.

- 211-98 Scripture-hymns on baptism. By James Maxwell, poet in Paisley.
Paisley: printed for and sold by the author, 1798.

12mo pp. 8

ESTC - BL/Princeton

- 212-98 The infidel and Christian schemes compared, an essay. In three parts, by James Maxwell, poet in Paisley.
Paisley: printed for, and sold by the author, 1798.

12mo pp. 8

ESTC - Princeton

Note One of the rarest of all Maxwell's titles. According to ESTC, no copies survive in any of the great European libraries.

- 213-98 A birth-day poem for James Maxwell, written by himself, on May the Ixth, [sic] M,DCC,XCVII. when he entered the LXXIX [sic] year of his age, in a very frail condition, and in great expectation of his death.
[Paisley? s.n., 1798]

Appendix A

demi-sheet

ESTC - Bodleian

Note A very rare Maxwell title. He writes: “*My years are arrived almost to fourscore*”.

1799

Printed by Neilson and Weir

- 214-99 The divine right of church government: wherein it is proved, by fair and conclusive arguments, that the Presbyterian government ... may lay the only lawful claim to a divine right ... A new edition corrected and amended. By sundry ministers of Christ within the City of London ...
Paisley: printed by Neilson and Weir. 1799.

8vo pp. 264

PCL

- 215-99 Renfrewshire Association [proclamation re. “preservation of Game in the County of Renfrew”.]

Broadside, printed both sides

PCL

Note There is an imprint on p.2 - “Paisley: printed by Neilson & Weir, Cumberland. 1799.”

- 216-99 A commentary, with notes, on part of the book of the Revelation of John. By the late John Snodgrass, D.D. Minister of the Middle Church of Paisley.
Paisley: printed by Neilson and Weir. 1799.

8vo pp. [xii],592

PCL

- 217-99 A concordance to the Holy Scriptures: with the significations and applications of the words contained therein. Also all the Hebrew and Greek names of persons and places mentioned in the Old and New Testament rendered into English, and placed in alphabetical order. To which are added, the titles and appellations given to Christ and the church. By John Fisher, Philadelphus. The fourth edition.
Paisley: printed by Neilson & Weir, for R. Smith, bookseller. 1799.

12mo pp. 312

PCL/NLS

- 218-99 Religious correspondence in three letters, containing a general address to sinners, with a short account of the author’s own conversion; ...
Paisley: printed by Neilson & Weir, Cumberland, 1799.

Appendix A

*Lochgoin Farmhouse library -
catalogue in Andersonian Library, University of Strathclyde*

- 219-99 The fruitless fig-tree, a parable ...Paraphrased and applied, by James Maxwell, poet in Paisley.
Paisley: printed for the author, by Neilson & Weir. 1799. Price one penny.

12mo pp. 8

NLS

- 220-99 A friendly and monitory poem for the new year 1800, being the first of the nineteenth century, by James Maxwell, poet in Paisley.
Paisley: printed for the author, by Neilson & Weir, Cumberland, 1799. (Price, one penny.)

12mo pp. 8

NLS

Printer not cited

- 221-99 The poetical works of R. Fergusson
Paisley published by R. Smith bookseller 1799.

12mo pp. 233,[2 contents pp.]

NLS

Notes (i) See note at 176-96 above. (ii) J. A. Fairley in his *Bibliography of Robert Fergusson* [Glasgow, 1915] p. 137 points out: "... - 186 is made up of sheets from unsold stock of no. 28 [i.e. Neilson's 1796 edition]; 187-233 and contents have been reprinted [by Neilson and Weir?], either because they were exhausted, or possibly to get rid of the smaller type pages." (iii) Engraving of "Mr. Robert Fergusson" opposite t. page.

Titles printed by John/J. Neilson n.d. - but possibly 1799

- 222-99 The Holy Bible abridged: or, the history of the Old and New Testament. Illustrated with notes and adorned with forty-eight beautiful copperplates. For the use of children.
Paisley: printed by J. Neilson, and sold wholesale by J. Lumsden, engraver, Glasgow,

32mo pp. 144, with illustrations

ESTC - NLS

Notes (i) ESTC cites S. Roscoe and R. A. Brimmell's *James Lumsden & Son of Glasgow* [Library Association, private, 1981] in support of the date 1799 for this title but since no other titles have come to light bearing the imprint "John (or J.) Neilson" for 1799 and since there are titles bearing both "Neilson and Weir" and "J. Neilson" in 1800 it seems to me more likely that this belongs to 1800 rather than 1799. Nevertheless, to highlight the uncertainty on date I have chosen to include it here. (ii) The engraver James

Appendix A

Lumsden was best known for his contributions to children's books and chapbooks. He retired in 1810 and died in 1821, aged 68. Both his son and grandson were knighted (as Sir James Lumsden in each case) and each served a term as Lord Provost of Glasgow.

223-99 The history of Master Jackey and Miss Harriot. Dedicated to the good children of Europe, Asia, Africa, and America.
Paisley: printed by J. Neilson. And sold wholesale by J. Lumsden engraver, Glasgow

24mo pp. 23,[1] with illustrations

ESTC - NLS

Appendix B

Quoted sections from The Paisley *Declaration of Rights* read to the Court as part of the indictment in the trial of Thomas Muir - Edinburgh, 30th August 1793

Bibliographical description of title page

A/DECLARATION OF RIGHTS/AND/An Address to the People./Approved of by a number of the Friends of Reform/in Paisley./[double rule]/ It is no injury to the Community that each/Individual enjoy his Right./[double rule]

8vo n.d., n.p. (1790?) (Paisley?) 16pp.

British Library

“DECLARATION OF RIGHTS.

I The Government of this realm, and the making of laws for the same, ought to be lodged in the hands of King, Lords of Parliament, and the representatives of *the whole body* of the free men of this realm.

II Every Briton (infants, insane persons, and criminals only excepted) is of common right, and by the laws of God, a *free* man, and intitled to the full enjoyment of *liberty*.

III A Briton's liberty, or freedom, consists in having *an actual share*, either in legislation itself, or in the *appointing* of those who are to frame the laws; which, although they ought to protect him in the full enjoyment of those absolute rights, that are vested in him by the immutable laws of nature, may yet be fabricated to the destruction of his person, his property, his religious freedom, family, and fame.

