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**Edward Irving, Thomas Carlyle, and the Making of the  
'Victorian Prophet'**

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PhD History  
The University of Edinburgh  
2019



I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own.

Randall Reinhard



## **Abstract**

The concept of the 'Victorian prophet' has been used by scholars to refer to such figures as Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin as they secularised the office of the Old Testament prophet for industrialising Britain in the nineteenth century. This thesis seeks to historically contextualise this phenomenon by examining the career and influence of Edward Irving (1792-1834), a minister in the Church of Scotland who self-consciously embodied the role of prophet to the British nation. In this capacity, he interpreted disasters such as the economic crisis of 1825-26 as divine retribution for the sins of all classes, including the idolatry of wealth; he publicly warned of the terrible judgments which would follow the dismantling of Britain's Protestant constitution through the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts and Catholic emancipation; and he appealed directly to the rulers of the land through his sermons and numerous publications. Some of the factors which allowed him to do this were: his understanding of the traditions and legacy of the Church of Scotland combined with his conspicuous position as a popular Scottish preacher in London; his (essentially Romantic) reverence for the ideal, the transcendent, and the supernatural; and his pre-millenarian eschatology. The controversies in his later career, leading to his ultimate expulsion from the Church on a charge of heresy in 1833, contributed to his sense of persecution. Irving's influence extended beyond just the 'religious world' as his publications were frequently reviewed in the magazines, and events in his life were often discussed in the major newspapers. From early on, the periodical press picked up on his prophetic denunciations, though this particular aspect of his style was almost universally criticised. When some of the works of social criticism by Robert Southey, John Sterling, and John Stuart Mill were published in the late 1820s and early '30s, they did so with some level of awareness of Irving's career, but none more so than Carlyle, who sought to reinterpret the significance of Irving's 'failure' as a prophet. For Carlyle, it was not possible to return to the outdated forms of the past, and he consequently presented himself as a secular prophet for a new age, though his criticism of British society shared many similarities with Irving's. In addition to religious developments such as the establishment of the Catholic Apostolic Church, I argue ultimately that the complex legacy of Edward Irving includes, through the mediation of Carlyle, the creation of the 'Victorian prophet'.

## Lay Summary

The concept of the 'Victorian prophet' has been used by scholars to refer to such figures as Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin as they portrayed themselves as secular prophets for industrialising Britain in the nineteenth century. This thesis seeks to historically contextualise this phenomenon by examining the career and influence of Edward Irving (1792-1834), a minister in the Church of Scotland who self-consciously embodied the role of prophet to the British nation. In this capacity, he interpreted disasters such as the economic crisis of 1825-26 as divine retribution for the sins of all classes, including the idolatry of wealth, he publicly warned of the terrible judgments which would follow the decision to allow Catholics full political participation in Britain, and he appealed directly to the rulers of the land through his sermons and numerous publications. Some of the factors which allowed him to do this were: his understanding of the traditions and legacy of the Church of Scotland combined with his conspicuous position as a popular Scottish preacher in London; his reverence for the ideal, the transcendent, and the supernatural; and his belief in the imminent apocalypse and second coming of Christ. The controversies in his later career, leading to his ultimate expulsion from the Church on a charge of heresy in 1833, contributed to his sense of persecution. Irving's influence extended beyond just the 'religious world' as his publications were frequently reviewed in the magazines, and events in his life were often discussed in the major newspapers. From early on, the periodical press picked up on his prophetic denunciations, though this particular aspect of his style was almost universally criticised. When some of the works of social criticism by Robert Southey, John Sterling, and John Stuart Mill were published in the late 1820s and early '30s, they did so with some level of awareness of Irving's career, but none more so than Carlyle, who sought to reinterpret the significance of Irving's 'failure' as a prophet. For Carlyle it was not possible to return to the outdated beliefs of the past, and he consequently presented himself as a secular prophet for a new age, though his criticism of British society shared many similarities with Irving's. In addition to religious developments such as the establishment of the Catholic Apostolic Church, I argue ultimately that the complex legacy of Edward Irving includes, through the mediation of Carlyle, the creation of the 'Victorian prophet'.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank the staff of the School of History, Classics, and Archaeology, as well as those at the Edinburgh University Main Library, New College Library, and National Library of Scotland, whose daily efforts allowed me to carry out my research seamlessly.

My supervisors, Profs Thomas Ahnert and Stewart J. Brown, and my friend, Prof Ian Campbell, were instrumental in helping me shape the vague thoughts I had about the Victorian Prophet more than five years ago. My friends in the History department and the Nineteenth Century Research Seminars team provided the camaraderie to make for an enjoyable journey.

Finally, this experience would not have been possible without the personal support from my family, especially my parents, Russell and Rebecca Reinhard, and my wife, Emily Cooper. They have been a tireless source of encouragement through the years and provided a fresh set of eyes at crucial moments.

This work is dedicated to Emily, who has learned far more about Edward Irving and Thomas Carlyle than she ever wished to know.



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## Introduction

In the 1820s Edward Irving, a minister in the Church of Scotland, caused a stir in Britain with his preaching and publications. People of all classes came out to hear him as he denounced aspects of the new industrial society which was then taking shape. He ultimately became convinced that he and his generation were living in the final days of the Christian dispensation, and he attempted to show this by mapping current events onto apocalyptic prophecies. Building on the recent work by scholars who have re-examined Irving's life and theology, this thesis further establishes the importance of Irving's thought to the intellectual history of the period by analysing his social criticism and self-portrayal as a prophet for nineteenth-century Britain. In so doing I historically contextualise the concept of the 'Victorian prophet', as I argue that the more famous critiques of industrial society seen later in the century, in particular that of Thomas Carlyle who had such a profound impact on later generations, must be understood in the context of the late 1820s and early 1830s when Irving was denouncing idolatry, infidelity, and political expediency with all the language and rhetoric of an Old Testament prophet.

The last few decades of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth saw widespread changes in British society, regardless of whether these constituted a 'revolution' or (less ambitiously) a 'transformation' or 'divergence'. The spread of coal-powered steam engines stimulated the textile and iron industries, which led to a transfer of population from the countryside to the large towns and manufacturing centres all while the net population more than doubled. The country itself was dramatically reshaped during this period, through the implementation of the final stages of public land enclosure with its now-ubiquitous hedgerows and a proliferation of canals, iron bridges, and railways. According to the traditional account, the unbridled optimism often exhibited by the liberal champions of 'progress' was met with fierce criticism from certain voices in society who feared the destructive forces being unleashed by nascent industrial capitalism. Such critics have been termed the 'Victorian prophets', men like Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin, and Matthew

Arnold who were peculiarly perceptive in their awareness of the demoralising effects outward 'improvement' was having on British society. A significant aspect of their critique focused on the unfortunate consequences of a society obsessed with the pursuit of wealth, where everything could be measured in pounds-sterling. Though much of our understanding of the 'industrial revolution' continues to be reshaped by economic and social historians, our perception of the intellectual reactions to the social changes brought about by increasing industrialisation and urbanisation continues to be framed in the context of the same few canonical figures, the Victorian prophets. The fact that the writings of these figures have been extensively anthologised and reproduced has led to a semi-mythological status which continues to be reinforced in the scholarship. I argue that one figure in particular – Edward Irving – was critical to the development of this prophetic genre.

Born on 4 August 1792, Irving grew up in Annandale in southwestern Scotland, before attending the University of Edinburgh where he trained to become a minister in the Church of Scotland. During his ministerial training he worked as a teacher at a school in Kirkcaldy, where he met the young Carlyle who was teaching at a nearby school, and the two became lifelong friends despite certain personal trials. Before he finally accepted a call to minister at the Caledonian Chapel in London, Irving also served for a time as an assistant to Thomas Chalmers as he carried out his plans for social rejuvenation in Glasgow. Irving moved to London in 1822, where he became enormously popular. Contemporary commentators and modern scholars have posited a variety of causes to explain his sudden popularity, but the fact remains that within just a few months, leading political and literary figures were attending his overcrowded services. In London, Irving met and befriended several people who would go on to influence his thought, one of these being Samuel Taylor Coleridge, while he continued to offer assistance to his friend Carlyle who was still back in Scotland. Though Irving was ultimately abandoned by fashionable society due to his preoccupation with interpreting the biblical prophecies, acceptance of speaking in 'tongues' among his congregation, and controversial views on the nature of Christ for which he was

deposed from the Church of Scotland in 1833, he had made his mark on Britain, and he remained a household name throughout his lifetime.

While Irving had turned a critical eye on the religious world and wider society from an early age, his study of the biblical prophecies in the mid-1820s prompted him to interpret the social and political issues of the day as signs of the end times. In light of his personal controversies in the late 1820s and early 1830s, he saw himself as being persecuted for daring to speak the truth, thereby strengthening his conviction. There is clear evidence that Irving conceived of his career in London as a prophetic mission, and towards the end of his life, he became increasingly desperate in this role. The major newspapers and magazines around Britain (and beyond) followed Irving's sensational career, ensuring that his controversial views were extensively debated. Though he was easily dismissed by some, many took him seriously, and for a group of rising social critics, his existence in itself served as a sign of the revolutionary nature of the times. An analysis of Irving's social criticism and the reactions thereto can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the intellectual atmosphere of a particularly turbulent period in British history. This is what I provide with this thesis, but I also argue further that Carlyle's own unique brand of social criticism cannot be properly understood without an awareness and appreciation of Irving's life and career.

### The 'Victorian Prophet'

The concept of the 'Victorian prophet (or sage)' has come to be used in modern scholarship to denote such literary figures as Carlyle, Ruskin, and Arnold in their role as social critic, but there is clear historical precedent for these figures being understood in this way. As James Anthony Froude wrote of Carlyle in the biography published just after his death:

He was a teacher and a prophet in the Jewish sense of the word. The prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah have become a part of the permanent spiritual inheritance of mankind, because events proved that they had interpreted correctly the signs of their own times, and their prophecies

were fulfilled. Carlyle, like them, believed that he had a special message to deliver to the present age.<sup>1</sup>

In twentieth-century scholarship, this concept has predominately been employed from a literary perspective and has come to signify a certain canonical group of authors (with the cast of characters subject to slight variation among individual scholars) who attempted to interpret events and provide judgments on political, social, and economic issues in the manner of an ancient prophet or sage.

With *The Victorian Sage: Studies in Argument* (1953), John Holloway is largely credited with having invented the modern usage of the concept itself.<sup>2</sup> In this work, Holloway defines the genre of sage writing as literature which is interested in 'what the world is like, where man stands in it, and how he should live', and he illustrates this by examining works by Carlyle, Benjamin Disraeli, George Eliot, John Henry Newman, Arnold, and Thomas Hardy.<sup>3</sup> In so doing, he also lays out what is considered to be the appropriate approach to the study of such literature, emphasizing a focus on the sage's use of language rather than an analysis of their content. The sage's task according to Holloway is 'awakening or reawakening something' rather than transmitting information, and in the process they seem 'to have glimpsed something not conspicuous to the common eye'.<sup>4</sup>

George P. Landow has followed in this vein with *Elegant Jeremiahs: The Sage from Carlyle to Mailer* (1986), going into more depth and extending the analysis through to the twentieth century. Where he differs from Holloway is his exclusive focus on nonfiction writing, covering Anglo-American sages including Carlyle, Ruskin, and Arnold, but also Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau among several others. By narrowing his concentration, Landow is able to provide a much more detailed, and ultimately more helpful

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<sup>1</sup> James Anthony Froude, *Thomas Carlyle, A History of the First Forty Years of his Life, 1795-1835* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1882), Vol. I, xv.

<sup>2</sup> There is little distinction in the scholarship between the terms 'sage' and 'prophet', which are often used interchangeably; I refer almost invariably to the 'Victorian prophet' as I believe it more closely captures the essence of the role embodied particularly by Carlyle.

<sup>3</sup> John Holloway, *The Victorian Sage: Studies in Argument* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1953), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Holloway, *The Victorian Sage*, 16-17.

account of sage writing. He argues that the genre of Victorian sage writing must be understood in relation to the elements of Old Testament prophecy upon which the various writers often drew.<sup>5</sup> Landow distinguishes between the writings of the sage and wisdom literature: though they both seek to aid people in difficult times by showing that there is meaning in the world, the latter does so from a central position while the former begins with the assumption that this central wisdom has been lost or forgotten and therefore seeks to recall it.<sup>6</sup> The prophet thus stands in a position on the fringes of the society which they address. As Landow points out, the Victorian prophets did not need to create the necessary literary devices in order to fulfil this role, rather they had only to adapt the example of the Old Testament prophets, whose function had always been '[s]tanding apart from society and charging its members with having abandoned the ways of God and truth'.<sup>7</sup> In an article from around the same time, Greg Myers similarly claims that, just like the Old Testament prophets, these 'social prophets' (including Carlyle, Ruskin, and Henry Adams) acted 'as representatives of, mediators for, and critics of their nation and their historical moment'.<sup>8</sup>

In the introduction to an anthology of prominent texts by the Victorian prophets (in this case Carlyle, John Stuart Mill, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Ruskin, Arnold, William Morris, and H. G. Wells), Peter Keating has attempted to provide some historical context for this phenomenon, portraying the prophetic tradition as itself symptomatic of the kind of social changes that the various prophets were interested in analysing. As evidence of their prophetic credentials, Keating notes that Carlyle, Ruskin, and Arnold all 'claim insight into the human condition, use religious terminology to dramatize their message, and consciously encourage public images of themselves as lonely, isolated, embattled bearers of the truth'.<sup>9</sup> But according to Keating, what

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<sup>5</sup> George P. Landow, *Elegant Jeremiahs: The Sage from Carlyle to Mailer* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 18.

<sup>6</sup> Landow, *Elegant Jeremiahs*, 22-23.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 24.

<sup>8</sup> Greg Myers, 'Nineteenth-Century Popularizations of Thermodynamics and the Rhetoric of Social Prophecy', *Victorian Studies*, 29:1 (Autumn 1985): 36.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Keating, introduction to *The Victorian Prophets: A Reader from Carlyle to Wells*, ed. Peter Keating (Fontana Paperbacks, 1981), 14.

distinguishes these Victorian prophets from others throughout history was 'the secularism of their concerns', regardless of their own personal religious beliefs; as he put it, 'threats of divine anger or retribution' had given way to the unprecedented threat of democracy, with the French Revolution serving as an all-too-vivid reminder of the apocalyptic danger facing society from this new phenomenon.<sup>10</sup> On this interpretation, studying the past replaced the traditional recourse to the Word of God, as the prophets sought 'understanding or classification of the present by means of historical precedents and contrasts'.<sup>11</sup> For Myers, these social prophets are defined by their criticism of 'the society of their time in terms of a vision of universal history'.<sup>12</sup>

Though predecessors such as William Wordsworth and Coleridge are acknowledged for this prophetic role, it is nearly universally agreed that Carlyle instigated something new – Keating even refers to this new phenomenon as 'the Carlylean prophet'<sup>13</sup> – and that he subsequently influenced many of the later writers. Landow argues that while John Milton and Wordsworth drew upon aspects of Old Testament prophecy and even occasionally presented themselves as prophets, they ultimately wrote as epic poets, putting forth a central message rather than an eccentric one which meant that they did not employ the same rhetorical devices as the sage.<sup>14</sup> Landow claims that the formal type of this genre first emerged tentatively with Carlyle's 'Signs of the Times' in 1829 before appearing fully formed with his mature social criticism in *Chartism* (1839), *Past and Present* (1843), and *Latter-Day Pamphlets* (1850). To a greater or lesser extent, writers such as Ruskin, Thoreau, and Arnold consciously and obviously imitated Carlyle's style and rhetoric in these works.<sup>15</sup> In an older unpublished PhD thesis, Barry Vinson Qualls refers to Carlyle as 'the seminal influence on the literature of the Victorian Age, the Victorian prophet', who persuaded an entire generation of thinkers to embrace

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<sup>10</sup> Keating, introduction, 14.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 17.

<sup>12</sup> Myers, 'Nineteenth-Century Popularizations of Thermodynamics', 36.

<sup>13</sup> Keating, introduction, 13.

<sup>14</sup> Landow, *Elegant Jeremiahs*, 29.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 33

his beliefs 'about what an Age of Machinery was doing to the *inward man*'.<sup>16</sup> I do not mean to challenge Carlyle's place as the founder of this unique genre, rather I mean to contextualise it. Carlyle certainly did something innovative in his critical works beginning with 'Signs of the Times', but, as I argue, he was only able to do so because of the example of his old friend Edward Irving.