IV It is the right of the commons of Britain to *elect* a new house of parliament once at least in *every year*: because, when a parliament continues for a longer term than *one Session*, thousands, who have attained to man's estate since it was elected, and are therefore entitled to enter into possession of their best inheritance, the actual exercise of their elective franchise, are, in that case, unjustly *denied their right, and excluded from freedom.*”

Appendix B

“AN ADDRESS, &c.
FRIENDS AND COUNTRYMEN,

Permit us, with the affection and anxiety, that Citizens ought to feel for their country, to submit to your consideration some reasons, why, in our humble opinion, the reform of parliament, now in agitation, ought not to be regarded by you with indifference.”

[Note by RLC: All four sections quoted by the Lord Advocate, Robert Dundas, in the course of Muir’s indictment are reproduced here. Note, however, that the footnote to the 4th section was omitted from Dundas’s statement to the Court.]

1st section [p. 4]

“Being subject to the legislation of persons whom *other men have placed over you*, it is evident you are denied that which is the right of every one, and without which none are *free*. For to be *enslaved* is to have no will of your own in the choice of those law-makers which have power over your *properties*, your *families*, your *lives*, and *liberties*. Those who have no votes for electing representatives are not free as the rights of nature, and the principles of our constitution require, but are enslaved to the representatives of those who have votes.”

2nd section [p. 5]

“Should you not associate in your own cause, and with one voice, the voice of united millions, demand a reform in the national *representation*,” ... [“there is reason to fear it will be but imperfectly amended.”]

3rd section [pp. 8-9]

“But such a Parliament cannot be had, unless we will revert to the first principles of our constitution, which we have so shamefully abandoned. A government where the executive and legislative power meet in a single person has no more pretence to freedom, it is perfect despotism, and the people who submit to it are in a state of slavery. If the will of the Prince *must* be *law*, in what manner it is announced, whether the mandate issue directly from the throne itself, or through the medium of the House of Commons is a matter of indifference. If that assembly is no longer the representative of the people, the constitution is *changed*. If those men who are said to represent us, are only the *registers* of the *royal edicts*, the government is degenerated into an *absolute monarchy*. Since electing a Parliament is our only security against an *arbitrary* power in the Crown; *election* itself must be not only the common right, but the common *duty* of all the people.”

4th section [pp. 15-16]

“But the evils of long Parliaments – are they not written in *tears*, and in *blood*? And have they left us aught of liberty, but the *name*? With the poor exception then, of one year of freedom in *seven*, and that in favour of not *one seventh* part of the nation, it is demonstrated that you are *constantly taxed, without being represented, and compelled to obey laws, to which you never gave assent*. Are not these the very definitions of slavery? And are you not thus degraded to a level with the very *cattle* in the field, and the *sheep* in the fold, which are a property to those who rule over them, and *have no power to say*, Why are we bought and sold? Why are we yoked and laden with heavy *burdens*? Why are we *fleece*d and led to the slaughter?”

Appendix B

Demand then, with one voice, friends and countrymen, that share in making your own laws, to which, by the constitution and the laws of nature, you are entitled†. Call for the *Bill* which would restore your lost constitution, and recover your stolen rights! Pursue the only course which can ever effect any considerable reduction of debts and taxes, or materially advance the interests of manufactures and commerce! - In short, be free, prosperous and happy! and give your posterity the same cause to rever [sic] *your* memories, as you have to bless *those progenitors* who left you an inheritance in a free constitution!”

† The rich and poor being of the same species, are under the same laws of nature, and being alike capable of benefit, or injury from their legislators, they necessarily have, in the election of those legislators, the same rights. But the rich, in defence of their liberty and property have every advantage which wealth, learning, and the purchased services of others can afford them; while the poor, destitute of all these, have no security but in the purity of legislation, nor any means of self defence, but in retaining their share of the elective power.

The poor then, have an equal right, but more need, to elect representatives than the rich. He that is free, possesses that which is more to be valued than riches: but, robbed of liberty, he is poor indeed!

Appendix C

The significance of the 1793 *Declaration* of the Friends to the Liberty of the Press

Sources

1 *Proceedings of the Friends to the Liberty to the Press on December the 22d, 1792 and January 19th, and March 9th, 1793. Printed by Order of the Committee. 1793.*

2 *The Resolutions of the First Meeting of the Friends to the Liberty of the Press, December 19th, 1792. Also, The Declaration of the Second Meeting, January 22nd, 1793, written by The Hon. Thomas Erskine ; to which is added, A Letter to Mr. Reeves, Chairman of the Association for Preserving Liberty and Property : By Thomas Law, Esq. Late one of the Committee of that Society, London : Printed for J. Ridgway, York-Street, St. James's-Square 1793. [Price Sixpence.]*

3 Article on *Thomas Erskine* in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (online edition) by David Lemming, Oxford, 2004-2010.

The first two meetings took place in Free-Mason's Tavern, London on December 19 and 22, 1792 with Erskine, then Gerard Noel Edwards, Esq. M.P., respectively in the Chair. Erskine's speech at the first meeting contained the following (slightly misleading) account of his family circumstances in Edinburgh, designed more for rhetorical effect than with an eye for accuracy:

"I belong to the people - they raised me from poverty to affluence - from obscurity to notice - they have a right to demand my services - they shall have them".

At the third meeting held in the Crown and Anchor Tavern on 19 January, 1793 - the same venue as the fourth meeting - the Chair was again taken by Erskine and at the meeting on 9 March the reformist M.P. and dramatist, Richard Brinsley Sheridan was in the Chair. It was at this March meeting that a decision was taken to the effect

"That 10,000 copies of the Declaration proposed by the Hon. Thomas Erskine and unanimously adopted at the last General Meeting, be circulated throughout the country".

At a meeting of the "Stewards" in the Crown and Anchor on 13 March, with Sheridan in the Chair, it was resolved that a committee be formed "for the purposes directed by the General Meeting of the 9th Instant." A total of thirty-six names follows which include those of well-known reformists such as Colonel Macleod M.P., Lord Daer, Capel Lofft, Charles Grey M.P., the Earl of Lauderdale, Charles Sturt M.P., John Rawdon M.P., Samuel Whitbread M.P., Sheridan and, of course, Erskine himself.