One point agreed upon by many of the scholars who have worked on these literary prophet-figures was their stance outside of orthodox religion, or at least the established church. For example, Elisabeth Jay and Richard Jay explicitly cite these individuals' loss of faith or lapse in orthodoxy as a necessary precondition for their criticism.<sup>17</sup> One of the main historical problems with this standard conception of the Victorian prophet has been pointed out by Frank M. Turner, who claims that the nature of modern scholarship has largely shaped and determined our understanding of developments in nineteenth-century British history based on a framework wherein a religious worldview was slowly but steadily replaced by a secular one.<sup>18</sup> Because of this, he argues that our historical understanding has been distorted due to Anglo-American scholars' fascination with the secular, or at least non-Anglican Victorian sage.<sup>19</sup> This can certainly be seen in the majority of academic works on the topic. As an example, Holloway, who includes Newman in his list of sages, explicitly states that he makes no reference to works that are attributed to Newman's Anglican phase.<sup>20</sup> Thus, according to Turner's hypothesis, the historical figures most interesting and worth studying are those which have adopted what can be interpreted as a secular approach to understanding changing social conditions during this time period.

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<sup>16</sup> Barry Vinson Qualls, *Carlyle and Dickens: The Function of the Victorian Prophet* (PhD thesis: Northwestern University, 1973), 17.

<sup>17</sup> Elisabeth Jay and Richard Jay, introduction to *Critics of Capitalism: Victorian Reactions to 'Political Economy'*, eds. Elisabeth Jay and Richard Jay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 21.

<sup>18</sup> Frank M. Turner, *Contesting Cultural Authority: Essays in Victorian Intellectual Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 4.

<sup>19</sup> Turner, *Contesting Cultural Authority*, 42-43.

<sup>20</sup> Holloway, *The Victorian Sage*, 20.

Given the fact that the 'Victorian prophet' continues to be used to evoke this kind of secular social criticism,<sup>21</sup> I believe it is time to examine the origins of the phenomenon, and in so doing, I challenge the historiographical consensus that has developed. Edward Irving used religious language and prophetic rhetoric as he criticised society according to his pre-millenarian vision of universal history, and he portrayed himself as an embattled bearer of the truth, yet as a minister in the Church of Scotland for the majority of his career he was a staunch defender of established religion.<sup>22</sup> It is recognised that many of the later Victorian critics employed religious language and allusions regardless of their personal convictions, and it seems that Irving helped to saturate the British intellectual scene with the kind of ideas, language, and imagery which the prophets, most notably Carlyle, would later employ. I argue ultimately that for the social critics writing in the 1820s and '30s, including Robert Southey, John Sterling, Mill, and especially Carlyle, Irving served as something of an example (for Sterling and Carlyle to varying degrees) but mostly as a foil against which they could establish their own critique of the times.

### Literature Review

Scholarship on Edward Irving is enjoying something of a renaissance. Though he attracted a small but dedicated following throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, within just the past decade a new scholarly biography and an edited collection of his journal and letters have appeared, as well as several books, articles, and theses. Far from precluding any further work on the subject however, this interest has only served to reinforce the need to understand Irving's influence on the wider public during and shortly after his

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<sup>21</sup> Two very recent historical works use the term in their titles: Ciaran Brady's *James Anthony Froude: An Intellectual Biography of a Victorian Prophet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); and Stuart Eagles's *After Ruskin: The Social and Political Legacies of a Victorian Prophet, 1870-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>22</sup> Though the minister of an established church, Irving was also not Anglican, and there is a significant question, which I explore throughout my work, regarding whether or not Irving's status as a *Scottish* minister in London provided him the necessary distance to launch his critiques.

lifetime, as the scholarly focus still (understandably) tends to be on his distinctive theological views and their reception. In this thesis, I draw on this excellent recent scholarship, which has situated Irving firmly within the Romantic atmosphere of the early nineteenth century, in order to show how he stimulated the later Victorian prophets.

From the mid-nineteenth century to the present, scholarship on Irving has focused understandably on the theological controversies by which he was surrounded, from his interpretations of the biblical prophecies, association with the manifestations of the Holy Spirit, including speaking in ‘tongues’, to his high-profile trials both in London and Annan concerning his views on the nature of Christ. Several sketches and biographies appeared in the decades after his death, including those by Washington Wilks and Margaret Oliphant, which attempted to explain Irving’s extraordinary life, though they now provide valuable biographical material. A few decades ago scholars began re-examining the phenomenon of millenarianism in various contexts, and Irving’s contributions to the development of this tradition have been noted in many of these cases. Of these Sheridan Gilley has argued that Irving redefined the concept of the millennium for the Evangelical elite of Britain, through his literal interpretation of the second coming of Christ.<sup>23</sup>

Comprehensive discussions of the scholarship on Irving can be found elsewhere,<sup>24</sup> but I would like to draw attention to several recent works which have sought to modify the perspective from which Irving has been studied. In *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* (1989), D. W. Bebbington broke new ground by arguing that Irving effectually blended Evangelical religion with the Romantic reaction against Enlightenment ideals, and he highlights the influence of Coleridge on Irving’s developing contempt for what he saw to be the expediency of the age.<sup>25</sup> This relationship between Irving and

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<sup>23</sup> Sheridan Gilley, ‘Edward Irving: Prophet of the Millennium’, in *Revival and Religion: Essays for John Walsh*, eds. Jane Garnett and Colin Matthew (London: The Humbledon Press, 1993), 108.

<sup>24</sup> See for instance Byung Sun Lee, ‘Christ’s Sinful Flesh’: *Edward Irving’s Christological Theology within the Context of his Life and Times* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 2-11.

<sup>25</sup> D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1989), 80.

Romanticism has been further explored in a recent article by Ted Underwood, where he argues that Romantic historicism paradoxically helped to shape Irving's dispensational fundamentalism just as it did the more 'secular' Broad Church movement associated with Coleridge and Thomas Arnold.<sup>26</sup> Studies such as these indicate that research on Irving is leading to exciting lines of enquiry, but there is still more to be done.

The connection between Irving's theology and the Romantic atmosphere within which he worked has been taken up very recently as the core focus of a thesis (since published) by Peter Elliott, entitled *Edward Irving: Romantic Theology in Crisis*. There Elliott argues that the distinctive features of Irving's theology – most importantly his millenarianism, Christology, and acceptance of the spiritual gifts – can be explained by his fundamental Romantic principles.<sup>27</sup> Elliott also convincingly shows that the same principles can help to explain the dramatic trajectory of Irving's career, including his confrontation with the Church of Scotland and relegation in the developing hierarchy of the Newman Street congregation. In so doing, Elliott claims that Irving 'not only presented early nineteenth century [sic] Britain with a Romantic theology, he lived his life as something of a Romantic hero'.<sup>28</sup> By analysing Coleridge's marginalia, notebooks, and correspondence, Elliott has also provided a nuanced interpretation of the mutual influence between Coleridge and Irving, arguing that Coleridge was particularly persuaded by Irving's views on the second coming, the millennium, and the visible church.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, Elliott has examined the correspondence of Thomas and Jane Carlyle with the intention of evaluating the view of Irving that is presented there. Though this has certainly provided insights into the fascinating relationship between these three, no attempt is made by Elliott to engage with the few, but as I argue

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<sup>26</sup> Ted Underwood, 'If Romantic Historicism Shaped Modern Fundamentalism Would that Count as Secularization?', *European Romantic Review*, 21:3 (June 2010): 338.

<sup>27</sup> The key features of Romanticism for Peter Elliott (via Michael Ferber) were: an emphasis on the imagination over reason, an organic and potentially revelatory understanding of history, an elevation of individual experience, and an implicit anti-authoritarianism, *Edward Irving: Romantic Theology in Crisis* (PhD thesis: Murdoch University, 2010), 29.

<sup>28</sup> Elliott, *Edward Irving*, 325.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 170.

disproportionately meaningful, published remarks on Irving made by Thomas Carlyle during his lifetime (i.e. excluding the *Reminiscences*).

Following a similar interpretation of the Romantic Edward Irving, Byung Sun Lee has recently provided a new interpretation and historical contextualisation of Irving's theology. Lee argues that Irving sought 'to form a coherent theological system', including his acceptance of the spiritual gifts (the 'tongues') and his pre-millenarian eschatology, which was centred around his belief that Christ had shared exactly the same 'sinful flesh' as the rest of humanity.<sup>30</sup> But perhaps the greatest recent contribution to Irving studies is the publication of a new scholarly biography by Tim Grass. This biography builds on, while correcting, the traditional accounts of Irving's life by Oliphant and Carlyle, and in so doing, Grass provides a realistic depiction of Irving's career which is thematically related to his later history of the Catholic Apostolic Church. Grass's overall interpretation of Irving – a man and minister with high ideals who had a view 'of the ministry as warfare' and thrived on disagreement<sup>31</sup> – is one which will be borne out in this study. These works, combined with Barbara Waddington's recent collection and publication of Irving's letters and journals,<sup>32</sup> provide the foundation for my analysis of Irving's social criticism and sense of prophetic mission.

The literature on Thomas Carlyle is understandably vast. One recent noteworthy study is that by Chris R. Vanden Bossche, who has interpreted Carlyle's career within the context of his search for a transcendental source of authority, transforming an early aesthetic transcendentalism into his later political authoritarianism.<sup>33</sup> Of particular importance to this study are Carlyle's religious views, which have been the subject of much research and speculation. Enquiry into this topic has spawned a collection of articles devoted solely to Carlyle's religious beliefs, which includes several of the texts

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<sup>30</sup> Lee, 'Christ's Sinful Flesh', 11.

<sup>31</sup> Tim Grass, *The Lord's Watchman: A Life of Edward Irving (1792-1834)* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 300-301.

<sup>32</sup> Barbara Waddington, ed., *The Diary and Letters of Edward Irving* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012).

<sup>33</sup> Chris R. Vanden Bossche, *Carlyle and the Search for Authority* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1991), viii.

discussed below.<sup>34</sup> A recent PhD thesis by Joanna Malecka, who challenges the conventional understanding (from James Anthony Froude) of Carlyle as a ‘Calvinist without the theology’, demonstrates the continued liveliness of this particular area of research.<sup>35</sup>

For some scholars of Carlyle, the connection between him and Irving has proved enticing, and there are several relevant papers and articles which have contributed to the present study. In 1983, Lawrence Poston examined the context of Carlyle’s ‘Signs of the Times’, taking into account the three books Carlyle was ostensibly reviewing as well as the few articles he had previously published. Poston notes the similarities between Irving’s work and Carlyle’s, but he argues that Carlyle ultimately sought to call his readers’ attention to the link between two different kinds of enthusiasm: the pre-millenarian doctrine of the imminent apocalypse and the Utilitarian ‘gospel’ of reform.<sup>36</sup> More recently, John M. Ulrich has re-examined Carlyle’s ‘Signs of the Times’ and its relationship to Irving. Ulrich argues, against Poston, that Carlyle’s critique actually came from within the millennialist discourse, and that in his text Carlyle was advancing ‘what is essentially a secular, post-millennialist combination of progressivism and millennialism in direct response to Irving’s theological pre-millennialism’.<sup>37</sup>

Several short studies on the relationship between Irving and Carlyle have touched on the interpretation of Irving as a prophet. In his paper on the intellectual similarities between the two men, Wolfgang Franke has pointed out that Irving’s ‘invectives against Mammonism’ were no less direct than Carlyle’s, and in his denunciation of capitalist exploitation Irving used ‘the language of the Prophets’.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, Franke claims that Irving

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<sup>34</sup> Paul E. Kerry and Jesse S. Crisler, eds., *Literature and Belief*, 25:1/2 (Provo, Utah: Center for the Study of Christian Values in Literature, Brigham Young University, 2005).

<sup>35</sup> Joanna Malecka, *The Ethics, Aesthetics and Politics of Thomas Carlyle’s French Revolution* (PhD thesis: The University of Glasgow, 2017).

<sup>36</sup> Lawrence Poston, ‘Millites and Millenarians: The Context of Carlyle’s “Signs of the Times”’, *Victorian Studies*, 26:4 (Summer 1983): 401.

<sup>37</sup> John M. Ulrich, ‘Thomas Carlyle, Edward Irving, and Millennialist Discourse’, in *Literature and Belief*, 64.

<sup>38</sup> Wolfgang Franke, ‘Carlyle and Edward Irving: The Intellectual Basis of their Friendship’, in *Thomas Carlyle 1981: Papers given at the International Thomas Carlyle Centenary Symposium*, ed. Horst W. Drescher (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Peter Lang, 1983), 61.

undoubtedly identified himself with the role 'of the messenger of God'.<sup>39</sup> In what is perhaps the most significant text among this group, Caroline McCracken-Flesher has examined how both Irving and Carlyle fulfilled the function of prophet for nineteenth-century Britain. But in an article-length analysis such as this, the evidence is necessarily superficial, and we are ultimately left with more questions than answers. More importantly, McCracken-Flesher treats Irving and Carlyle as complimentary products of the age who arose 'side by side' to give 'back to the moment what it required'.<sup>40</sup> This interpretation, which gives agency to society and 'anthropological desire' in producing the role of the prophet, seems to overlook the complex historical nuances of Irving's sensational career and Carlyle's interpretation thereof. As Irving catapulted to fame in the early 1820s and used his public platform to criticise the religious world and liberal society, Carlyle watched and waited; when he tentatively donned the prophetic mantle in 'Signs of the Times', Carlyle was speaking to an audience which had listened to Irving's prophetic denunciations for years.

These scattered and small-scale studies on the relationship and similarities between Irving and Carlyle constitute my point of departure. In this thesis I explore: how exactly Irving fulfilled the role of prophet, and what form this took in Britain during the transformational years of the 1820s and early 1830s; how Irving, who presented himself as a messenger of God, was received by the rest of society; and finally, how Carlyle dealt with the complicated legacy of Irving when he sought to provide his own reading of the times.

## Methodology

This thesis places the development of the Victorian prophetic genre within the historical context of the late 1820s and early 1830s through an analysis of the nature and influence of Edward Irving's social criticism, as he increasingly

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<sup>39</sup> Franke, 'Carlyle and Irving', 64.

<sup>40</sup> Caroline McCracken-Flesher, 'Carlyle, Irving, and the Problematics of Prophecy', in *Literature and Belief*, 29.

portrayed himself as something akin to an Old Testament prophet sent to call British society to repentance before the second coming of Christ. The time period covered is restricted largely to Irving's own lifetime (1792-1834) with most of the attention being on the time he spent preaching and publishing in London, from 1822 until his death. As the majority of this work consists of an examination of Irving's thought and the reception thereof, the research concentrates on Irving's own works and the reactions to and reviews of these from the literary public. But this study also situates Irving's thought within the wider trend of social criticism during this period, both to make suggestions regarding his influence and demonstrate the affinity between his views and those of a few better-known figures, including Carlyle and Robert Southey.

Broadly the methodology I have adopted here is that of an intellectual historian.<sup>41</sup> If we accept the historiographical consensus regarding Carlyle's 'Signs of the Times' as the foundational text for the Victorian prophetic genre, then this thesis can be seen as an extended contextualisation of that essay. Though some scholars have noted the similarities between Carlyle and Irving, I argue that to fully understand what Carlyle was doing in 'Signs of the Times' and his later works of social criticism we need to consider his friend Edward Irving's extraordinary career. By examining his major published works, as well as several timely pamphlets from the late 1820s and early 1830s, I show how Irving presented himself as a Christian prophet for the benefit of the British state and public. I also analyse the newspaper reactions and magazine reviews to show that this intention was clearly recognised (though often criticised) by his contemporaries, a fact which must be taken into account when reading Carlyle's 'review' of Irving in 'Signs of the Times' and his later eulogy for his friend in *Fraser's Magazine*.