The *Declaration* issued by the Friends to the Liberty of the Press is an important document in the context of the movement to uphold and defend press freedom in the 1790s. Yet it is not

Appendix C

particularly well known. The statement begins with reference to the threat to press freedom graphically articulated by Erskine in his typical, rather florid style :

“A sudden alarm has been spread through the Kingdom by the Ministers of the Crown, of imminent danger to the Constitution, and to all Order and Government. The Nation has been represented to be fermenting into Sedition and Insurrection, through the dangerous Association and Writings of disaffected subjects ; and under the pressure of this perilous conjuncture the Parliament has been suddenly assembled, and the Militia embodied”.

The Friends was set up to counteract the ‘Reevesian’ Associations as a dangerous over-reaction and to speak up for the ancient principle of liberty of the press. Most shocking of all is the threat even to private conversation uttered in one’s own home :

“We assemble neither to reprehend, nor to dictate to others, but from a principle of public duty to enter our solemn protest against the propriety or justice of those Associations, which by the contagion of example are spreading fast over England, supported by the Subscriptions of opulent men, for the avowed object of *suppressing and prosecuting* Writings : more especially, when these rewards are extended (of which there are instances) to question and to punish opinions delivered even in the private intercourses of domestic life ; unmixed with any act or manifested intention against the authority of the laws”.

In the concluding part of the *Declaration* Erskine can’t resist a final swipe at the legal travesty that condemned some (without naming them – but in Scotland, for example, Robertson and Berry) to prison simply for having possessed or handed on to others certain books deemed unacceptable by the ‘authorities’, on the grounds that they were ‘bad books’ - and it ends with the following resounding defence of a free press :

The Press, therefore, as it is to be affected by Associations of individuals to fetter its general freedom, *wholly unconnected with any attack on private character*, is a very different consideration ; for if the nation is to be combined to suppress writings, without further describing what those writings are, than by the general denomination – *sedition* ; and if the exertions of these combinations are not even to be confined to suppress and punish the circulation of books, *already condemned by the judgments of Courts*, but are to extend to whatever does not happen to fall in with their private judgments : - if every writing is to be prosecuted which they may not have the sense to understand, or the virtue to practise: - if no man is to write but upon their principles, nor can read with safety except what they have written, lest he should accidentally talk of what he has read; - no man will venture either to write or to speak upon the topics of Government or its Administration – a freedom which has ever been acknowledged by our greatest statesmen and lawyers to be the principal safeguard of that Constitution, which liberty of thought originally created, and which a FREE PRESS for its circulation gradually brought to maturity.

Finally, the identity of some of the signatories to the *Declaration* is of considerable interest. Apart from those of most of the M.P.s noted above, the names include those of radicals like John Thelwall, Maurice Margarot, Joseph Gerald [sic], Thomas Hardy, and the extremist Robert Watson. Intriguingly, the list also includes William Reid (of Brash and Reid, booksellers in Glasgow) and Daniel Isaac Eaton, the ‘godfather’ of radical publishers.

Appendix D

The Hugh Simm letters at Princeton¹ and their significance for Scottish diaspora studies

The Hugh Simm Collection located in the Manuscripts Division of the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections at the Firestone Library, Princeton University consists of 22 letters from Hugh Simm (1737-1810), a “mechanic” – that is, most probably a weaver – originally from Paisley who, with others from that town, came over with John Witherspoon and his family on the *Peggy* out of Greenock in the summer of 1768, Witherspoon having finally accepted the call from the College of New Jersey to be its President.

A few sentences from one of the earliest letters from Hugh to his brother Andrew Simm are printed in L. J. Butterfield’s *John Witherspoon Comes to America* (Princeton, 1953)² and the whole text of eleven letters are published in Barbara De Wolfe’s *Discoveries of America – Personal Accounts of British Emigrants to North America during the Revolutionary Era*.³ When she wrote her book, De Wolfe was Bernard Bailyn’s Harvard research associate.

Most of the letters are addressed to Andrew Simm, Hugh’s brother, a weaver who lived at “the Toun-head” – present-day Townhead – in Paisley. One letter is addressed to Robert Aitken, a Paisley bookseller and an acquaintance of both Hugh Simm and Dr. Witherspoon. At the date of the letter (October 13, 1768) Aitken was *either* preparing to return to Paisley to clear the way for his permanent emigration to America after a year’s sojourn in Philadelphia for the purpose of setting up in business there *or* he had already left for Scotland. Aitken was, of course, to distinguish himself a few years later as the celebrated publisher of *The Pennsylvania Magazine* and printer of the first American Bible in English – the so-called ‘Bible of the Revolution’ (see chapter 5).

The Princeton finding aid is in error in referring to Hugh Simm’s addressee as Robert “Atkin” – without, that is, identifying him – while neither Butterfield (who might have been expected to have shown interest in the letter by virtue of its Witherspoon and Paisley connotation), nor De Wolfe

¹ Call number C1201, Firestone Library.

² *ibid.*, p. 84. Letter dated 8th June, 1769. In his note (145) on p. 95 Butterfield refers to the Simm letters as “a recently discovered collection”.

³ pp. 122-148. The 11 letters printed by De Wolfe are dated 1769 – December 2, June 8, October 13 ; 1770 – July 20 ; 1772 – March 3, November 14 ; 1773 – January 9, April 1 ; 1774 – September 27 ; 1778 – October 2, October 4.

Appendix D

(who prints the whole letter but confuses the issue further by transcribing Aitken's name as "Atken"), makes the crucial connection with Robert Aitken of Paisley.

The Hugh Simm letters are also important in a broader context for two reasons : First, the letters should be seen as a unique repository of the sentiments and experiences of a loyalist Scottish emigrant in America in the Revolutionary period and of a man who was sufficiently devoted to Britain to return there (to Paisley) in later life when he was rewarded for his efforts by the grant of an annual pension by a grateful government. (In that regard, American historians such as De Wolfe have found the letters highly relevant to their own country's history of that period - especially the letters that comment on his joining the loyalist cause and his acceptance of a commission as Quarter Master in the regiment of Colonel Rudolph Ritzina, his assessment of the Stamp Act and the arrival in Boston of regiments from Ireland). Secondly, the Simm letters graphically record actual incidents and events consisting in the main of highly personal anecdotes, bringing alive the anxieties of that period when emigrants from Scotland were often in two minds as to where their future commitments might lie.

Apart from the Aitken letter - the importance of which is discussed in chapter 5 - an extract from a hitherto unpublished letter in particular is worth quoting here. It is written from New York, dated October 29, 1780 and addressed to Andrew Simm. The letter contains a fascinating account of the career in America of one Joseph English, another young man from Paisley who, it seems, like Hugh Simm himself, crossed the Atlantic with Witherspoon in the summer of 1768 but who, unlike Hugh, seems to have turned out a restless individual, preferring action and danger to married life and a settled existence :

I was not a little surprised a few Days ago to see Joseph English and Daniel Reid's son comming [sic] to see me, the one from the one end of America and the other from the other. They both sat down and whilst supper was preparing Joseph gave me the following account of himself. That after he came to America with Dr. Witherspoon he went into the country was married and settled for a few months. Not liking that way of life, he left it and went to be a Sailor on the upper Lakes above the falls of Niagara. When the rebellion began he left the Lakes, came to Montreal, inlisted in the Army and was in Quebec the time of the siege : coming with a Reinforcement to General Burgoyne he was taken Prisoner and carried to Boston. Not liking a State of Confinement he inlisted and was made a Sergeant in Washington's Army. He remained in this Service till a few days ago, when, receiving three months pay, he drank it in half an Hour and deserted to this Place and inlisted as a Sergeant in a new Regiment that is raising here to go to the Conquest of Mexico, and then perhaps to Chili [sic] and Peru. So that the first Letter his friends will receive from him may be dated from the Manilas or Cape Horn, he neither knows nor cares which. Joseph is a firm looking clever fellow and with the same ease and intelligency could receive Orders to be confin'd within the Walls of a Garrison or go around the World.

Joseph informs me that a few Weeks before he deserted he was near to New Paisley on a scouting Party, that he there saw John Tannahill, who told him, that his Brother was well with John M'neel and Hugh Dinsmoor. You will please to communicate this intelligence with my complements [sic] to James Tannahill.

Appendix D

The reference to “New Paisley” is especially interesting as is mention of the two Tannahill brothers, probably uncles of the poet, Robert (1774-1810), who also, (as, of course, had Robert Burns before him), contemplated emigration to America.

Hugh Simm died in Paisley in July 1810, having returned to Britain in 1783 or 1784. The *Glasgow Sentinel* for July 19, 1810 carries a warm obituary appreciation of him, noting his loyalty to Britain during the American war and his resultant government pension. The article also comments on Simm’s love of learning :

His fondness for books continued to the latest period of his life, by which means he had obtained a large share of historical and general knowledge.

Appendix E

The two ‘missing’ Witherspoon pocketbooks (or “commonplace books”) at Princeton University [see also chapter 4]

Provenance

The first of the two manuscripts (no. 1140: Witherspoon’s notes interleaved with pages of *The Edinburgh Almanack* for 1768) “has an accession number long after Collins completed his book” (1925), and “probably post-dating Butterfield as well” (1953).¹ The second manuscript (no. 1141: Witherspoon’s notes interleaved with pages of *The Universal Scots Almanack* for 1763) was “a gift from a Princeton alumnus in 2002”; this manuscript “had been privately owned since the 19th century and was purchased in the antiquarian book trade”. It is clear, therefore, that if, as seems conclusive, they are indeed the MSS. seen by Alexander and sought in vain by Collins, they somehow disappeared from the Princeton library some time after 1825, were then in the possession of the antiquarian book trade and/or private individuals at different times and eventually restored to Princeton well into the twentieth century (in the case of MS. 1140 not earlier than circa 1953 and in the case of MS. 1141 in 2002), the one by purchase by Princeton University on the open book market, and the other by private donation, also after purchase on the open market.

The 1763 pocketbook [see NLS catalogue R.305.b and ESTC T.209644]

[Ref. CO 199 (number 1141)]

The Universal Scots Almanac For the Year of our Lord M.DCC.LXIII. [1763]

Edinburgh, Printed by Walter Ruddiman, John Richardson and Co for the Widow of John Chapman, senr. and sold at her House, third story of Cleghorn’s Land, Grass-market ; at the Printing-House, and by all the Booksellers in Town and Country.

[24 leaves, 25-72 p; 14 cm. 12mo]

This notebook represents a fascinating schedule of a busy industrial west of Scotland town minister and pastor in the later eighteenth century. As such, it offers great insight into Witherspoon’s various routine duties and how he planned their execution. For example, the book

¹ All quotations from an email to me from the Keeper of Manuscripts in the Firestone Library, Don C. Skemer, dated 6 July 2010.

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gives page after page of notes on sermons whose construction he is meticulously planning : thus, there are no less than eight full pages on how he proposes to approach the text Ephesians, 5, 16 - “Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.”

The 1763 MS. charmingly notes routine commitments such as Witherspoon’s preaching and lecturing to “Young Communicants in the Laigh Church from Mark, 10,14, Suffer the little Children to come unto me and forbid them not &c.” He even lists the names of the individual young Communicants in his ‘class’. Another important feature of the 1763 almanac is the extent to which it reveals, throughout that year, Witherspoon’s Sunday absences from his Paisley charge as a result of his acceptance of pulpit exchanges in other churches. We see that in 1763 he was “absent from Paisley this year the following Sabbaths” - one Sunday in each of January, February, twice in April, and once in each of July, August, September, November and December, a total of nine absences when he was preaching elsewhere, on all such occasions requiring him to arrange for his own pulpit to be filled by a visiting minister. The names of most of these visiting preachers are not revealed, but it is exciting to note the identity of the occupant of his pulpit in the Laigh Church on Sunday, February 27, 1763, when Witherspoon is preaching in the Tolbooth Church in Edinburgh : “That Day my Charge supplied by Mr Thom of Govan.”²

The 1768 pocketbook [see NLS catalogue R.305]

[Ref. CO 199 (number 1140)]

The Edinburgh Almanack For the Year M,DCC,LXVIII [1768]

Edinburgh : Printed for, and sold by R. Fleming at the Cross, and by the other Booksellers in Town and Country.

[24 leaves, 25-120 p., [8] leaves of plates: coats of arms; 14 cm. 12mo]

This MS. is historically much the more important of the two pocketbooks, since it relates directly to Witherspoon’s visit to London, (thence to Holland) in March-April 1768,³ immediately prior to his departure in May for America. Of special interest are his recorded “Engagements in London”, including meetings scheduled with such as the following (in chronological order) :

² For a note on the charismatic Thom see chapter 4, note 59, pp. 197-8, and also p. 233.