What does it mean then for Irving to have presented himself as a nineteenth-century prophet? As John F. A. Sawyer has pointed out, the primary meaning of the original Hebrew word used to describe the vast majority

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<sup>41</sup> John Burrow has defined intellectual history simply as a process of recovering 'what people in the past meant by the things they said and what these things "meant" to them', quoted in Richard Whatmore, *What is Intellectual History?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 19.

of biblical prophets – *nabi* – was ‘proclaimer’, while the early Greek translators used *prophetes* meaning ‘interpreter’.<sup>42</sup> This reminds us that ‘prophecy’ means not only ‘prediction’, as in the more colloquial sense, but also ‘proclamation’, *foretelling* as well as *forthtelling*. While this distinction has certainly been recognised for Carlyle and the later Victorian prophets, it seems to have been forgotten in the case of Edward Irving. He tends to be treated, if at all, as an apocalyptic prophet in the millenarian (predictive) sense, but in fact he actually combined the two aspects of prophecy seamlessly, and in the process he sought to resurrect the prophetic role for Britain in the nineteenth century. Throughout his works, Irving provided expositions of Old Testament texts and likened himself to nearly all the major prophets, including Moses, Jonah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, John the Baptist, and even Christ himself.

In his survey of the Old Testament prophets, Sawyer notes several shared themes which apply not only to Carlyle and Ruskin, as examples of the mature Victorian prophet, but to Irving as well. The prophets often employed a technique in which ordinary objects or events are seen to symbolise important meanings relevant to the present occasion (Landow has much to say on this point), and they also expressed an inner compulsion forcing them to prophesy even against their own will.<sup>43</sup> Materialism was one of the primary concerns for the prophets, with attacks on the rich who indulged at the expense of the poor, and there was a ubiquitous criticism of idolatry.<sup>44</sup> Finally, the prophets were often portrayed as lonely men who had been despised and rejected by society.<sup>45</sup> Landow has summarised the standard prophetic pattern:

the prophets of the Old Testament first called attention to their audience’s present grievous condition and often listed individual instances of suffering. Second, they pointed out that such suffering resulted directly from their listeners’ neglecting – falling away from – God’s law. Third, they promised further, indeed deepened, miseries if their listeners failed to return to the fold; and fourth, they completed the prophetic pattern by offering visions of bliss that their listeners would realize if they returned to the ways of God.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> John F. A. Sawyer, *Prophecy and the Biblical Prophets* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 1.

<sup>43</sup> Sawyer, *Prophecy*, 12, 5.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 45-46.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 43.

<sup>46</sup> Landow, *Elegant Jeremiahs*, 26.

Though this pattern is found in prophetic books throughout the Old Testament, a particularly clear example can be seen in Jeremiah. There the prophet preached in front of the temple in Jerusalem, calling out the idolatry of the Jewish people and warning of the judgment of God: 'Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Behold, mine anger and my fury shall be poured out upon this place, upon man, and upon beast, and upon the trees of the field, and upon the fruit of the ground; and it shall burn, and shall not be quenched' (Jeremiah 7:20).

For those interested in Irving, my analysis of his use of prophetic rhetoric demonstrates how distinctive aspects of his thought and theology provided the foundation from which he could reproach society, and my detailed examination of his contemporary reception in the press is an addition to the recent work on Irving. For Carlyle scholars, this study provides a connection to the excellent research on Irving that has come out within just the last decade. There is a tendency among scholars (those who are not explicitly concerned with his theology) to treat Irving as something of a caricature, and examples abound in the scholarship of misleading claims and even incorrect information regarding basic biographical facts.<sup>47</sup> Donald Winch has called for 'a form of intellectual history that combines sympathy with enough distance to ensure that we do not simply perpetuate previous misrepresentations'.<sup>48</sup> This mixture of sympathy and distance is precisely what is needed in the case of Edward Irving; I have no intention of 'reviving' his reputation (in many ways this has already been done), but I have endeavoured to present a three-dimensional figure who had interesting things to say about the world in which he found himself and who was well-known and widely discussed across the nation during his own lifetime. Finally, for the historians of the nineteenth century, I locate Irving within the wider intellectual history of a much-studied period. Mark Bevir has highlighted several over-lapping 'beginnings' to the intellectual history of the long nineteenth century, including Enlightenment,

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<sup>47</sup> As one conspicuous example which would affect one's entire interpretation of Irving's life and career, Barton Swaim writes that Irving was 'deposed from the ministry in 1827', "*Our own Periodical Pulpit*": Thomas Carlyle's Sermons', *Christianity and Literature*, 52:2 (Winter 2003): 142.

<sup>48</sup> Donald Winch, *Riches and Poverty: An Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain, 1750-1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 422.

Romanticism, Evangelicalism, and Liberalism.<sup>49</sup> As I show throughout this thesis, Irving interacted in interesting and significant ways with these intellectual currents, and I believe that an understanding of his life and career within the context of the times can contribute to a broader understanding of the intellectual history of the period in general.

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In the first chapter I lay out the political, economic, social, and intellectual context of the early nineteenth century in which Irving lived and worked. I also explore further the kind of social criticism which gave rise to the idea of the Victorian prophet by examining several exemplary texts by Robert Southey, John Sterling, John Stuart Mill, and Thomas Carlyle. Despite their differences of opinion, each of these authors writing in the late 1820s and early 1830s addressed, among other things, the erosion of traditional authority structures and the somewhat troubling rise of public opinion. Through an analysis of these texts, an understanding of their shared concerns provides a framework through which to examine Edward Irving's own social criticism.

The second chapter provides a roughly chronological account of Irving's life and thought along with a discussion of his major publications as well as an analysis of the intellectual influences in his life which may have shaped the way he viewed society and his role therein. Irving's relationships with Carlyle, Thomas Chalmers, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge have been the subject of discussion since his own lifetime, but they remain crucial to an understanding of his work. Other influences include his long and difficult probationary period and his experience of urban poverty in Glasgow, in addition to the more famous events and controversies of his later career. Irving's place within the Romantic and millenarian currents of early nineteenth-century Britain is explored, as well as his relationship to the wider developments taking place in the Church of Scotland.

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<sup>49</sup> Mark Bevir, 'The Long Nineteenth Century in Intellectual History', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 6:2 (Autumn 2001): 314-319.

An extensive analysis of Irving's social criticism makes up the third chapter, where I argue that he consciously portrayed himself as a prophet in the Old Testament tradition. By looking primarily at the published discourses throughout his career, it can be seen how his early views on society and the exalted role of Christian ministry later fit into his increasingly pre-millenarian prophetic-historical framework. This provided the foundation for his usage of the rhetoric of a public prophet denouncing a society which had forsaken God, particularly during the debates over Catholic emancipation in the late 1820s. As he faced trials and controversies in the early 1830s, his rhetoric grew even more extreme and confrontational based on his sense of being persecuted at the hands of an apostate Church.

The fourth chapter examines the contemporary reception of and reactions to Irving's views in a thorough way which has not yet been done. Irving's immense popularity during his own lifetime was itself a topic of conversation among his contemporaries, and it ensured that his views and actions were common knowledge around the country. Writers and reviewers commented upon the oratorical qualities of his preaching and writing, they often took offence at his criticism of the contemporary religious world, and the periodical press was very familiar with his social and political criticism. Ultimately, it was recognised (though often lamented) by the wider public that Irving presented himself as an inspired prophet in his apocalyptic denunciations.

In the fifth and final chapter I argue for Irving's significance regarding the development of the later 'Victorian prophet'. The same authors examined in the first chapter, who would go on to establish a new genre of social criticism in the nineteenth century, were aware, to various degrees, of Irving and his prophetic denunciations, and in this way, they competed with him to establish their own interpretation of the times. Carlyle especially sought to reinterpret the significance of Irving's life and career, and I argue ultimately that the kind of 'prophetic' social criticism offered by Carlyle in his major works can be seen as an indirect and complex legacy of Edward Irving. Through the mediation of

Carlyle, this legacy arguably extended through to the later Victorian prophets, shown for example in the work of John Ruskin.

In the conclusion I trace briefly some of the different strands of Irving's legacy, particularly pertaining to his sense of prophetic mission. Perhaps the most obvious is the development of the Catholic Apostolic Church, though the lineage there is not necessarily straightforward, but there are also echoes within the Presbyterian and Anglican establishments, including in the works of John Cumming and Edward Bickersteth.



## The Early Nineteenth-Century Context

The changes which took place within the British state and society in the first few decades of the nineteenth century have been the topic of heated debate since that very time. If we are to understand Edward Irving's role as a prophet during this period, then it is necessary first to examine the context within which he lived and worked. Though the political, economic, and social transformations of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries have often been invoked by Irving scholars in an attempt to place his thought, they have hardly received anything more than cursory notice. The French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars, the economic crisis of 1825-26, and Catholic emancipation were issues to which Irving was responding clearly and articulately, and there were of course deeper structural changes taking place to which he was reacting as well (though perhaps less consciously). This period was no less a time of fierce ideological debate, as Whigs, Tories, and utilitarians contested the new science of political economy, all while extreme critiques of the new society which was emerging were being launched by Romantics and millenarians. The genre of Victorian prophetic writing explored in the introduction has been traced back to Thomas Carlyle, in particular his 1829 essay 'Signs of the Times', but the late 1820s and early 1830s was a time of acute social and political speculation which led to a number of authors employing various rhetorical techniques in an attempt to establish their own interpretation of the age. In the second half of this chapter I analyse several texts – by Robert Southey, John Sterling, John Stuart Mill, and two essays by Carlyle – produced during this period in order to illustrate the kind of social criticism which has given rise to the concept of the 'Victorian prophet'.

### Political, Economic, and Social Background

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries brought significant political, economic, and social changes to Britain. The prolonged series of wars with

France transformed the British economy, while industrialisation altered the face of British society. And in the 1820s and '30s, the British state faced serious challenges regarding its relationship with the established churches and the question of parliamentary representation.

On 10 August 1792, just days after Edward Irving was born, the Tuileries Palace in Paris was stormed and the French royal family taken prisoner.<sup>1</sup> On 21 January 1793, King Louis XVI was executed, marking the dramatic climax to the French Revolution which would continue to transfix both Irving and Thomas Carlyle (as well as an entire generation) decades later. Shortly after the king's execution, France declared war against Britain initiating more than 20 years of British history defined by intermittent warfare. In December 1797, the dreaded moment seemed to have finally arrived as Napoleon, with an army of 120,000 men, waited for favourable conditions to invade England, though he was called off to Egypt early the next year. Napoleon's defeat at the Nile at the hands of Admiral Nelson on 1 August 1798 wound up the War of the First Coalition. Following the year-long Peace of Amiens, Britain was back at war in May 1803. According to Boyd Hilton, a very real fear of invasion persisted in Britain until at least 1805 with Nelson's victory at Trafalgar.<sup>2</sup> The tide began to turn against Napoleon following his disastrous invasion of Russia in 1812, and he was banished to Elba two years later only to return to power once more. On 18 June 1815, he was defeated decisively at Waterloo by the British army under Wellington and its Coalition allies, leading to Napoleon's final banishment to St. Helena. As Hilton points out, the end of the Napoleonic Wars left Britain in a dominant position among European powers with a sense of security which led to national self-confidence and thirty years of taking for granted their international pre-eminence.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore,

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<sup>1</sup> In her biography of Irving, Margaret Oliphant immediately juxtaposes Irving's birth in a quiet corner of Scotland with the revolutionary events taking place in France, *The Life of Edward Irving, Minister of the National Scotch Church, London. Illustrated by his Journals and Correspondence*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1862), Vol. I, 1.

<sup>2</sup> Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People? England, 1783-1846* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 91.

<sup>3</sup> Hilton, *Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People*, 238.

with the defeat of France Britain had acquired a 'second' empire (with a total of 43 colonies by 1816), establishing itself as the global power.

In the spring of 1798, an Irish uprising fed into apocalyptic fears and contributed to the Union between Britain and Ireland (which came into effect in 1801). The addition of a majority Catholic country to the Union would ultimately call into question the relationship between the state and the established churches, a topic which would be the subject of fierce debate for decades. It was clear by the early nineteenth century that the established churches were failing to keep up with population growth in the newly industrialising areas, and consequently Dissenting groups were making huge gains. According to Stewart J. Brown's calculation, the established churches accounted for probably 90 per cent of the population in Britain before 1790, but by 1815 Dissenting bodies claimed perhaps a third of the British population.<sup>4</sup> There was growing demand for reform of the national churches through parliamentary measures, beginning with a series of grants intended to improve small livings initiated by the Prime Minister Spencer Perceval in 1809, and he also raised the minimum stipend paid to clergy in the Church of Scotland. Following Perceval's assassination in 1812, the new PM Lord Liverpool carried on church reform which sought to address non-residence (mainly in the Anglican Church), small livings, exploited curates, and pastoral neglect. In 1818 Parliament granted £1 million for the construction of new churches; by 1821 there were 85 churches that had already been built with these funds or were under construction, and this also stimulated private subscriptions and voluntary church-building which led to hundreds of additional churches.

For centuries several strict measures had been placed on Catholics, prohibiting them from voting, holding public office, and acquiring property. These began to be dismantled in the late eighteenth century, but the Test and Corporation Acts remained, requiring all office-holders to take communion in the Church of England at least once a year and swear oaths to the superiority

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<sup>4</sup> Stewart J. Brown, *The National Churches of England, Ireland, and Scotland 1801-1846* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 50.

of the crown. Though these acts were intended to exclude Catholics from power, the situation was further complicated by the Protestant Dissenting groups who were also thereby barred. Hilton claims that the 'New Dissenters' such as the Methodists were generally anti-Catholic and therefore against repealing the Test and Corporation Acts, while the Unitarians and Old Dissenters favoured repeal for the most part, acknowledging that this would mean opening office to Catholics as well.<sup>5</sup> The campaign for repeal was led by the Unitarian MP William Smith which included hundreds of petitions and led to the introduction of a successful repeal bill by the Whig Lord John Russell. The abolition of these acts had been the aim of Daniel O'Connell, an Irish Catholic barrister, and his Catholic Association which was formed in 1823. Following government suppression of Irish associations, the Catholic Association reformed, and there were gains by pro-Catholic candidates in the election of 1826. O'Connell finally forced the government's hand on the Catholic question when he won the County Clare by-election in July 1828, despite being ineligible to take his seat. Initial inaction by Wellington's government raised the threat of civil unrest, until there was nothing to do but concede the demands; the Roman Catholic Relief Act passed in 1829, removing the last of the remaining Catholic disabilities.<sup>6</sup> As Parliament thus became open to Dissenters and even Catholics, the Anglican Church no longer held its privileged position, and many saw this as the final separation of church and state, cheered by some and lamented by others.

Just a few years later, the British political system would be rocked by the agitation for parliamentary reform. As Hilton points out, there were a thousand petitions for reform by 1 March 1831 compared with only two against, and those from the bigger cities had tens of thousands of signatures.<sup>7</sup> The first unsuccessful bill introduced that year led to a dissolution of the government followed by an election which gave the pro-reform Whigs a substantial majority. After the defeat of the second bill in the Lords during the summer of

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<sup>5</sup> Hilton, *Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People*, 380.

<sup>6</sup> For a recent account of the political narrative of Catholic emancipation see Wendy Hinde, *Catholic Emancipation: A Shake to Men's Minds* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

<sup>7</sup> Hilton, *Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People*, 420.

1831, there were serious riots in London, Derby, Nottingham, and Bristol; the damaged property included the Duke of Newcastle's castle in Nottingham and the Bishop's Palace in Bristol. In March 1832, the third bill passed the Commons on the promise from the King that he would create new peers to ensure its success in the Lords. When the King failed to honour his promise, Wellington was brought in but could not form an administration, and the country was again faced with the threat of popular violence. During the 'Days of May', 200,000 people met in Birmingham and heard Thomas Attwood suggest that armed insurrection might be necessary to bring the Whigs back.<sup>8</sup> Wellington finally conceded to the inevitable and resigned, allowing for Grey to return. This time the bill passed the Lords with no need for additional peers, and the Whigs were rewarded with a major electoral victory the following December. Separate parliamentary acts granted reform measures for Scotland and Ireland.<sup>9</sup>

The historiography of the period is dominated by the 'industrial revolution', though the extent to which the British economy was 'revolutionised' has been seriously questioned. As C. Knick Harley points out, Britain's economy was already substantially industrialised by the early eighteenth century.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, there were major changes that took place in the British economy and society which have contributed to a redefinition of the industrial revolution. M. J. Daunton claims that British industrialisation 'combined rapid structural change and slow growth'.<sup>11</sup> Agricultural yields began improving as early as the seventeenth century, and an increasingly integrated economy allowed regions to begin specialising based on local conditions. Britain's large coal deposits allowed for 'mineral-based energy growth' (British coal usage increased at least fivefold during the eighteenth

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<sup>8</sup> Hilton, *Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People*, 426.