³ He was absent from Paisley for almost exactly one month. His letter of March 9 1768 to Rush is written from London, as is his letter to him of 2 April in which he states that he has received Rush’s letter “on my Return from Holland the beginning of this week” and expects to reach Edinburgh “on Saturday the 9th or Monday the 11th Instant most probably the last & I shall stay but one Night in Town when I expect to see my Friends [almost certainly the Hogg family]”. See Butterfield, *John Witherspoon Comes to America*, pp. 71-2.

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- Charles Nisbet⁴ (twice, on 2 and 3 March);
- “Mr Dilly (twice, on 4 March - probably Edward Dilly, not Charles, in the light of Witherspoon having specifically mentioned Edward in his letter of March 9 to Benjamin Rush;
- Benjamin Franklin [“Visit Dr Franklin”] (Saturday 5 March);
- George Whitefield (twice, on 7 and 9 March, including a visit to him at Moorfields where Whitefield had set up his Tabernacle in 1753);⁵
- Lady Tweedale at “the house of Peers” (10 March);⁶
- “Captain Montgomerie” (probably an officer who became either the 11th or the 12th Earl of Eglinton,⁷ on 14 March);
- and with two of the best-known English dissenting ministers at the time:
- Dr. Thomas Gibbons⁸ (twice, 4 and 7 March), and

⁴ The Reverend Charles Nisbet (1736-1804) was a fellow student of Witherspoon’s at Edinburgh and was called to the charge at Montrose in 1764. After advocating the cause of the American colonies, he was appointed principal of Dickinson College, Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

⁵ See letter to Rush of March 9th 1768 - “I was with Mr. Whitefield on Monday Morning. He was very friendly but he has a Colledge of his own to establish just now in Georgia which will be the chief Object of Attention to him & his friends.” - Butterfield, p. 72

⁶ The family name of the Marquesses of Tweedale was Hay and their seat was at Yester. Witherspoon’s father - minister at Yester - was known to have been on good terms with the fourth Marquess, John Hay (d.1762), who had become the last Secretary of State for Scotland (1742-6), an office that was not revived until the nineteenth century.

⁷ The pocketbook calls him “Captain Montgomerie” whereas Witherspoon’s letter of April 18 1767 to Rush mentions that it is being sent to London “under Cover of Col. Montgomery” [sic]. I believe it possible these may be two *different* persons, viz. “Col. Montgomery” was undoubtedly Archibald Montgomerie (1726-1796), M.P. for Ayrshire from 1761 to 1768, a soldier who had served in America and whose regiment had been disbanded in 1764, Montgomerie having then been put on half-pay. Witherspoon would have known him from his Beith days. This Montgomerie was defeated in the 1768 general election and succeeded to the earldom of Eglinton the following year on the murder of his brother, Alexander the 10th Earl. However, the man Witherspoon met in London in March 1768 - “Captain Montgomerie” - could well have been Hugh Montgomerie (1739-1819), who had studied at Edinburgh before entering the army in 1756. Hugh served in the American War of Independence in the 78th Highlanders and later in the 1st Royals. He was elected M.P. for Ayrshire in 1780 and is ridiculed (among other Scots M.P.s) by Burns in his poem, *The Author’s Earnest Cry and Prayer* (Kilmarnock Edition, 1786) who compares, unfavourably, his splendid military prowess with his virtual silence as an M.P. “I ken that if your sword were wanted/Ye’d lend your hand ;/But when there’s ought to say anent it/Ye’re at a stand.”

⁸ Witherspoon had gone to consult with such as “Dr Gibbons Mr Dubert and Mr Clunie” in the course of his London visit to seek their help and advice in respect of the parlous lack of funds at the College of New Jersey and the run-down state of the library in particular - which Rush had disclosed to him just prior to his visit. See his letter to Rush of March 9 1768, the same letter in which he refers to the Princeton roll : “At present there are but about 50 students at the College.” Thomas Gibbons (1720-1785) was a dissenting minister and a Master of Arts of Princeton (1760), so Witherspoon would have been anxious to learn his insights. Gibbons was the author of *The Christian Minister, in Three Poetic Epistles to Philander* (London, “printed for J. Buckland ...

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- Dr. William Langford⁹ (at whose church he preached on the afternoon of 13 March).

Once Witherspoon is home in Paisley, he notes in the almanac a short list of “Persons to be written to at London” : “Dr Gibbons Mr Sayre¹⁰ Mr Cochran¹¹ Mr Dilly”. And to persons in Edinburgh, “Messrs Erskine¹² Gray¹³ Hogg¹⁴ Mr Wm. Sanderson”, and in Glasgow “David Dale¹⁵ Mr Finlay”.¹⁶

and E. and C. Dilly”, 1782). In that work Gibbons writes : “In Witherspoon the most divine Regard/ To sacred Writ, and Reason’s keenest Ray/Unite, and with Conviction strike the Soul.” See also Butterfield, pp. 71-2.

⁹ William Langford (1704-1775) was a colleague of Gibbons who shared a common interest in America. Not much is known about him except that he published (i) in 1770 *Three Sermons* delivered in Swallow Street Chapel, “where the Scots congregation met” [the “Scotch Church”, Westminster], and (ii) a sermon in 1774 entitled *Truth and Love United* for the “Correspondent Board in London” of the S.P.C.K. “in the Highlands and Islands, and for spreading the Gospel among the Indians in America.” On Langford’s death Gibbons preached a sermon *The Blessedness in Dying in the Lord ... preached at the weigh-house in Little Eastcheap on the death of the Rev William Langford, D.D. who departed this life April 23, 1775 ... By Thomas Gibbons, D.D. London : printed for J. Buckland; E. and C. Dilly; W. Harris; and J. Towers, 1775.*

¹⁰ Stephen Sayre (1736-1818) is mentioned in Butterfield, note 118, p. 93. It is Sayre who is referred to in Witherspoon’s letter to Rush of March 9 1768 : “I saw a partner of Mr Duberd’s [sic] who came lately from North America was educated at Princetown & seems to be as warm a friend to the Colledge as yourself.” Sayre is described by his only biographer as “soldier, merchant, banker, ship-builder, politician, speculator, propagandist, diplomat, inventor, and occupant of prisons. It has also been suggested or asserted, not always with cause, that he was a most active gallant, a wicked schemer, a liar, a madman, an embezzler, and a traitor.” – John Alden, *Stephen Sayre - American, Revolutionary, Adventurer*, Baton Rouge, Louisiana and London, 1983, p. 1.