<sup>9</sup> For the reform movement in Scotland see Gordon Pentland, 'Scotland and the Creation of a National Reform Movement, 1830-1832', *The Historical Journal*, 48:4 (December 2005).

<sup>10</sup> C. Knick Harley, 'British and European Industrialization', in *The Cambridge History of Capitalism*, eds. Larry Neal and Jeffrey G. Williamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), Vol. I, 503.

<sup>11</sup> M. J. Daunton, *Progress and Poverty: An Economic and Social History of Britain 1700-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 127.

century), which also freed up land for agriculture.<sup>12</sup> In the eighteenth century, landowners began consolidating large estates where they employed waged workers; this contributed to an increase in labour productivity and released rural workers to enter industry. The population was becoming increasingly centralised, while also growing rapidly, with the highest rate of growth occurring in the decade after 1811.<sup>13</sup> There were conspicuous cases of industrialisation, such as the widespread adoption in the cotton industry of power weaving in the 1820s, which led to the decline of the hand-loom weavers. Factory work entailed a degree of social control by the masters over the workers, involving a cultural shift from task-orientated work to time-orientated work as well as a relative loss of autonomy and sense of subjugation to the machine.<sup>14</sup> However, the transition to centralised, urban factories was relatively slow, and steam power was rivalled by organic energy sources (human, animal, wind, and water power) until at least the mid-nineteenth century. There were also significant regional differences in the experience of industrialisation in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain due to local factors and circumstances: southern England was largely deindustrialised; halting factory development in the West Country created conflict compared to the more successful implementation of factory production in Lancashire and Yorkshire; and coal-based industries emerged in the north-east, south Wales, and along the Mersey and Clyde rivers.<sup>15</sup>

The rise of the great estates was the culmination of the process of enclosure which involved changes to the legal and cultural definition of property as well as the physical creation of fences and hedges to enclose individual fields. As Daunton claims, the years between 1700 and 1850 saw a clearer distinction being drawn between renting and owning property and a trend away from customary tenure to shorter-term leases.<sup>16</sup> Landlords

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<sup>12</sup> Daunton, *Progress and Poverty*, 136.

<sup>13</sup> Michael Anderson, 'The Social Implications of Demographic Change', in *The Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750-1950*, ed. F. M. L. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), Vol. II, 1.

<sup>14</sup> Daunton, *Progress and Poverty*, 180-182.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 144-145.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 69-71.

increasingly treated their lands as their own personal property to be rented out to the highest bidder, and while the situation in Scotland was slightly different, the Highland Clearances from the 1760s, in which landlords cleared whole villages from their lands in order to create large sheep farms, was a notorious and extreme example of this trend. Though the majority of English land was enclosed by 1700, individual instances of enclosure through thousands of private Acts of Parliament, particularly between 1750 and 1819, led to a perception among early nineteenth-century observers of the poor being forcefully dispossessed of their rights through the imposition of the propertied classes.<sup>17</sup> With more power over their tenants, landlords were free to increase rent, and between 1790 and 1815 rising rents outstripped prices leading to ‘a golden age for landlords’ in which they took an increasing share of the national income and benefitted from public office.<sup>18</sup> The political power of the landowners during this period allowed them to shift the burden of taxation onto other groups in society and maintain their higher rents through protection, the most famous example of this being the corn law of 1815.

Two decades of war and the transition to peace afterwards brought significant changes to the British economy. During the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, the national debt ballooned, fuelling anxiety regarding national bankruptcy, and the currency was removed from the gold standard, leading to fierce debates over how and when to resume convertibility. The demobilisation of hundreds of thousands of men in the years immediately following Waterloo, combined with population growth and multiple poor harvests, contributed to rising food prices, which culminated in periodic food riots. But most importantly for the purposes of this study, the mounting national debt during the wars gave rise to the first ‘capitalists’ who held the funds, as well as, in the words of Gregory Claeys, ‘a new mentality of speculative investment’.<sup>19</sup> This increased speculation, in part due to higher profit rates, contributed directly to the economic crisis of 1825-26, which Hilton claims ‘was

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<sup>17</sup> Dauntton, *Progress and Poverty*, 92.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 55.

<sup>19</sup> Gregory Claeys, *Machinery, Money, and the Millennium: The New Moral Economy of Owenite Socialism, 1815-60* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), xviii.

comparable both in substance and dramatic effect to the Wall Street crash of 1929'.<sup>20</sup> In October 1825, a run on the country banks led to widespread failures across England, and in December the London bank of Pole, Thornton, & Co. crashed, bringing with it 43 other country banks. The mood in London during this time was panicky, and there were guards stationed around the Bank of England. As Hilton observes, there was a total of 1,650 bankruptcies recorded in the first half of 1826, and non-payment of wages set off riots in the industrial districts.<sup>21</sup> Daunton points out that this crisis was welcomed by many 'as a corrective to the pretensions of speculators and over-trading'.<sup>22</sup> As will be shown throughout this thesis, Edward Irving would interpret this and other events as divine judgments on an apostate nation.

The first half of the nineteenth century was a time of acute unrest in Britain, brought about in part by the political, economic, and social changes which have been examined above. As Emma Vincent Macleod has noted, during the wars with France there were serious bouts of rioting in 1795-6, 1799-1801, and 1811-13.<sup>23</sup> In addition to the instances of real or perceived violence already mentioned, three conspicuous examples of social unrest will serve to illustrate the general atmosphere of instability and anxiety. In the first half of the 1810s, bands of textile workers known as Luddites, named after a mythical General Ludd, smashed power-looms in the textile centres of the east Midlands, south Lancashire, and west Yorkshire. They were eventually tracked down by government troops, and their leaders were either executed or transported. Years later, agricultural workers would commit similar acts of violence, as they broke threshing machines and burned barns. Referred to as the 'Swing riots', after another mythical leader, Captain Swing, this spate of attacks spread in the second half of 1830 from Kent to much of southern and eastern England and ultimately saw nineteen people executed and hundreds more imprisoned or transported. But the most notorious was the massacre

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<sup>20</sup> Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795-1865* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 131.

<sup>21</sup> Hilton, *Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People*, 398.

<sup>22</sup> Daunton, *Progress and Poverty*, 356.

<sup>23</sup> Emma Vincent Macleod, 'The Crisis of the French Revolution', in *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Britain*, ed. H. T. Dickinson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 118.

that came to be known as Peterloo. On 16 August 1819, a peaceful crowd of 60,000-100,000 people was gathered to hear the Radical Henry Hunt at St. Peter's Fields in Manchester; when government troops were called in to disperse the crowd, eleven people were killed and more than 400 were injured in the resulting conflict. For critics such as Carlyle, this would prove a poignant symbol of the times.

### Intellectual Context

In addition to the external changes mentioned above, there were significant intellectual developments during this period as well. Whigs, utilitarians, and Evangelicals sought to harness the new science of political economy, while the Romantic poets denounced this new form of 'mechanical' thinking, and millenarians looked forward to the second coming of Christ and the end of the world.

When Irving travelled to Edinburgh to attend the University in 1805, he entered an intellectual environment which had seen the development of a new Whig ideology – often referred to as philosophic Whiggism – led by Dugald Stewart, the professor of moral philosophy at Edinburgh. The central tenet of this ideology was 'conjectural' or 'stadial' history, developed to varying degrees in the work of David Hume, Adam Smith, William Robertson, and Adam Ferguson, which stipulated that society progressed through successive stages, from hunter/gatherer, through pastoralism, to agricultural, and finally commercial society. Building on the work of his predecessors in his *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind* (1792), Stewart sought to incorporate the rise of manufacturing into his teleological history; a new generation of Whigs following in his footsteps would come to see the growth of manufacturing and industry as pointing the way to an even higher stage of society. Stewart championed a system of moderate, and therefore gradual political and intellectual reform, and his influence on nineteenth-century statesmen was considerable; among his pupils were James Mackintosh, John Russell, and Henry Brougham. In 1802 the *Edinburgh Review* was set up by

Brougham, Francis Horner, and Francis Jeffrey (editor from 1802-1829) to further these liberal Whig principles, and in so doing, it set the tone for the culture of nineteenth-century periodical reviewing.<sup>24</sup> By the late 1820s and early 1830s, this new ideology had come of age, associated with several influential articles by Thomas Babington Macaulay in the *Edinburgh* where the 'march of mind' and the 'progress of society' were hailed.

Though utilitarianism has come to be inseparably associated with Jeremy Bentham, it was the 'Anglican utilitarians' of the eighteenth century, the most famous of which was the moral philosopher William Paley, who first developed views that were recognisably 'utilitarian'.<sup>25</sup> The theories developed by these thinkers were based on the idea of natural law, in which God was the legislator who willed the happiness of humanity. The most influential text within this tradition was Paley's *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (1785), in which he sought to establish morality and politics on the basis of utility and expediency.<sup>26</sup> This went through fifteen editions by 1805 and remained a standard textbook at Cambridge into the 1840s, though it was criticised (for different reasons) by Evangelicals, high churchmen, and Romantics alike.

In *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, published in 1789, Bentham sought to create a universal, secular system of jurisprudence based on the 'utility' (or greatest happiness) principle, which itself was founded on the motives of pleasure and pain. As James E. Crimmins has summarised: all motives were believed to have their source in the anticipation either of pleasure or pain, therefore all motives were inherently rooted in self-interest; given this universality of motivation, the utility of an act could only be assessed according to its resulting consequences, which were

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<sup>24</sup> For an in-depth study of this influential magazine see Biancamaria Fontana, *Rethinking the Politics of Commercial Society: The 'Edinburgh Review' 1802-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

<sup>25</sup> According to Colin Heydt, two recognisably 'utilitarian' views held by these philosophers were: 'all things – knowledge, virtue, health – are valuable only insofar as they promote pleasure or decrease pain, and actions are right or wrong depending on their consequences for the public good, i.e. the greatest happiness', 'Utilitarianism before Bentham', in *The Cambridge Companion to Utilitarianism*, eds. Ben Eggleston and Dale E. Miller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 17.

<sup>26</sup> Niall O'Flaherty has provided a very recent contextualisation of Paley's work in *Utilitarianism in the Age of Enlightenment: The Moral and Political Thought of William Paley* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

to be determined by what would later be referred to as the 'felicific calculus'.<sup>27</sup> Though Bentham's jurisprudential theories were appreciated to varying degrees in Europe and Latin America, his emphasis on natural rights proved unpopular in anti-revolutionary Britain of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As Colin Heydt points out, Paley's *Principles* 'remained far more influential than Bentham's work for a number of decades'.<sup>28</sup> But in the 1810s Bentham turned his attention to the topic of parliamentary reform, and following the end of the Napoleonic Wars when such reform started to gain traction, he began to enjoy considerable popularity among reformist Whigs and political Radicals. In 1817 he published his plan for radical parliamentary reform, and in the early 1820s the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* became something of a utilitarian political manifesto, containing numerous and significant contributions by James Mill (also a student of Dugald Stewart) and other disciples of Bentham. This included Mill's famous essay 'On Government', in which, according to Crimmins, 'Mill attempted to distill the essence of the utilitarian position on political reform'.<sup>29</sup>

In his influential study, Boyd Hilton has described the first half of the nineteenth century as the 'Age of Atonement', the dominant mode of thought being 'an amalgam of enlightenment rationalism and evangelical eschatology' with the Christian doctrine of atonement at its core.<sup>30</sup> The development of Evangelicalism is dated to the mid-1730s and 1740s with Howell Harris and Daniel Rowland preaching around Wales, George Whitefield and John Wesley around Bristol and London, Jonathan Edwards in Northampton, the Cambuslang revival in Scotland, and similar occurrences across the Atlantic in Massachusetts. Violent opposition to these early Evangelical preachers often led to the creation of tightly-knit, separate communities, the most famous of these being the Methodists. In his seminal work on the subject, D. W. Bebbington defines Evangelicalism with reference to its four distinguishing characteristics: '*conversionism*, the belief that lives need to be changed;

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<sup>27</sup> James E. Crimmins, 'Bentham and Utilitarianism in the Early Nineteenth Century', in *The Cambridge Companion to Utilitarianism*, 40.

<sup>28</sup> Heydt, 'Utilitarianism before Bentham', 25.

<sup>29</sup> Crimmins, 'Bentham and Utilitarianism', 53.

<sup>30</sup> Hilton, *Age of Atonement*, 3.

*activism*, the expression of the gospel in effort; *biblicism*, a particular regard for the Bible; and what may be called *crucicentrism*, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross'.<sup>31</sup>

Despite a few high-profile adherents during the eighteenth century, Evangelical attitudes did not begin to permeate polite society until after the French Revolution. The classic text associated with this late-eighteenth-century development was William Wilberforce's *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians in the Higher and Middle Classes of this Country contrasted with Real Christianity* (1797), wherein Wilberforce criticised the lukewarm late eighteenth-century Christianity he had inherited and sought to initiate a national religious revival. At the centre of this movement was the group which later came to be called the Clapham Sect, including among others Wilberforce, Charles Simeon (vicar of Holy Trinity Church, Cambridge), and Hannah More (author of popular Christian morality tracts during the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars). The group published the *Christian Observer*, edited by Zachary Macaulay (father of Thomas Babington Macaulay), and they were instrumental in securing first the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 and finally slavery itself in 1833. As with the anti-slavery campaign, these turn-of-the-century Evangelicals were prominent proponents of moral and social reform, with a particular focus being on the advancement of education, manifested by the Sunday School movement, the Religious Tract Society, and the British and Foreign Bible Society. Renewed emphasis on missionary activity was another new development with the influence of Evangelicalism, leading to the foundation of the London Missionary Society, the Church Missionary Society, and separate missionary bodies in Edinburgh, Glasgow, and other major cities during the second half of the 1790s.

Where all these intellectual currents converged in the nineteenth century was in the study of political economy. The development of political economy as a science for the statesman has been traced to Adam Smith's

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<sup>31</sup> D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1989), 3.

*Wealth of Nations* (1776), in which he described the mechanics of economic growth based upon the division of labour limited by the productivity of the land. In Edinburgh, Dugald Stewart interpreted the work of Smith and inspired a younger generation of disciples, whom he treated to a series of lectures on political economy from c. 1800-1808.<sup>32</sup> In England, David Ricardo explicated the process whereby wealth was distributed in his *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (1817). Hilton notes that it was the economic debates (over the bullion question and the corn laws) of the early 1810s as well as the publication of Ricardo's *Principles* that brought the subject of political economy to the public's attention.<sup>33</sup> According to Hilton, political economy in England was more technical and less philosophical than it was in Scotland, 'though the dominance of Bentham, James Mill, and Ricardo meant that it was based on a utilitarian or materialist conception of economic man, who balanced in his mind the pains of labour against the pleasures of profit'.<sup>34</sup> With the rise of professionalisation from the 1820s, symbolised by the founding of the Political Economy Club by Mill in London in 1821, the study became more technical and less metaphysical still.<sup>35</sup> In the mid-1820s, university chairs specifically devoted to political economy began to be set up, and J. R. McCulloch, holder of the chair at Edinburgh, delivered a series of public lectures in London on the subject which drew huge crowds and distinguished persons.

In *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798, expanded in 1803), Thomas Robert Malthus argued, against the perfectibilist theories of William Godwin and the Marquis de Condorcet, that human population, which increased geometrically, was kept from outstripping the food supply, increasing only arithmetically, by checks such as famine, disease, and warfare. It was on this basis that Malthus controversially opposed the poor laws, as interfering with the 'preventive' checks on population by incentivising the poor to have more children than they could sustain, and therefore tending to perpetuate poverty and misery. Hilton writes that Evangelicals after Malthus

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<sup>32</sup> Hilton, *Age of Atonement*, 38.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 40.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 37.

combined political economy with an evangelical natural theology, which allowed them 'to acknowledge the dismal nature of a world in alienation from God, as providing an arena for the exercise of man's best, redemptive faculties'.<sup>36</sup> A. M. C. Waterman has defined the tradition initiated by Malthus's writings as Christian Political Economy, which included one of Malthus's greatest disciples, Thomas Chalmers, who will be discussed more fully in the following chapter. Waterman argues that this variety of political economy was a new strain of British conservative thought which, seeking to justify existing economic institutions while remaining open to reform, underpinned the liberal Tory ideology of George Canning, William Huskisson, and Robert Peel.<sup>37</sup>

Despite the popularity and prevalence of political economy, it was not without its critics, the fiercest of which were the Romantics. Scholars have traditionally dated the 'emergence' of English Romanticism as a literary phenomenon to the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, though this (along with everything else related to the concept) has been contested.<sup>38</sup> What I am concerned with here is the tradition of Romantic social criticism which can be traced to the reaction by the Lake poets (Robert Southey, Coleridge, and Wordsworth) to the challenge introduced by Malthus's *Essay on Population*. Donald Winch has pointed to Southey's attack on Malthus in the *Annual Review* for 1803 as the 'opening salvo' of a Romantic critique of political economy which would become institutionalised among the Lake poets.<sup>39</sup> Southey helped to set up the

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<sup>36</sup> Hilton, *Age of Atonement*, 55.

<sup>37</sup> A. M. C. Waterman, *Revolution, Economics, and Religion: Christian Political Economy 1798-1833* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 6.

<sup>38</sup> Romanticism is one of those notorious concepts which seems indefinable but yet indispensable; for a classic account of Romantic literature see M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971); for a more recent attempt to define Romanticism in its relationship to 'Enlightenment' see Marshall Brown, 'Romanticism and Enlightenment', in *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism*, ed. Stuart Curran (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>39</sup> Donald Winch, *Riches and Poverty: An Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain, 1750-1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 288. Philip Connell has since examined the early Romantic responses to Malthus and has convincingly argued that they must be understood within the complex context of the Lake poets' reactions to Paleyite natural theology and re-evaluations of Godwinian rationalism as well as their attempts to reconcile with their own earlier radical republicanism, *Romanticism, Economics and the Question of 'Culture'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), ch. 1.

*Quarterly Review* in 1809, which sought to counter the influence of the Whig *Edinburgh Review*, and he used this organ to continue publishing his views on political economy and similar topics, including in several articles on population, education, and the poor in 1811-12. As Philip Connell has shown, Southey's views expressed in these articles served to influence Wordsworth in his own attacks on political economy in *The Prelude* (1805) and *The Excursion* (1814).<sup>40</sup> Prompted by the introduction of Samuel Whitbread's poor law reform bill in 1807, William Hazlitt penned three (anonymous) letters on Malthus and the poor laws, published in William Cobbett's radical *Weekly Political Register*, which were subsequently expanded and published as *Reply to the Essay on Population*. Hazlitt would continue this attack on political economy and economists, including in his 'Hints on Political Economy' published in Leigh Hunt's *Examiner* in 1826. Percy Bysshe Shelley had also been criticising Malthus from the early 1810s and would produce a famous critique of political economy in his *Defence of Poetry* (composed in 1821 but not published till 1839).

Intersecting each of these intellectual currents in the early nineteenth century was a renewed millenarianism, or belief (in some form or other) in the thousand-year reign of Christ.<sup>41</sup> Though J. F. C. Harrison and others have distinguished between 'intellectually sophisticated millennialists' and 'popular, largely self-educated adventist millenarians', it seems more accurate to think of these as being two ends of a continuous spectrum of millenarian opinion.<sup>42</sup> At the 'millenarian' end of the spectrum were Richard Brothers and Joanna Southcott. Brothers was a retired naval lieutenant and self-styled 'Prince of the Hebrews and nephew of the Almighty', who in 1792 began interpreting his dreams, visions, and 'divine communications' (such as thunder), and he

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<sup>40</sup> Connell, *Romanticism*, 165.

<sup>41</sup> In his survey of the twentieth-century scholarship on millennialism and apocalypticism, Douglas H. Shantz argues that 'millennial ideas are far more central to western historical consciousness than was previously recognized', 'Millennialism and Apocalypticism in Recent Historical Scholarship', in *Prisoners of Hope?: Aspects of Evangelical Millennialism in Britain and Ireland, 1800-1880*, eds. Crawford Gibbon and Timothy C. F. Stunt (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2004), 18.

<sup>42</sup> J. F. C. Harrison, *The Second Coming: Popular Millenarianism 1780-1850* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), 5. Hereafter I will exclusively use the term 'millenarian' to refer to this wide range of beliefs.

believed that on multiple occasions he had successfully interceded to spare God's destruction of London, which he identified as the modern Babylon. In the reactionary atmosphere of the time, Brothers was viewed by the government with suspicion, and in 1795 he was declared insane and taken to a private asylum. Though Brothers continued to attract sympathetic admirers who helped to publish his writings, some of his followers soon gathered around Joanna Southcott, who identified herself with the 'woman clothed with the sun' (from Revelation 12). Previously a domestic servant and upholstress, Southcott had begun writing down her visions and interpretations of scripture in 1792; by 1807 the number of followers who had been 'sealed' by her was around 14,000. It must be noted that similar occurrences were taking place across Europe during the same period.<sup>43</sup> Scholars have also noted the extent to which this millenarianism penetrated the wider culture, including secular variations, but seen especially in the Romantic literature of the period.<sup>44</sup>

On the other ('millennialist') end of the spectrum were the preachers and professional exegetes who reacted to the revolutionary events in France by turning to the apocalyptic prophecies. This was initially dominated by Dissenters who were largely supportive of the Revolution in France, men like the Unitarian Joseph Priestley, who believed that the infidelity engendered in France was necessary to tear down the anti-Christian establishments and bring about a pure Christianity. Another Dissenter, James Bicheno was very positive regarding the events taking place in France, and he argued that by attempting to restore the *ancien régime*, Britain was siding with Antichrist. Apologists for Britain and the Anglican establishment were soon to be found however, in men such as Samuel Horsley and George Stanley Faber. Faber,

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<sup>43</sup> Clarke Garrett has compared millenarian movements in England and France, *Respectable Folly: Millenarians and the French Revolution in France and England* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975); while Stewart J. Brown has highlighted the resurgence of interest in the biblical prophecies seen in Ireland, Germany, Russia, and elsewhere, 'Movements of Christian Awakening in Revolutionary Europe, 1790-1815', in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, Vol. VII, eds. Stewart J. Brown and Timothy Tackett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>44</sup> See Tim Fulford, ed., *Romanticism and Millenarianism* (New York: Palgrave, 2002); Orienne Smith has focused primarily on women writers during this period in *Romantic Women Writers, Revolution, and Prophecy: Rebellious Daughters, 1786-1826* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

whom W. H. Oliver refers to as ‘the period’s one major professional exegete’, identified the infidel power of France as the direct embodiment of Antichrist.<sup>45</sup> The difference separating the enthusiastic supporters of the Revolution and the pessimistic reactionaries was generally one between post-millenarians and pre-millenarians respectively. Very roughly, post-millenarians believed that the world would become progressively better, often attributed (at least implicitly) to the success of missionary work, and would transition into the millennial reign of peace and blessedness, at the end of which Christ would return for the final judgment (in the early nineteenth century this was the more orthodox view often associated with mainstream Evangelicals). Pre-millenarians, on the other hand, held that the world would become progressively worse until the second coming of Christ, an event which would be necessary to usher in the millennial reign. As Edward Irving would become one of the most prominent pre-millenarian exponents from the mid-1820s, this topic will be addressed more fully in further chapters.

This period between the late eighteenth century and first few decades of the nineteenth also saw an explosion in print media. As Hilton points out, book production had increased significantly by the end of the eighteenth century, and the reduction of copyright restrictions between 1774 and 1842 created a market in cheap editions of traditional texts which were accessible to a popular audience.<sup>46</sup> The periodical press expanded exponentially as well, with over half a million copies of the morning newspapers being sold in London alone by the 1790s.<sup>47</sup> With the crystallisation of political and ideological parties during this period, there was also a correspondent growth of newspapers and magazines to serve as mouthpieces for these groups. The *Edinburgh, Quarterly*, and *Westminster* reviews have already been noted, but there were numerous other minor periodicals discussing the political events and publications of the day. Hilton describes the country during this period as

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<sup>45</sup> W. H. Oliver, *Prophets and Millennialists: The Uses of Biblical Prophecy in England from the 1790s to the 1840s* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1978), 54, 57.

<sup>46</sup> Hilton, *Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People*, 15-20.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

'obsessively communicating with itself', which created 'a nationwide marketplace in ideas'.<sup>48</sup>

It is not surprising then with all this communication that it was this period which saw the rise of what came to be understood as 'public opinion'. As Angus Hawkins has noted, participation in political and religious clubs and societies was increasing from the 1790s, and these years also saw the growth of popular political meetings, such as O'Connell's mass meetings in Ireland.<sup>49</sup> Petitioning Parliament, especially after 1815 (seen in the examples above), grew dramatically as an extra-parliamentary form of popular political pressure.<sup>50</sup> Public opinion, as distinguished from the populace, was broadly equated with the middle classes (this concept itself was being defined during the period as well), and it became a prominent theme in Whig rhetoric, used for example in the debates over parliamentary reform.<sup>51</sup>

### The 'Condition of England'

The political, economic, and social changes outlined above prompted a number of competing analyses of the times in the late 1820s and early 1830s. With his *Colloquies on Society*, the Poet Laureate Robert Southey provided a provocative critique of the manufacturing system in Britain; his text has since come to be seen as the archetypal Romantic (and Ultra Tory) reaction to industrialisation which itself inspired significant responses. In the pages of the newly-launched *Athenaeum*, John Sterling, one of a group of younger disciples of Coleridge who could be characterised as 'liberal Anglican', lamented the replacement of religious feeling by worldly pursuits. Another one of the younger generation, John Stuart Mill sought in his 'Spirit of the Age' articles (published in the *Examiner* in 1831) to reconcile his radical utilitarian

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<sup>48</sup> Hilton, *Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People*, 20.

<sup>49</sup> Angus Hawkins, *Victorian Political Culture: 'Habits of Heart and Mind'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 73-74.

<sup>50</sup> Hawkins, *Victorian Political Culture*, 73.

<sup>51</sup> As Hawkins points out, 'the term 'middle classes' conveyed a set of moral values, such as piety, 'virtue', knowledge, industry, diligence, 'independence', and patriotism', and this has often been linked with the growth of Evangelicalism, *Ibid*, 74-75.

upbringing and his recent appreciation of Coleridge as he argued for parliamentary reform. Though there are obvious differences in style, genre, and expressed opinions between the selected works, and they were written at different stages in their respective authors' careers, what they shared was a recognition that the traditional authorities, both political and religious, seemed no longer able to guide society through the unprecedented changes taking place.

Robert Southey (1774 – 1843) was a member of the first generation of Romantics who generally retreated into a conservative paternalism when confronted with the widespread social and political changes brought about by the French Revolution and industrialisation in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Several years after leaving Oxford, due to his rejection of orthodox Christianity which upset his plans for ordination in the Church of England, Southey met and befriended Coleridge. Southey had developed increasingly Radical political views during this period, influenced largely by the events in France, and consequently his writing at this time was often subversive, but with the developments of the Peninsular War, his political views began to shift due to his support for the war. He was made Poet Laureate in 1813; perhaps his most notorious example of discharging this office was a poem on the death of King George III, *A Vision of Judgement* published in 1821. By the mid-1820s, Southey had become an arch-defender of the Anglican establishment, as seen in his *Book of the Church* (1824).

Southey's 1829 book, *Sir Thomas More: Or Colloquies on the Progress and Prospects of Society*, was written towards the end of a productive career, and it represented a direct attempt by him to enter the debate on the 'Roman Catholic Question'. This is immediately evident from the preface, where he stated his position – that Catholics should not hold any office connected to legislative power – and defended the consistency of his views in light of recent criticism.<sup>52</sup> As a work of fiction, the text does not necessarily contain an identifiable argument as such, instead Southey used two main characters to

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<sup>52</sup> Robert Southey, *Sir Thomas More: Or Colloquies on the Progress and Prospects of Society* (London: John Murray, 1829), Vol. I, xi-xiv.

question prevailing opinions on the debate over Catholic emancipation as well as a host of social and political issues facing Britain at the time. The narrator is Montesinos, a man of letters who has thought deeply about society but remains firmly fixed in his nineteenth-century perspective. Throughout the book, this narrator is visited by the ghost of Sir Thomas More, the author of *Utopia* (1516) who was ultimately martyred by Henry VIII for his adherence to papal supremacy. Though Montesinos is generally understood to be 'Southey's textual alter-ego', in Tom Duggett's words, it seems that the two characters provided Southey with the opportunity to explore the optimistic (albeit still reactionary) and pessimistic responses to the societal transformations of the period, in the forms of Montesinos and More respectively.<sup>53</sup>

Though the immediate context of the text was the debate over Catholic emancipation, the overall theme was much more general: it is apparent that the ghost of Thomas More had come to shake Montesinos out of his easy belief in the rapid improvement of society. 'The fact is undeniable', More proclaimed, 'that the worst principles in religion, in morals, and in politics, are at this time more prevalent than they ever were known to be in any former age'.<sup>54</sup> More attempted to show further that this speculative improvement was neither general nor certain, suggesting that 'there may be more knowledge than there was in former times, and less wisdom,.. more wealth and less happiness,.. more display and less virtue'.<sup>55</sup> The two proceeded to trace the moral and physical condition of the people over the centuries to determine the extent to which they have improved. Montesinos claimed that the people's physical condition had improved, pointing to the fact that they were mostly free of war and disease.<sup>56</sup> More rejected both of these propositions; he argued that 'the seeds of civil war' were quickening in the country, and that England was just as susceptible, if not more so, to famine and disease at the present compared to former ages, due in large part to the growth in population and

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<sup>53</sup> Tom Duggett, 'Southey's *Colloquies* and Romantic History', *Wordsworth Circle*, 14:2/3 (2013): 87-88.

<sup>54</sup> Southey, *Colloquies*, Vol. I, 32.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 37.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 47-49.

overcrowding in cities.<sup>57</sup> The labouring classes, More continued, were actually worse off than before: prior to the dissolution of the monasteries, the labouring classes would have been taken care of through the distribution of alms.<sup>58</sup> He claimed that after the Wars of the Roses, 'a trading spirit thus gradually superseded the rude but kindlier principle of the feudal system: profit and loss became the rule of conduct; in came calculation, and out went feeling'.<sup>59</sup> Both interlocutors agreed on the primary cause for the decline in the people's condition: the manufacturing system and the disproportionate wealth and corresponding greed it engendered.

The sight of some children on their way to work in the factory prompted Montesinos and More to discuss the growing manufacturing system and its consequences. For More, this was 'a system that employs men unremittingly in pursuits unwholesome for the body, and unprofitable for the mind' which had conjured up new evils and miseries.<sup>60</sup> But he went further, describing the manufacturing system in vivid imagery:

It is a wen, a fungous excrescence from the body politic: the growth might have been checked if the consequences had been apprehended in time; but now it has acquired so great a bulk, its nerves have branched so widely, and the vessels of the tumour are so inosculated into some of the principal veins and arteries of the natural system, that to remove it by absorption is impossible, and excision would be fatal.<sup>61</sup>

Montesinos tried to distinguish between commerce and manufacturing, claiming that the natural effects of commerce were 'humanizing, civilizing, liberalizing' which 'carries with it industry, activity, and improvement', while manufacturing 'is to produce physical and moral evil, in proportion to the wealth which it creates'.<sup>62</sup> Elsewhere, More claimed that commerce too had been corrupted by 'the greedy spirit of the age'.<sup>63</sup>

The evil effects of this system agreed upon by both characters were the dishonesty and greed it seemed to require and exacerbate, as well as the

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<sup>57</sup> Southey, *Colloquies*, Vol. I, 49-51.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, 88-89.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, 79.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, 170.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, 171.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, 197.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, Vol. II, 301.

disproportionate wealth and poverty it created among the different classes in society. Montesinos complained of the dishonesty in modern trade which was driving out the small shopkeepers.<sup>64</sup> Competition within a manufacturing system such as that of Britain, he declared, was not over who can make the highest quality goods, but who can make the cheapest.<sup>65</sup> More agreed, in characteristically stronger terms:

Was there ever a people among whom [...] the desire of gain had so eaten into the core of the nation? Too truly must it be said that every man oppresses his neighbour, or is struggling to oppress him. The landlord racks his tenant; the farmer grinds the labourer. Throughout the trading part of the community every one endeavours to purchase at the lowest price, and sell at the highest, regardless of equity in either case.<sup>66</sup>

Furthermore, it was suggested that the wealth created through such a system was anything but healthy for the society as a whole, as More provocatively compared the effects on public prosperity from the wealth produced to the health of a person whose limb was swollen with dropsy.<sup>67</sup> 'National wealth is wholesome only when it is equitably diffused', More stated more clearly.<sup>68</sup> Montesinos agreed, pointing out that the 'diseased activity' and 'feverish excitement' due in large part to 'the prevailing fashion of an ostentatious and emulous expenditure' among the middle and upper classes was 'a symptom which hath ever preceded the decay of states'.<sup>69</sup> The effect, according to More, was 'a country where one part of the community enjoys the highest advantages of civilization with which any people upon this globe have ever in any age been favoured, [while] there is among the lower classes a mass of ignorance, vice and wretchedness, which no generous heart can contemplate without grief'.<sup>70</sup>

For More, the growing inequality between the rich and the poor caused by Britain's commercial and manufacturing system, in addition to being morally reprehensible, was creating a dangerously unstable political situation as well.