¹¹ William Cochran is mentioned twice by Witherspoon in his letters to Rush of April 18, 1767 and – his last from Scotland, written as he waits to go aboard the *Peggy* at Greenock – May 18, 1768. I have been unable to discover who he was, except to note that he was to be found at “Mr McKays St Alban Street Pall Mall London”.

¹² The Reverend John Erskine (1721?-1803). John R. McIntosh describes him as “one of the most important eighteenth century Scottish theologians” (*Church and Theology in Enlightenment Scotland*, East Linton, 1998, p. 240) and also as “arguably the greatest theologian produced by the late eighteenth century church.” (ibid., p. 166).

¹³ William Gray was an Edinburgh bookseller, mentioned in the imprints of several Witherspoon titles (e.g. in the five volume Edinburgh edition of the *Essays and Sermons on Important Subjects* (1768). See the NLS online Scottish Book Trade Index for a description of his business and career.

¹⁴ Bailie William Hogg is described as a “Banker, Old Treasurer” in a list of “Magistrates and [Members of the] Town Council of Edinburgh” and included also as no. 14 in a list of 33 such notables in the *Scots Magazine*, vol. 29, September 1767, p. 503. His family was well known to Witherspoon and he mentions them – usually with a special word of affection for “Miss Annie” – in some of his letters to Rush (e.g. in the last Greenock letter of May 18, 1768 – “I wrote to Baillie Hogg & Miss Annie - & have ordered a Compliment to be made to Miss Annie of my sermons [now] publishing.”). Richard Stockton in his letter to Rush of April 14, 1767 writes : “I have wrote to Mr. Hogg and desired him to tell his excellent Lady & Sisters the regard I have for them.” See also Butterfield, note 70, p. 91, who describes the Hoggs as “a mercantile family friendly to Rush and other Americans.”

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In Paisley, before he departs, there are last-minute letters to be written to “Mr Muir¹⁷ Mr Wilson B. Smith Claud Manson [?] Wm Buchanan Mr Skeoch¹⁸ Billy Stow¹⁹ and others in “Kilbride”, “Greenock”, “Holland” etc., followed by “Mr Foulis of Glasgow”,²⁰ “Dr Trail”.

After these notes there follows the intriguingly titled “*Memorandum of things to be remembered in America*”, and he comments, as it were, to himself –

“James Robertson weaver desires to be informed if there be any Encouragement for him to remove his family there consisting of a Wife 4 Daughters & a Son the Eldest 13 next 11 Alexr.[?] Crawford son to Jo. Crawford and Agnes Miller desires to go abroad
David Sclater son to David Sclater Workmen in Paisley
Jo. Muir son of John Muir Shoemaker in Paisley
James Renfrews Servant [indecipherable]”.

That last note would, on the face of things, tend to bear out the clear implication in one of the Hugh Simm letters, namely that Witherspoon sailed with others from Paisley known to him and his family.²¹

¹⁵ David Dale (1739-1806) is the famous philanthropist whose name – with that of Robert Owen – will always be associated with New Lanark which Dale set up (initially with Richard Arkwright) in 1784. Witherspoon would have known Dale on two accounts : conceivably he came across him as a young weaver in Paisley in the 1750s but it is likelier that the two knew each other around the time (in the late 1760s) when Dale seceded from the Kirk and became pastor of the Old Scotch Independents. His Oxford *DNB* entry (by the late Professor John Butt, Department of History, University of Strathclyde) says of him that “in years of dearth he assisted in financing purchases of meal and American grain to keep down local prices.” Dale is buried in the Ramshorn churchyard of the University, Ingram Street, Glasgow, which is appropriate since both he and his son were named as trustees of the putative Anderson’s University – the antecedent institution of Strathclyde – by Professor John Anderson in his famous Will of 1795, in the “Class Fourth. Manufacturers, or Merchants”.

¹⁶ Not known.

¹⁷ Witherspoon’s great friend and colleague in Paisley, the Reverend George Muir, minister of the High Church.

¹⁸ This relatively uncommon surname was shared by the wife of the Paisley emigrant bookseller, Robert Aitken – Janet Skeoch – who accompanied her husband to Philadelphia in 1771 after his sojourning visit there in 1769. It is possible that “Mr Skeoch” was a brother of Janet – or conceivably her father.

¹⁹ William Stow, probably a member of Witherspoon’s Laigh Church congregation, was the father of David Stow (1793-1864), the founder of the Glasgow Normal School and the author of the influential *Physical and Moral Training* (1832). William was one of the pioneers of the Sabbath School movement in Paisley : see Ronald L. Crawford, *Literary Activity in Paisley in the Early Nineteenth Century*, unpublished B.Litt thesis, University of Glasgow, 1965, pp. 285-8.

²⁰ Robert Foulis (1707-1776), the celebrated printer to the University of Glasgow who, with his younger brother Andrew (1712-1775), had promised to donate books to the Princeton library (and did so). See Witherspoon’s letters to Rush of October 3, 1767 and January 15, 1768, the latter confirming the promise reported in the former. See Butterfield, pp. 55 and 66.

²¹ See Appendix D, referring to Hugh Simm’s letter of October 29, 1780 to his brother Andrew in Paisley.

Appendix F

Robert Aitken's waste book – Library Company of Philadelphia/ Historical Society of Pennsylvania [see also Appendix G]

The two volumes of Robert Aitken's "waste book" (or day book, or simply accounts ledgers)¹, written up daily in his own hand, constitute one of the most comprehensive original documents available to bibliographers and historians of the later eighteenth century printing and publishing scene in America and are, therefore, a crucially important primary reference source. The waste book represents at its most basic level a veritable treasure trove of many of the iconic names of the American revolutionary period as they traded with Aitken's bookstore as customers. But the volumes are much more than that, affording unique insight into printing, publishing, binding and bookselling conventions and practice at that formative time in the book trade in Philadelphia.

The waste book was used extensively by Willman and Carol Spawn, for example, in their groundbreaking research into Aitken's prowess as a bookbinder and as a means of tracking down and identifying specific binding commissions he executed for named clients. By the same token, the waste book graphically follows the progress – successes as well as failures – of Aitken's numerous publications throughout his long career of over 30 years in America. Thus, the story of the catastrophe of his Bible, from a commercial point of view, is all too clear in the pages of the waste book.