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<sup>64</sup> Southey, *Colloquies*, Vol. II, 253.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 247.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, 246.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, Vol. I, 178.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, Vol. II, 253.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, 255.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, Vol. I, 106.

He highlighted Britain's seeming inability to eradicate the vice and wickedness which had been allowed to grow 'not on the waste alone, but in the very garden and pleasure ground of society and civilization'.<sup>71</sup> With this lack of order, More encouraged Montesinos to imagine a nightmare scenario, where a hypothetical provocateur had successfully excited a popular insurrection, which certainly would have touched on middle and upper class fears of just such an event. More vividly painted the scene:

Imagine the infatuated and infuriated wretches, whom not Spitalfields, St. Giles's, and Pimlico alone, but all the lanes and alleys and cellars of the metropolis would pour out;.. a frightful population, whose multitudes, when gathered together, might almost exceed belief! The streets of London would appear to teem with them, like the land of Egypt with its plague of frogs: and the lava floods from a volcano would be less destructive than the hordes whom your great cities and manufacturing districts would vomit forth!<sup>72</sup>

Montesinos replied with a comfortable response: that such an uprising would be quickly crushed, which More granted. But, he added, compared with the fire of London, such an insurrection would cause considerable damage and 'would not pass away without leaving in your records a memorial as durable and more dreadful'.<sup>73</sup>

One of the causes agreed upon by the interlocutors, particularly in regard to the rise in infidelity, was the periodical press. Montesinos claimed that the infidelity of other countries, including France, did not come near to the mischief which was 'carried on throughout these kingdoms by periodical publications, daily, weekly, monthly and quarterly, and by some or other of these introduced into the remotest parts of the country'.<sup>74</sup> More had pointed out earlier that the press had been actively employed 'in undermining the foundations of faith, and effacing all respect for religious institutions, and for religion itself'.<sup>75</sup> The problem, according to More, was 'a class of miscreants [...] the panders of the press, who live by administering to the vilest passions of the people, and encouraging their most dangerous errors, practising upon

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<sup>71</sup> Southey, *Colloquies*, Vol. I, 108.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, 114-115.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, 115.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, Vol. II, 106.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, 50.

their ignorance, and inculcating whatever is most pernicious in principle and most dangerous to society'.<sup>76</sup> Another exacerbating factor was an increasingly literate proportion of the population who took the opinions of these writers with an implicit faith.<sup>77</sup> As literature had been made accessible to people of all classes, 'the health of the public mind' was completely dependent upon the quality of that literature.<sup>78</sup> Thus More and Montesinos sought to emphasise the great responsibility that must be exercised by those who would direct the public by their writing. As More put it, 'Kings have not so serious an account to render as they who exercise an intellectual influence over the minds of men'.<sup>79</sup>

The issue that seemed to trouble Southey as his characters discussed this topic was the growing importance of public opinion on the moral and intellectual life of Britain. More recounted the history whereby the press had come to supplant the pulpit in expressing and shaping public opinion. While a 'tyranny of the pulpit' had been thrown down in the defeat of the Covenanters, More warned of a tyranny of the press, which 'is more difficultly to be restrained'.<sup>80</sup> 'Public opinion', he continued, 'has in this country arrogated and obtained a greater degree of authority than is consistent with the public weal. It is deferred to and followed by those whose duty it is to controul it within just bounds, to see that it is duly instructed, and to guide it'.<sup>81</sup> This was no insignificant matter for the two; Montesinos characterised this reality as the defining feature of a new age. He declared, 'First the Sword governs; then the Laws; next in succession is the Government of Public Opinion. To this we are coming. Already its claims are openly and boldly advanced,.. timidly, and therefore feebly, resisted'.<sup>82</sup> More pronounced prophetically, 'Blessings and curses are before you, and which are to be your portion depends upon the direction of public opinion. The march of intellect is proceeding at quick time;

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<sup>76</sup> Southey, *Colloquies*, Vol. II, 387-388.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, 90.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, 362-363.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 386.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, 205-206.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, 209.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, 202-203.

and if its progress be not accompanied by a corresponding improvement in morals and religion, the faster it proceeds, with the more violence will you be hurried down the road to ruin'.<sup>83</sup>

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In the later 1820s, a new generation of social critics had emerged, among which was the somewhat lesser-known John Sterling (1806 – 1844).<sup>84</sup> After attending courses at Glasgow University for several years in the early 1820s, Sterling entered Trinity College, Cambridge, where he became a member of a number of intellectual societies, including the Cambridge Apostles, where he met and befriended Frederick Denison Maurice. This group admired the work of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, whom Sterling first visited at Highgate in August 1827. After moving to London at the end of that year, Sterling became friends with John Stuart Mill through the London Debating Society; it was through Mill that he would later meet Carlyle, with whom he would also form a close friendship. In 1828, Sterling and Maurice took over the operation of *The Athenaeum*, a periodical that had been founded the same year by James Silk Buckingham, which provided Sterling with a ready outlet for his social criticism.

In his series of 'Unpublished Fragments', Sterling presented a youthful critique of society which also served as an homage to Coleridge, the 'patron saint' of the band of Cambridge Apostles. Published in *The Athenaeum* between April and August in 1828, the 'Fragments' were said to be from the pen of Theodore Elbert, a young Swede travelling around England. Though the order in which they appeared does not necessarily make sense from a geographical perspective, there were accounts of Elbert's visits to the Isle of Wight and Netley Abbey in Hampshire, as well as several from London. The particular importance of this work for the purposes of this study lies in Sterling's

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<sup>83</sup> Southey, *Colloquies*, Vol. II, 361.

<sup>84</sup> Very little scholarship has been done on John Sterling; perhaps the only full-length work in the twentieth century devoted entirely to Sterling is Anne Kimball Tuell's *John Sterling: A Representative Victorian* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1941).

diagnosis of society, his suggestions for remedies, and the language he employed in doing so.

In one of Sterling's first scenes in London, Elbert had climbed to an outer gallery of St. Paul's Cathedral to contemplate the city. After taking in the expanse of the city, he imaginatively traced the history of the location from its existence as an uninhabited place to the seat of the commercial empire of Great Britain.<sup>85</sup> But the author's ambivalent attitude towards the greatness of London was soon made apparent. As he looked down from above, he proclaimed, 'And thus it is, that I am now surveying at a glance, this whole immense domain of bustle and competition, a kingdom of swarming streets, an enormous concentration of human wealth, power, and misery'.<sup>86</sup> He continued, in the same vein: 'The greater number of these persons are ignorant, misguided, opposing their will to duty, never to passion, utterly reckless and almost utterly wretched'.<sup>87</sup> And though Elbert could imagine 'a million of living souls' beneath his hand, these were 'in fact, to moral purposes, dead and decaying'.<sup>88</sup>

Everywhere he looked, all he could see was misery. Sterling implored his audience, 'Track home to their lanes and cellars the craftsmen and the labourers, the servants of our pleasure, and see amid their families the unquiet tempers, the sullen rages, the evil cravings, the mutual unrepentant reproaches, which add a sting to penury, and throw poison into the waters of bitterness'.<sup>89</sup> But these 'jealousies, and hatreds, and malignity, vulgar anxieties, and miserable ambitions' could be seen in 'the dwellings of the rich' as well; and though 'the lean cheek of envy is fed from plate instead of earthenware, and self-oblivion is sought for in the costliest, not the cheapest, intoxication', 'the miserable debasement of human nature shows as foul in velvet and jewels as in rags'.<sup>90</sup> To bring home this wretchedness, Sterling

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<sup>85</sup> [John Sterling], 'Unpublished Fragments (From the Travels of Theodore Elbert, a young Swede) No. II. – London', *The Athenaeum. London Literary and Critical Journal*, 27 (30 April 1828): 423.

<sup>86</sup> [Sterling], 'London', 423.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

related the heart-wrenching story of what could be considered a typical boy in the slums of London: born in a workhouse and raised in a brothel, the boy learned to steal out of hunger and sheer desperation; sent to prison but soon released, he committed the same crimes until he was sentenced to hang; a crowd turned out only for the purposes of entertainment, 'to see the horrible removal from the world of a being, who, perhaps, never heard the name of God or duty, or received the sympathy of one human creature'.<sup>91</sup>

Sterling went deeper than this though and examined the causes of this misery, blaming it on selfishness and greed. In the same article, he lamented, 'All, all is selfishness. Selfishness in the conduct of every one of the corporations which compose or minister to the Government: selfishness in the intercourse of society: selfishness in the anxiety of every class to weigh down those below it'.<sup>92</sup> In another instalment in the series, Sterling addressed more specifically 'the state of society', with an aim 'to comment on some of the peculiarities which it seems to exhibit in England'.<sup>93</sup> Among the most important of these peculiarities was the influence and effects of wealth. In exaggerated language, he declared, "Wealth! wealth! wealth! Praise be to the god of the nineteenth century! The idol – the mighty Mammon!"<sup>94</sup> Such are the accents of the time, such the cry of the nation'.<sup>95</sup> This desire for wealth, Elbert claimed, had warped all the priorities in English social life: 'To succeed in life is to make a large fortune, without doing any thing which would send a man to prison. To be unsuccessful is not the being ignorant, or luxurious, or envious, or sensual; but simply the being poor, – the one unpardonable sin – not against the Spirit of God, but against the spirit of the world'.<sup>96</sup> The government, he claimed, was founded 'half on privilege, and half on wealth', but money can buy the privilege,

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<sup>91</sup> [Sterling], 'London', 424.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, 423.

<sup>93</sup> [John Sterling], 'The State of Society in England. [Fragments from the Travels of Theodore Elbert, a young Swede.] No. III', *The Athenaeum. London Literary and Critical Journal*, 31 (28 May 1828): 487.

<sup>94</sup> This reference to Mammon – the anthropomorphised demon of greed – was used by Edward Irving from the mid-1820s (and later by Carlyle), as such it will be discussed in more detail in the third chapter.

<sup>95</sup> [Sterling], 'State of Society', 487.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*.

rendering political power almost completely contingent upon wealth.<sup>97</sup> With 'power, rank, [and] political influence' all tied to wealth, it was no wonder then 'that the talents, and industry, and enterprise of the country, all that should be instruments of good, are devoted to this one pursuit'.<sup>98</sup>

Inequality in the distribution of wealth, blamed largely on the laws of inheritance, had tended to 'make the few rich, and the many poor, and thereby establish laws of opinion, which lead the many to drudge away their lives in seeking to gain the same level as the few'.<sup>99</sup> This was said to have particularly affected 'the aristocracy, and the largest instructed classes immediately below them', from whom 'we ought to be entitled to expect everything for the education of the body of the people'.<sup>100</sup> Sterling continued:

When you degrade the gentry into machines for accumulation and votaries of luxury, and make them alternately misers and spendthrifts, you do almost all that is possible for destroying the best hopes of England; you do all that man can do to prevent the existence of men, who, with that freedom from manual labour which is necessary for the highest cultivation of the faculties, would also have those moderate and self-denying habits which are indispensable to the growth of virtue; all that is possible to deprive the people of moral teachers, and to quench for ever the light of wisdom.<sup>101</sup>

In what would become a familiar claim made by Carlyle and others, Sterling argued that through their greed the upper classes were becoming unfit to lead.

An underlying cause of this degradation for Sterling was an overemphasis on the physical, driven in part by proponents of the utilitarian philosophy. In the view of the 'Englishman of the nineteenth century', according to Sterling, 'we may analyse the mind by chemical solvents, and melt the heart in a blow-pipe; we may arrive at the innermost secrets of the universe by algebraic process; and, by extraction of the square root, lay bare the deepest fibres of the tree of knowledge'.<sup>102</sup> This fascination with the physical had gone so far as to completely arrogate religious sentiment. As he continued, this typical nineteenth-century Englishman 'thinks to discover God

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<sup>97</sup> [Sterling], 'State of Society', 487.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

amid the skies, by taking an observation; and physical science is not merely the wand of Moses to call forth water from the rock, and to govern natural causes, but the fiery presence and living glory of the Deity'.<sup>103</sup> The vocabulary of this physical philosophy confined itself solely to 'utility', relegating 'the beautiful, the true, [and] the good' to 'slaves to the peddling merchant, expediency'.<sup>104</sup> The utilitarian philosopher, according to Sterling, 'weighs the happiness of mankind as a usurer his ingots, and numbers it as a farmer his sheaves: for to him it consists only in sheaves and ingots, and those faculties of our nature, which cannot employ themselves in reading bills of exchange, and reckoning oxen, – are a sound – a fancy – nothing'.<sup>105</sup> On this view then, political economy had become 'not merely the science of laws which regulate wealth, but the science which alone must govern the welfare of our species'.<sup>106</sup>

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John Stuart Mill (1806 – 1873), son of the Benthamite reformer James Mill, did not attend university, but instead studied for the bar, before obtaining a position as junior clerk at the India Office in 1823. He first read Bentham in the early 1820s, which he remembered as being powerfully influential in his intellectual development, and he began attending meetings of the London Debating Society in 1825, where he would later befriend John Sterling. Mill was publishing articles during this time in the *Morning Chronicle* and later the *Radical Westminster Review*. Following his mental breakdown during the winter of 1826-7 (well-documented in his autobiography), Mill began enjoying poetry for the first time, especially that of Wordsworth, and he also started learning German, studying Coleridge, and following the philosophy of the Saint-Simonians in France.

In 1831, a young Mill, by this time good friends with Sterling, weighed in on the debate regarding the present and future state of society which had

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<sup>103</sup> [Sterling], 'State of Society', 487.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

been called into question during the agitation for parliamentary reform. In 'The Spirit of the Age', published in seven instalments in the *Examiner* from January to May of that year, Mill presented his understanding of the political and social changes sweeping British society during this time. Essentially an argument for reform, he provided more however than just a superficial reading of the political changes necessary, offering suggestions as to how society could go from its current transitional state to a natural state once more.

The impetus for Mill's work, like those which have already been examined, was the overwhelming sense that British society was in a state of flux. Mill stated this in confident terms: 'The conviction is already not far from being universal, that the times are pregnant with change; and that the nineteenth century will be known to posterity as the era of one of the greatest revolutions of which history has preserved the remembrance, in the human mind, and in the whole constitution of human society'.<sup>107</sup> It was felt, he claimed, 'that men are henceforth to be held together by new ties, and separated by new barriers; for the ancient bonds will now no longer unite, nor the ancient boundaries confine'.<sup>108</sup> Society was thus divided into those of the present age and those of the past; the former viewed this with exultation, and the latter with terror.<sup>109</sup> In relation to this broad point, it is significant that Mill cited Southey's *Colloquies*, which he referred to as 'the gloomiest book ever written by a cheerful man', and 'very curious and not uninteresting'.<sup>110</sup>

For Mill, it was abundantly clear that he and his generation were living through 'an age of transition'. Supposedly without intending to imply any prejudice, he claimed that 'Mankind have outgrown old institutions and old doctrines, and have not yet acquired new ones'.<sup>111</sup> 'The ancient constitutional

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<sup>107</sup> A. B. [John Stuart Mill], 'The Spirit of the Age. No. I', *The Examiner*, 1197 (9 January 1831): 20.

<sup>108</sup> [Mill], 'No. I', 20.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid*; in his private correspondence at the time, Mill suggested to Sterling that Southey was 'altogether out of place in the existing order of society: his attachment to old institutions & his condemnation of the practices of those who administer them, cut him off from sympathy & communion with both halves of mankind', John Stuart Mill to John Sterling (20-22 October 1831), in *The Earlier Letters of John Stuart Mill: 1812-1848*, ed. Francis E. Mineka (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), 83.

<sup>110</sup> [Mill], 'No. I', 20.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*.

texts', along with the old rules of law, commerce, foreign policy, and ecclesiastical policy had ceased to hold sway over the public mind.<sup>112</sup> Furthermore, social relationships, such as those between the landlord and his tenants and the manufacturer and his workers, had broken down, while the poor did not look up to the rich, nor did the young respect the old.<sup>113</sup>

Though Mill made it clear that he believed in the 'improvement of the age', he argued against any simplistic understanding of this. For him, the knowledge which was being so actively diffused was superficial; while he readily acknowledged that the quantity of debate over important subjects had greatly increased and penetrated deep within society, this was largely mere discussion, not wisdom.<sup>114</sup> He rejected the notion that 'the growth of the human understanding' had set society free from the errors of the past, and he pointed out that people were still susceptible to 'imposture and *charlatanerie*', 'sophisms and prejudice'.<sup>115</sup> In any case, detecting error was one thing, establishing truth on the other hand was much more difficult. 'To have erroneous convictions is one evil', he asserted, 'but to have no strong or deep-rooted convictions at all, is an enormous one'.<sup>116</sup> He continued: 'the men of the present day rather incline to an opinion than embrace it'.<sup>117</sup> And, for Mill, 'this is not a state of health, but, at the best, of convalescence'.<sup>118</sup> This is very similar to the metaphor used by Carlyle in his contemporaneous article, 'Characteristics', discussed below.

On Mill's reading of history, human society was always in one of two states, the natural or the transitional. In a natural state of society, 'worldly power, and moral influence, are habitually and undisputedly exercised by the fittest persons whom the existing state of society affords'.<sup>119</sup> In a transitional state, on the other hand, society 'contains other persons fitter for worldly power

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<sup>112</sup> [Mill], 'No. I', 20.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> A. B. [John Stuart Mill], 'The Spirit of the Age, No. 3' *The Examiner*, 1201 (6 February 1831): 82.

and moral influence than those who have hitherto enjoyed them'.<sup>120</sup> In this state, worldly power and the capacity for wielding it have become severed, and moral authority has either disappeared entirely, or exists only within the wisest of the age. With no established doctrines, 'the world of opinions' becomes 'a mere chaos', the visible remedy being 'an alteration in the conditions for worldly power'.<sup>121</sup> For Mill, this disorder would continue 'until a moral and social revolution (or it may be, a series of such) has replaced worldly power and moral influence in the hands of the most competent'.<sup>122</sup> In the remainder of these papers, Mill set out to show how worldly power and moral influence had become exercised increasingly by those unfit to do so.

According to Mill, society could be politically constituted in one of two ways. As demonstrated in the ancient republics of Greece and Rome, as well as the modern United States, the wielders of worldly power could be chosen specifically for their ability to do so. And, as exemplified by the Highland clan, power could be entirely hereditary, though the possession thereof 'itself calls forth the qualifications for its exercise, in a greater degree than they can be acquired by any other persons in that state of society'.<sup>123</sup> Because the progress of civilization within societies was a natural occurrence, only the latter contained within 'itself the seeds of its own dissolution'.<sup>124</sup> As the holders of power were regularly chosen, new ideas and intellectual forces could be easily incorporated into the existing social order. But when power was handed down hereditarily regardless of the person's capacity to wield it, every cause which raised up 'fitter persons for power than those who possess it' would expose that society to certain destruction.<sup>125</sup> As civilisation progressed, some who were excluded from power would be rendered increasingly fit for it, while 'the monopolizers of power' actually would become less so.<sup>126</sup> Unless such a

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<sup>120</sup> [Mill], 'No. 3', 82.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

‘society be so constituted as to prevent altogether the progress of civilization, that progress always ultimately overthrows it’.<sup>127</sup>

Such was the case, Mill argued, in Europe during the middle ages, where worldly power was tied almost exclusively to wealth. For centuries, this had been restricted to landed property, until, sooner or later, those families that had accumulated ‘manufacturing and commercial wealth’ were admitted as well. This system, whereby power was held by ‘the landed gentry, and the monied class’ to the exclusion of anyone else, remained to the present day.<sup>128</sup> Mill’s complaint in the conclusion of this paper was that this system led almost necessarily to the kind of corruption of political power of which the British state was being accused during this period of agitation. Against the classical argument that luxury tended to enervate the mind, Mill claimed that ‘what really enervates, is the secure and unquestioned possession, without any exertion, of all those things, to gain which, mankind in general are wont to exert themselves’.<sup>129</sup> Because of this, rather than advancing, the higher classes had retrograded ‘in all the higher qualities of mind’.<sup>130</sup> Mill went so far here as to predict the ultimate abolition of hereditary monarchy and aristocracy.<sup>131</sup>

The aristocracy was the focus of Mill’s examination regarding moral influence as well. He identified three sources of moral influence: ‘eminent wisdom and virtue, real or supposed; the power of addressing mankind in the name of religion; and, finally, worldly power’.<sup>132</sup> When these three forces agree with each other, the opinion becomes a ‘received doctrine’; and when they differ or oppose each other, then ‘a violent conflict rages’.<sup>133</sup> These received doctrines he defined as ‘covering nearly the whole field of the moral relations of man, and which no one thinks of questioning, backed as it is by the authority of all, or nearly all, persons, supposed to possess the knowledge enough to

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<sup>127</sup> [Mill], ‘No. 3’, 83.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> A. B. [John Stuart Mill], ‘The Spirit of the Age, No. 3, *concluded*’, *The Examiner*, 1206 (13 March 1831): 162.

<sup>130</sup> [Mill], ‘No. 3, *concluded*’, 162.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>132</sup> A. B. [John Stuart Mill], ‘The Spirit of the Age, No. IV’, *The Examiner*, 1209 (3 April 1831): 210.

<sup>133</sup> [Mill], ‘No. IV’, 210.

qualify them for giving an opinion on the subject'.<sup>134</sup> Again he traced this development throughout history. In Europe during the middle ages, Catholicism, representing the moral influence of religion, was united with worldly power.<sup>135</sup> Following the Reformation, Mill argued that none of the successor churches inherited 'any portion of the moral influence of their predecessor', because no Protestant sect 'ever claimed a special mission from the Deity to itself'.<sup>136</sup> Mill claimed that it was the aristocracy which succeeded to the moral influence previously exercised by the Catholic church. And as they also held worldly power, it was at this time that 'the received doctrines of the British constitution' were established, as well as opinions 'respecting morality, education, and the structure of society'.<sup>137</sup>

But, as Mill attempted to show, this effective formula no longer worked in Britain of the nineteenth century. Put simply, the upper classes had declined: 'In the same ratio in which they have advanced in humanity and refinement, they have fallen off in energy of intellect and strength of will'.<sup>138</sup> Members of the aristocracy, Mill stated, were at the time generally inexperienced in business and ignorant of the world, and their opinions had become hereditary, concerned solely with maintaining the privileges of their order.<sup>139</sup> They had lost their uncontested moral influence, but retained enough 'to prevent any opinions, which they do not acknowledge, from passing into received doctrines'.<sup>140</sup> Their superior capacity for exercising worldly power was now, as Mill asserted, 'a broken spell'.<sup>141</sup> The solution for Mill was to divest the aristocracy of their monopoly on worldly power. This was necessary 'ere the most virtuous and best-instructed of the nation will acquire that ascendancy over the opinions and feelings of the rest, by which alone England

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<sup>134</sup> A. B. [John Stuart Mill], 'The Spirit of the Age, No. 2', *The Examiner*, 1199 (13 January 1831): 52.

<sup>135</sup> A. B. [John Stuart Mill], 'The Spirit of the Age, No. V', *The Examiner*, 1216 (15 May 1831): 307.

<sup>136</sup> A. B. [John Stuart Mill], 'The Spirit of the Age, No. V. (concluded.)', *The Examiner*, 1218 (29 May 1831): 340.

<sup>137</sup> [Mill], 'No. V. (concluded.)', 340.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

can emerge from this crisis of transition, and enter once again into a natural state of society'.<sup>142</sup>

This lack of authority constituted for Mill the most significant aspect of the present age of transition. He argued that '[t]he progress of inquiry has brought to light the insufficiency of the ancient doctrines; but those who have made the investigation of social truths their occupation, have not yet sanctioned any new body of doctrine with their unanimous, or nearly unanimous, consent'.<sup>143</sup> The effect he deduced from this was that '[t]he multitude are without a guide; and society is exposed to all the errors and dangers which are to be expected when persons who have never studied any branch of knowledge comprehensively and as a whole attempt to judge for themselves upon particular parts of it'.<sup>144</sup> The men of the past, he claimed, were those that adhered to the old blind guides; the men of the present were 'those who bid each man look about for himself, with or without the promise of spectacles to assist him'.<sup>145</sup> 'The true opinion', therefore, 'is recommended to the public by no greater weight of authority than hundreds of false opinions'.<sup>146</sup>

#### Thomas Carlyle's 'Signs of the Times'

Thomas Carlyle was born in Dumfriesshire in 1795, and from an early age he was destined by his parents, who were devout Presbyterian Seceders, to enter the ministry. For this purpose he attended Annan Academy and later Edinburgh University. As a 'partial student' at the Divinity Hall, he taught first at Annan Academy and then in Kirkcaldy in 1816, though by this time he had revealed to his parents that he no longer wished to become a minister. A few years later, he moved back to Edinburgh and began learning German, allowing him most importantly to read Goethe. He had decided to embark on a literary career, and he made a long excursion to London in 1824 to test out the waters; there he met some of the literati, including Henry Crabb Robinson, Charles

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<sup>142</sup> [Mill], 'No. V. (*concluded.*)', 340.

<sup>143</sup> [Mill], 'No. 2', 52.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

Lamb, and Coleridge. Carlyle returned to Scotland, where he married Jane Welsh in 1826, and the two moved to a small family farm in Craigenputtoch the following year. At this time, Carlyle's first published articles appeared in the *Foreign Review* and *Edinburgh Review*, and he worked on what would become his first book, *Sartor Resartus*.

Published anonymously in the *Edinburgh Review* in June 1829, Carlyle's 'Signs of the Times' has since become a classic piece of nineteenth-century social criticism. One of Carlyle's earliest publications, this article was ostensibly a review of three books, but he used the opportunity as he would on several other occasions to offer his own perspective on the relevant issues. The claim he made was that his age was a mechanical one, both internally and externally, and he observed this in the politics, religion, and literature of the day. He contrasted this 'mechanism' with 'dynamism' and made a case for the rejuvenation of society. This theme was picked up again by Carlyle in an 1831 review entitled 'Characteristics', also in the *Edinburgh Review*. In these two works, Carlyle laid the groundwork for his views of society which he would express in his later, more famous texts.

With 'Signs of the Times', Carlyle sought to offer his own reading of the age along with his proposals for addressing some of the more pressing societal concerns. He concluded that he and his generation were living in a 'Mechanical Age'. 'It is the Age of Machinery', he wrote, 'in every outward and inward sense of that word; the age which, with its whole undivided might, forwards, teaches and practises the great art of adapting means to ends'.<sup>147</sup> He complained that everything must be done 'by rule and calculated contrivance' rather than by hand.<sup>148</sup> Some obvious superficial examples of this were the train and the steam ship. Carlyle readily acknowledged the 'wonderful accessions' which had been made 'to the physical power of mankind', including the fact that people were for the most part 'better fed, clothed, [and] lodged'.<sup>149</sup> This mechanisation had led to changes in the social system as well: 'wealth has more and more increased, and at the same time

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<sup>147</sup> [Thomas Carlyle], 'Signs of the Times', *The Edinburgh Review*, 49:98 (June 1829): 442.

<sup>148</sup> [Carlyle], 'Signs of the Times', 442.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

gathered itself more and more into masses, strangely altering the old relations, and increasing the distance between the rich and the poor'.<sup>150</sup> Though Carlyle seemed content here to leave such questions to the political economists, these social issues would occupy much of his writing over the course of his career.

Of much greater significance for Carlyle was the seeming realisation that this mechanism had affected to a large extent the internal as well as the external arrangements of society. 'Men are grown mechanical in head and in heart, as well as in hand', he put simply.<sup>151</sup> He made it clear exactly what he meant by this:

Has any man, or any society of men, a truth to speak, a piece of spiritual work to do; they can nowise proceed at once and with the mere natural organs, but must first call a public meeting, appoint committees, issue prospectuses, eat a public dinner; in a word, construct or borrow machinery, wherewith to speak it and do it.<sup>152</sup>

This mechanical mode of proceeding, as Carlyle went on to argue, could be seen in the art, literature, and science of the day. 'In defect of Raphaels, and Angelos, and Mozarts', he complained, 'we have Royal Academies of Painting, Sculpture, Music; whereby the languishing spirit of Art may be strengthened, as by the more generous diet of a Public Kitchen'.<sup>153</sup> Literature too had 'its Trade-dinners, its Editorial conclaves, and huge subterranean, puffing bellows; so that books are not only printed, but, in a great measure, written and sold, by machinery'.<sup>154</sup> Metaphysics and moral science were decaying while the physical sciences enjoyed more attention and respect to the point that, as Carlyle put it, '[t]he science of the age, in short, is physical, chemical, physiological; in all shapes mechanical'.<sup>155</sup>

Carlyle argued that this mechanism could be seen nowhere better than in the politics of the day. '[T]he mighty interest taken in *mere political arrangements*' he interpreted as a sign in itself of the mechanical nature of the age.<sup>156</sup> He sarcastically summed up what he considered to be this dominant

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<sup>150</sup> [Carlyle], 'Signs of the Times', 442.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid*, 444.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid*, 443.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid*, 444.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid*, 445.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid*, 447.

mode of political thinking: 'A good structure of legislation, a proper check upon the executive, a wise arrangement of the judiciary, is *all* that is wanting for human happiness'.<sup>157</sup> Rather than focusing on the 'moral, religious, spiritual condition of the people', he complained that the government of the day concerned itself only with 'their physical, practical, economical condition, as regulated by public laws'.<sup>158</sup> This government called for the duties of 'an active parish-constable' rather than those of a father, displaying his views of an organic paternalistic form of government.<sup>159</sup> Thus it was, according to Carlyle's account of the public sentiment, that by adjusting the physical condition of the governmental machine, 'by preserving it untouched, or else by reconstructing it, and oiling it anew, that man's salvation as a social being is to be ensured and indefinitely promoted'.<sup>160</sup> More than anything, this signified a worshipping of the 'Body-politic' over the 'Soul-politic', a triumph of the external over the internal.<sup>161</sup> The embodiment for Carlyle of this mechanical philosophy was the utilitarian creed which he criticised continuously. He complained that the philosophers of the age, including Bentham, taught 'that our happiness depends entirely on external circumstances'.<sup>162</sup> These political philosophers, he continued, occupied 'themselves in counting-up and estimating men's motives, [and] strive by curious checking and balancing, and other adjustments of Profit and Loss, to guide them to their true advantage'.<sup>163</sup>

Carlyle claimed that this phenomenon was at work in the wider moral condition of society as well. 'Virtue is Pleasure, is Profit; no celestial, but an earthly thing', he declared.<sup>164</sup> Power and ambition were the only desirable qualities; 'beyond money and money's worth, our only rational blessedness is Popularity'.<sup>165</sup> The 'superior morality' of the age was, according to Carlyle, 'rather an 'inferior criminality,' produced not by greater love of Virtue, but by

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<sup>157</sup> [Carlyle], 'Signs of the Times', 447.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid*, 448.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid*, 447.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid*, 449.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid*, 456.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid*, 456-457.

greater perfection of Police; and of that far subtler and stronger Police, called Public Opinion'.<sup>166</sup> The 'Argus eyes' of public opinion, he observed ominously, watched over society 'more keenly than ever; but the 'inward eye' seems heavy with sleep'.<sup>167</sup> He provided a sardonic account of how the process worked:

This and that may be right and true; but we must not do it. Wonderful 'Force of Public Opinion!' We must act and walk in all points as it prescribes; follow the traffic it bids us, realise the sum of money, the degree of 'influence' it expects of us, *or* we shall be lightly esteemed; certain mouthfuls of articulate wind will be blown at us, and this what mortal courage can front?<sup>168</sup>