As we would expect, Aitken's waste book is in two volumes: volume 1 which is essentially a record of sales and purchases, and volume 2 consisting of a double entry ledger, with facing pages of *Dr.* [Debtors] and *Cr.* [Creditors], arranged in a single double page opening under the heading, spread across both pages, of the name of each customer. Volume 1 begins with an entry dated June 11, 1771 and the last entry is dated July 8, 1802, just six days before Aitken's death on 14 July. Volume 2 – the double entry ledger – records much of the harrowing financial detail associated with Robert Aitken Junior's personal indebtedness to his father, and his father's subsequent disowning of him, culminating in the sorry dissolution of their business partnership.

¹ "Waste-book ... a rough account-book (now little used in ordinary business) in which entries are made of all transactions (purchases, sales, receipts, payments, etc.) at the time of their occurrence, to be 'posted' afterwards into a more formal book ... in simpler terms of bookkeeping the Daybook and Journal were not distinguished from the Waste-book" – OED [cited by the Spawns in *The Aitken Shop*, p. 424.]

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Rosalind Remer comments on the contemporary significance of keeping accounts in this way :

[Aitken] carefully stuck to the system of keeping a waste book ... and recorded regularly from it to double entries in a ledger, noting which accounts had been settled or lost. ...

The publishers of the early republic relied much more strictly on double-entry, multiple-book accounting. This reflected the requirements of their profession. They had a constant need to evaluate their profits and losses, as the nature of their business – investment in books – required such analysis. Without clear accounts, a publisher ran the risk of becoming insolvent without realising it until it was too late.²

Customers of Aitken whose names are recorded in the waste book include Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine, John Witherspoon, James Wilson, Francis Hopkinson, John Dunlap, Benjamin Town, John Mifflin and Robert Bell, as well as names of organisations to which Aitken supplied specified binding and printing services, such as the American Philosophical Society, the Continental Navy, the Treasury Office and the Scots Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. Aitken's dealings with other bookmen – in Britain (including Charles Dilly, Debrett, the Duncans and John Bryce) and in America (e.g. Dunlap, Dobson, Bell, Belknap, Town, the Bradfords, Young and Carey) – are particularly illuminating and await a serious study in its own right.

The two volumes of the waste book were presented to the Library Company by the lawyer-philanthropist James J. Barclay in March, 1858.

I wish to thank the Librarian of the Library Company, James N. Green, for allowing me to examine the waste book intensively over a period of a week in the course of my Carnegie Trust funded study visit to Philadelphia in May, 2010 and for guiding me through some of its most interesting and, for me, relevant pages.

² Rosalind Remer, *Printers and Men of Capital - Philadelphia Book Publishers in the New Republic*, Philadelphia, 1996, p. 103.

Appendix G

Thomas Paine, Robert Aitken and *The Pennsylvania Magazine*

Considerable confusion and controversy have long surrounded two aspects of the precise nature of Paine's role in relation to Aitken's *Pennsylvania Magazine*. These relate to the following issues:

- On what basis did Aitken employ Paine and use his services ; and
- The extent of Paine's own contributions to the *Magazine* over the period from the first number in February 1775 to June or July of the same year, or as preferred by Richardson, to August - that is, to the fifth, sixth or even seventh number¹ - by which time, it is generally accepted, Paine's employment by Aitken had come to an end.

The question of Paine's 'editorship'

The evidence of Paine having served Aitken as editor of the *Magazine* has never been called into question until recently. From Moncure D. Conway to John Keane most biographers of Paine have been in no doubt that for a time after the first number in which, in his own admission, he "took no part", Paine was regarded by his publisher as his 'contributing editor'.

At the same time, however, it has to be emphasised that this is a modern interpretation of his role and that Paine never used the term himself to describe his working relationship with Aitken.² Indeed, in his letter of January 14 1779 to Henry Laurens, Paine, one feels, uses his words with unusually measured care to describe the strictly informal nature of the business relationship he had with the Scottish printer:

¹ Larkin is more precise : "No one has been able to ascertain the exact date, but Paine seems to have ceased work for Aitken sometime between August and September of 1775, when they parted ways in a dispute over Paine's compensation."

² Richardson uses the term "editorial assistant" which I like. If Burgess means there is no proof that Aitken *employed* Paine - as distinct, that is, from paying him for his contributions - that interpretation is not supported by the evidence of Aitken's waste book in the Library Company/Historical Society where Aitken's payments to "Thomas Pain" (later "Paine") are clearly recorded and tend, I believe, to support the traditional view that he earned wages from Aitken. The Librarian of the LCP, James N. Green, with whom I have discussed the issue, agrees with that conclusion : that is, that Green believes that the cash payments were "most likely wages". [Email to RLC dated 3 August, 2010.]

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... a person of this city desired me to give him some assistance in conducting a magazine, which I did without making any bargain.

The terminology describing Paine as Aitken's "editor" was first used by Benjamin Rush in his letter to James Cheetham of July 17, 1809 :

... Mr. Aitkin [sic] employed him as the editor of his *Magazine* with a salary of fifty pounds currency a year.

Writing in 2010, however, the Australian academic, Hazel Burgess, states :

There is, in fact, no credible evidence to demonstrate that Paine was, as stated by many commentators, editor of Aitken's magazine.³

In reaching that conclusion Ms. Burgess cites the Rush-Cheetham letter as the only mention of Paine's role as editor - which is inaccurate, given Paine's own comments to Laurens quoted above - but she does not expand on her reasons for doing so, apart from her (otherwise fairly convincing) demolition of Rush's failing memory in relation to the authorship of certain *Magazine* pieces he erroneously attributes to Paine. The issue of attribution of articles is, however, quite separate from the issue of editorship and is referred to below. I myself see no reason to quibble with the long accepted view that Tom Paine was indeed Robert Aitken's 'contributing editor', 'editor', or if preferred, 'editorial assistant'.

Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that although he performed what would today be termed an editorial *function* in relation to the magazine, it is most unlikely that Paine at any time enjoyed the degree of independent judgment, let alone the editorial control that at least a modern understanding of that role within a serial publishing venture would normally entail. We know from the Henry Laurens letter that the move to try to determine a form of contract between Aitken and Paine broke down, as a result - if you believe Paine - of Aitken's recalcitrant meanness over proposed terms.

In the sole reference to Aitken in his book *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America* Eric Foner states that the printer and bookseller "extended credit" to Paine.⁴ That is almost certainly based on a misinterpretation of Aitken's waste book entries. Over the period that Paine worked for Aitken the printer made a total of eight cash payments to him, the first dated 10 April 1775 and

³ At least Burgess is right to a degree when one considers, for example, the totally unwarranted assertion of such as Craig Nelson (in his distinctly underwhelming biography of Paine) when he confidently states: "Pain [sic] greatly impressed Aitken ... to the point where the printer decided to offer him a job as executive editor of his brand-new magazine." - *Thomas Paine his life, his time and the birth of modern nations*, London, 2007, p. 60.

⁴ "Updated edition", New York and Oxford, 2005, p. 38. Foner also claims that Aitken similarly extended credit to Franklin, which is certainly the case since the ledger (vol. 2) records "Sundries" in 1786-7 in the amount of £7-11-6d, "settled by cash in full".

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the last on 2 August in the same year ; these payments range from 15/- (two payments) to one of £13. The aggregate of payments totals £35-2-6d, the exact figure carried over from volume 1 of the waste book (sales and purchases) to volume 2 (double entry ledger) where, in an entry dated 2 July 1777, Aitken records £35-2-6d on the Dr. Leaf and on the opposite leaf - the Cr. side - he writes the word "Entered".

I had originally thought that this possibly indicated that Aitken regarded the money he had paid to Paine as loans or cash advances. Having conferred with James Green, however, we are agreed that the cash payments were almost certainly wages and that because - as distinct from the procedure affecting other Aitken employees who were regularly paid a weekly wage - Paine never rendered any account of wages due, this explains why the account still remained technically 'open' as late as 1777. It did *not* mean that Paine owed Aitken the money.

That would then imply that Paine's weekly wage was 15/- or £39 in a full year. If that is a correct hypothesis, then Paine did not - at least theoretically - 'earn' as much as £50 a year as Rush claimed. That sum certainly sits uncomfortably with the weekly wage of 30/- regularly paid Aitken's Scottish printer, John McCulloch, every Saturday - also entered in the waste book as "Dr. to cash". So, bluntly, Paine as Aitken's editorial assistant, was paid exactly half of McCulloch's earnings as Aitken's printer. Such a discrepancy, if Paine got to know about it, and bearing in mind his mercurial temperament, would not have been news he would have welcomed, least of all calmly accepted.

It seems to me, therefore, that it was in the main for financial reasons that Paine decided to abandon Aitken and *The Pennsylvania Magazine*, after working for him for around six months, and no longer, in the summer of 1775. It is, of course, entirely possible that there were other factors besides money, including issues relating to degree of editorial control - or rather the absence of it as far as Paine was concerned. To speculate, the latter might have had something to do with the role of John Witherspoon, whose advice Aitken almost certainly sought from time to time regarding specific contributed articles, if not on the content of whole monthly numbers following Paine's departure. Again, the hot-tempered Paine would have scorned such interference on the part of Aitken's distinguished Princeton friend and compatriot.

The issue of authorship

As recently as 1995 - when John Keane's justly acclaimed biography of Paine was published - it seemed to be fashionable to credit Paine with an ever expanding bibliography of contributions to Aitken's magazine. And, more generally, Keane led the way in claiming to have unearthed more of Paine's writings than had been previously supposed - a veritable undiscovered treasure trove

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of Paine goodies. Such was the mood of the moment that Keane himself, in a preface to his Notes, self-assuredly announces that, with regard to the whole Thomas Paine canon

I have managed to identify some 620 individual contributions by Paine, and the resulting bibliography is to be published as *The Writings of Thomas Paine, 1737-1809; a Guide*.⁵

However, at the date I write this (2011), no such book has emerged from Keane. The reason may be - and here I surmise - that modern scholars, including the controversial Ms. Burgess, have jumped the gun on Keane and have themselves added to the Paine canon of his enumerated writings. By the same token, of course, Burgess has also taken the opportunity of pouring cold water on a number of historic Paine attributions, among the most notable of these from the pages of *The Pennsylvania Magazine*. In particular, Burgess disputes the traditional attribution to Paine of the following magazine pieces:

Reflections on Unhappy Marriages (June 1775) - Burgess refutes Frank Smith's (provisional) attribution to Paine but weakly states "It was clearly not by Paine". Writing as "Epaminondas", John Witherspoon, on the other hand, is the undisputed author of several articles on marriage in the magazine. For the complete list of these, see Pitcher, pp. 96-8.

An Occasional Letter on the Female Sex (August 1775) - Burgess, noting that this short piece has been attributed to Paine "for more than a century" and used since the publication of Conway's *Life* as an indication of how Paine was a champion of women's rights, cites Frank Smith in support of her own clear view that the piece is not by Paine and, therefore, we should not be carried away by any misplaced belief that Paine was remotely interested in the subject of women's rights at all. She may well be right.

Finally, as an appendix to the appendix, as it were, it is also relevant in this context to refer to Burgess's equally convincing demolition job on the long-held view - again deriving from the Rush-Cheetham letter cited above - that Paine, writing under the *nom de plume* "Justice, and Humanity", authored a piece attacking black slavery which was published in a rival periodical to Aitken's, the *Pennsylvania Journal; and the Weekly Advertiser* on March 8 1775, around the time when Paine was getting more and more disenchanted with Aitken's dithering over the terms of his contract. Having conclusively shown that "Justice, and Humanity" was in all likelihood a well-known Quaker abolitionist by name of Anthony Benezet, Burgess regrets that because of that erroneous attribution

⁵ *Tom Paine A Political Life*, p. 537.

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[Based solely on Rush's letter], Conway claimed the piece for Paine. ... Paine was claimed as an advocate of abolition and, in that, accorded mystified honour. Generations of African Americans have been misled to look upon him as a proponent of their rights.

However, in other respects, the reader should be in no doubt, Burgess's academic judgment is, at bottom, unreliable. When, in particular, we come to the question of supposed 'new' writings, her credibility suffers a severe jolt, several Paine scholars having expressed considerable scepticism with her various *ex cathedra* hypotheses. Among them, Kenneth Burchell, writing online, is especially scathing on her claims :

A great part of the collection is either already in print, easily obtained. And more problematically, the very small quantity of new Paine material is sandwiched in between a much greater quantity of work that is not of Paine's authorship.⁶

To put it differently, the definitive bibliography of Paine's works remains to be written.

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⁶ From the devastating online onslaught on Ms. Burgess as a non-scholar by Kenneth Burchell - <http://kenburchell.blogspot.com/review-of-thomas-paine-collection-of.html>

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