As a result of this, literature, and particularly the periodical press as the medium of public opinion, had gained greater significance than in any former age. So much so that Carlyle claimed literature had superseded the moral authority of the church. 'The Church of England', he declared, 'at this moment, lies in the Editors of its Newspapers'.<sup>169</sup> Explaining what he meant by this, he wrote, 'These preach to the people daily, weekly; admonishing kings themselves; advising peace or war, with an authority which only the first Reformers, and a long-past class of Popes, were possessed of; inflicting moral censure; imparting moral encouragement, consolation, edification; in all ways diligently 'administering the Discipline of the Church''.<sup>170</sup>

In identifying the problems with which society was afflicted, Carlyle distinguished between 'Mechanics' and 'Dynamics'. Dynamics, he explained, 'is a science which treats of, and practically addresses, the primary, unmodified forces and energies of man, the mysterious springs of Love, and Fear, and Wonder, of Enthusiasm, Poetry, Religion, all which have a truly vital and *infinite* character'.<sup>171</sup> On the other hand, Mechanics was 'a science which practically addresses the finite modified developments of these, when they take the shape of immediate 'motives,' as hope of reward, or as fear of punishment'.<sup>172</sup> What was needed was not one or the other, but rather the

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<sup>166</sup> [Carlyle], 'Signs of the Times', 456.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 457.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 455.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 448-449.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 449.

right balance between these two kinds of forces. Overemphasis on the dynamic side of human nature led 'to idle, visionary, impracticable courses, and, especially in rude eras, to Superstition and Fanaticism, with their long train of baleful and well-known evils'.<sup>173</sup> But more importantly for the purposes of his article, too much focus on the mechanical or outward aspect, 'though less immediately prejudicial, and even for the time productive of many palpable benefits, must, in the long-run, by destroying Moral Force, which is the parent of all other Force, prove not less certainly, and perhaps still more hopelessly, pernicious'.<sup>174</sup>

Carlyle's analysis of the interplay between dynamism and mechanism in human society was predicated on his reading of history. In his study of history, he had concluded that the internal, dynamic considerations were often the motivating factors precipitating change:

Strange as it may seem, if we read History with any degree of thoughtfulness, we shall find that the checks and balances of Profit and Loss have never been the grand agents with men; that they have never been roused into deep, thorough, all-pervading efforts by any computable prospect of Profit and Loss, for any visible, finite object; but always for some invisible and infinite one.<sup>175</sup>

The Protestant Reformation, he claimed, 'had an invisible, mystic and ideal aim', and the English Revolution had been grounded in religious feeling.<sup>176</sup> He posited further that even the French Revolution 'had something higher in it than cheap bread and a Habeas-corporis act. Here too was an Idea; a Dynamic, not a Mechanic force. It was a struggle, though a blind and at last an insane one, for the infinite, divine nature of Right, of Freedom, of Country'.<sup>177</sup> Looking at the present in the light of this history, he observed, 'There is a deep-lying struggle in the whole fabric of society; a boundless grinding collision of the New with the Old'.<sup>178</sup> The French Revolution, however, 'was not the parent of this mighty movement, but its offspring'.<sup>179</sup> With a view to the Britain of his

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<sup>173</sup> [Carlyle], 'Signs of the Times', 452.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 450.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 451.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 459.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*

own day, he declared ominously that the New and Old 'had lain in separate masses, accumulating through generations, and France was the scene of their fiercest explosion; but the final issue was not unfolded in that country: nay, it is not yet anywhere unfolded'.<sup>180</sup>

Two years later, Carlyle addressed the same themes in an article also published in the *Edinburgh Review* under the title 'Characteristics'. Here he further developed the dichotomy between mechanics and dynamics in human society, contending that the former was artificial and conscious, while the latter was natural and unconscious.<sup>181</sup> His diagnosis of British society during his day was that it had become excessively conscious of itself: 'Never since the beginning of Time was there, that we hear or read of, so intensively self-conscious a Society'.<sup>182</sup> As it was for Mill, this kind of self-contemplation was, for Carlyle, 'infallibly the symptom of disease'.<sup>183</sup> Furthermore, this self-consciousness was indicative of an age of debilitating scepticism and doubt: 'Our whole relations to the Universe and to our fellow-man have become an Inquiry, a Doubt; nothing will go on of its own accord, and do its function quietly; but all things must be probed into, the whole working of man's world be anatomically studied'.<sup>184</sup> As in 'Signs of the Times', Carlyle proceeded to show how this doubt could be seen in the politics, religion, and philosophy of the day.

Religion, the highest spiritual function for Carlyle, was in a sorry state. Not taking into account 'the unhappy domains of Unbelief', he claimed that the religion of those who still considered themselves religious was in an unhealthy state, being all too conscious of itself.<sup>185</sup> He remarked, 'Instead of heroic martyr Conduct, and inspired and soul-inspiring Eloquence, whereby Religion itself were brought home to our living bosoms, to live and reign there, we have 'Discourses on the Evidences,' endeavouring, with the smallest result, to make

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<sup>180</sup> [Carlyle], 'Signs of the Times', 459.

<sup>181</sup> [Thomas Carlyle], 'Characteristics', *The Edinburgh Review*, 54:108 (December 1831): 361.

<sup>182</sup> [Carlyle], 'Characteristics', 366.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid*, 356.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid*, 366.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid*, 368.

it probable that such a thing as Religion exists'.<sup>186</sup> Even the Evangelicals, with all their enthusiasm, 'do not preach a Gospel, but keep describing how it should and might be preached'.<sup>187</sup> As it became more and more conscious of itself, religion had become more mechanical and less vital: 'Considered as a whole, the Christian Religion of late ages has been continually dissipating itself into Metaphysics; and threatens now to disappear, as some rivers do, in deserts of barren sand'.<sup>188</sup>

Within the realm of philosophy proper, Carlyle identified two stages of metaphysics: the 'Dogmatical' and the 'Sceptical'. In the first, 'the mind constructively endeavours to scheme out and assert for itself an actual Theorem of the Universe'; while in the latter, 'the existing Theorem of the Universe no longer answers the phenomena' according to an expanded mind, 'but must be torn in pieces, and certainty anew sought for in the endless realms of denial'.<sup>189</sup> It was abundantly clear to Carlyle, as he attempted to show in this article, that his society was in the stage of scepticism and doubt: 'Belief, Faith has well-nigh vanished from the world'.<sup>190</sup> On this view, destruction of the old was necessary, but when there was nothing left to destroy, something new must finally take its place. He proclaimed, 'The doom of the Old has long been pronounced, and irrevocable; the Old has passed away: but, alas, the New appears not in its stead; the Time is still in pangs of travail with the New'.<sup>191</sup>

In this review, Carlyle further elaborated on his understanding of history, which was both cyclical and progressive. Metaphysics, he claimed, was as old as the Book of Genesis, and it had always alternated between these periods of Dogma and Scepticism.<sup>192</sup> 'All Theologies and sacred Cosmogonies' had been produced during the former, and these had all been torn down in the latter, through the work of sceptics from Pyrrho down to Hume.<sup>193</sup> As societies

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<sup>186</sup> [Carlyle], 'Characteristics', 368.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 371.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 373.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 375.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 371.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*

progressed and knowledge increased, the Theorems of the Universe were continually being constructed and reconstructed, gradually incorporating more within them. The resulting conception was a view of history wherein societies went through cycles of belief and scepticism, with each new belief building and elaborating on the former. In 'Signs of the Times' he made this clear: 'it seems a well-ascertained fact, that in all times [...] the happiness and greatness of mankind at large have been continually progressing'.<sup>194</sup> He reiterated this view of the ultimate progress of history in 'Characteristics' when he wrote, 'As Phlogiston is displaced by Oxygen, and the Epicycles of Ptolemy by the Ellipses of Kepler; so does Paganism give place to Catholicism, Tyranny to Monarchy, and Feudalism to Representative Government, – where also the process does not stop'.<sup>195</sup>

Carlyle believed that he and his generation were living through a period in which the old beliefs had been torn down, yet nothing new had taken their place. He would spend the remainder of his career in an attempt to establish some kind of new belief, and this can be seen in these two articles. As has been mentioned, both of these texts were reviews of other works, which offered him the opportunity to comment on the success or failure of other attempts to address the crises of the times. 'Signs of the Times' was a review of three publications, one of these being Edward Irving's *The Last Days*. This fact is immensely significant to the proper understanding both of Irving's influence as well as Carlyle's thought, and as such, this point will be discussed in detail in the final chapter of this thesis. It has been suggested that one of the other texts Carlyle was reviewing was actually a fiction invented by himself, but the remaining text was William Alexander Mackinnon's *The Rise, Progress, and Present State of Public Opinion*. It will suffice here to say that Carlyle portrays these two texts as presenting opposing views of the times, and his interpretation discussed above was meant to serve as a mean between two extremes. He did much the same in 'Characteristics' where he was reviewing Friedrich von Schlegel's *Philosophical Lectures* and Thomas Hope's *An Essay*

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<sup>194</sup> [Carlyle], 'Signs of the Times', 457-458.

<sup>195</sup> [Carlyle], 'Characteristics', 380.

*on the Origin and Prospects of Man*. While the former was seen as ‘the apotheosis of Spiritualism’ and the latter that of Materialism, it was suggested that both were right and wrong in the same way. According to Carlyle, both Schlegel and Hope were attempting to establish some kind of belief. This point will be picked up in the conclusion in reference to the influence of Irving on Carlyle’s early thought.

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Published during a critical four-year period, these texts addressed to varying degrees the pressing social and political issues of the day – industrialisation and urbanisation, Catholic emancipation, and parliamentary reform – but they also probed deeper to examine the underlying causes of these fundamental changes in British society. Robert Southey, in the dialogue between his two characters, exposed the flaws in the optimistic and self-congratulatory belief in continual progress, and he argued that greed had been sapping Britain’s moral and social cohesion since the Reformation. John Sterling presented a vivid picture of the effect of greed on British society, and he was especially concerned with the kind of nominal Christianity which he saw as its outcome. John Stuart Mill explicated the then-present transitional period of British society, highlighting particularly the waning authority of the aristocracy, in an argument for reform. And Thomas Carlyle lamented the ‘mechanical’ nature of British religion, politics, and philosophy, as well as the scepticism and self-doubt of a society that was all-too-conscious of itself. In presenting their various interpretations of the age, they recognised the increasing weight of public opinion at the expense of traditional sources of authority such as the church, and the texts themselves represent their respective authors’ attempt to contribute to and ultimately influence the debate over the present and future of British society. In the remaining chapters, I will show that these more famous social critics had to compete with Edward Irving in reading the signs of the times.

## Edward Irving's Life and Career

Edward Irving undoubtedly lived during a time of transition and transformation. The long dominance of the Moderates in the Church of Scotland was coming under increasing challenge, British poets were reacting against what they saw to be the mechanistic thought of the late eighteenth century, and industrialisation was beginning to alter the very nature of society, all while Europe was struggling with the effects of the French Revolution, Napoleonic Wars, and the continuing 'threat' of democracy. In this chapter, I will explore the personal, socio-political, and intellectual influences on Irving which will allow for a fuller contextualisation of his social criticism and sense of prophetic mission in the following chapter. In addition to providing a framework for the development of his thought through an analysis of his publications and letters, I will also examine the key events and experiences in Irving's life which meant that he interacted in significant ways with the (Scottish) Enlightenment, Evangelical, Romantic, and millenarian intellectual trends of the period. In early adulthood, Irving spent years in and around Edinburgh, immersed in the unique intellectual atmosphere of the Scottish capital; he witnessed first-hand the social side-effects of early industrialisation, first in Glasgow and later in London; and he actively engaged in debates over 'political' issues, most notably Catholic emancipation, during a tumultuous period in British history. In the late 1820s, he began reshaping the Scottish church in London around his increasingly idiosyncratic views, though these ultimately brought him into direct conflict with the Church back in Scotland. This chapter draws heavily on the recent scholarship on Irving by Tim Grass, Byung Sun Lee, and Peter Elliott, and as I situate Irving within the wider intellectual history of the period, a secondary intention is to provide a succinct biography of him for those who may never read these other works.

## Early Life and Education

Edward Irving was born on 4 August 1792 to Mary (*née* Lowther) and Gavin Irving, a tanner and local magistrate in Annan, Dumfriesshire. Though Irving's family roots and early life were humble,<sup>1</sup> Tim Grass claims that he, as well as his Dumfriesshire contemporaries Thomas Carlyle and Hugh Clapperton (an explorer who died in West Africa in 1827), achieved fame because of their provincial background, not in spite of it.<sup>2</sup> Those interested in the later work of Carlyle will find it significant that he and Irving shared many of the same formative experiences during their early lives and education.

Several of Irving's early life experiences have frequently been cited for the possible influence they had on his later thought. The first of these was the education Irving received under Adam Hope, the schoolmaster at Annan Academy. In his later reflection, Irving claimed that any future eminence to which he might rise should be 'attributed totally to Mr Hope whose Instructions it may have pleased the Almighty to prosper and from whose care of my early Education I have derived that activity of Mind, which I know how to value and which I hope will accompany me through life'.<sup>3</sup> In his 'Reminiscence' of Irving (written in 1866 but not published until 1881), Thomas Carlyle, who was himself also taught by Hope,<sup>4</sup> would claim that throughout Irving's dramatic life one could always notice 'something of that primæval basis of rigorous logic and clear articulation laid for him in boyhood by old Adam Hope'.<sup>5</sup> Significantly, Carlyle would also attribute a higher level of sceptical freethinking in Annan to the logical habits of its inhabitants, in part cultivated by Hope, in addition to a drunken and neglectful clergyman.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Margaret Oliphant has illustrated this in all its rustic cheerfulness in *The Life of Edward Irving, Minister of the National Scotch Church, London. Illustrated by his Journals and Correspondence*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1862), Vol. I, 1-11.

<sup>2</sup> Tim Grass, *The Lord's Watchman: A Life of Edward Irving (1792-1834)* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 4.

<sup>3</sup> Edward Irving, Diary (4 August 1810), in *The Diary and Letters of Edward Irving*, ed. Barbara Waddington (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 27.

<sup>4</sup> For Carlyle's own education at Annan Academy see Fred Kaplan, *Thomas Carlyle: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 24-27.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, ed. James Anthony Froude (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1881), Vol. I, 79.

<sup>6</sup> Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, Vol. I, 81.

For about a year when he was ten, Irving would also travel with Hope and several others to attend the Burgher Seceder meeting-house in nearby Ecclefechan, precisely the same one which the young Carlyle and his family would attend. The Scottish Seceders, led by Ebenezer Erskine, had broken away from the Church of Scotland in the 1730s due to grievances over unpopular ministers being forced upon congregations following the reintroduction of patronage in 1712. Andrew L. Drummond and James Bulloch have noted the strong popular base of the Secession church and the relative growth of Seceding congregations during the mid-eighteenth century,<sup>7</sup> though by the early nineteenth century there existed several groups which had further splintered over subsequent theological or ecclesiastical differences. Generally, as Byung Sun Lee has pointed out, the Seceders were theologically conservative, adhering to the letter of the Westminster Confession, and inflexible on matters concerning doctrine and church discipline.<sup>8</sup> Though these trips occurred during a relatively brief period of Irving's childhood, Lee claims that they were deeply formative.<sup>9</sup>

The final point to be noted here was Irving's early, but long-lasting, fascination with the Covenanting tradition in Scottish national and church history. Named for their adherence to the National Covenant (1638) and later the Solemn League and Covenant (1643), the Covenanters fought throughout the second half of the seventeenth century to uphold Scotland's Presbyterian form of church government against the forced introduction of Episcopacy by Charles II. Southwest Scotland had been a stronghold for the Covenanters, and consequently Irving grew up in an environment which was saturated with their myths and legends, some of which were beginning to be disseminated to an even wider audience in the historical fiction of Sir Walter Scott. In an autobiographical passage from one of his later works, Irving claimed to have visited almost every Covenanter's grave 'in the moors and solitudes where

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<sup>7</sup> Andrew L. Drummond and James Bulloch, *The Scottish Church, 1688-1843: The Age of the Moderates* (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1973), 43, 50-51.

<sup>8</sup> Byung Sun Lee, *'Christ's Sinful Flesh': Edward Irving's Christological Theology within the Context of his Life and Times* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 17.

<sup>9</sup> Lee, *'Christ's Sinful Flesh'*, 17.

they fell, martyrs to the doctrine of Christ's sole supremacy in His house'.<sup>10</sup> Later in life, Irving would actually publish (in 1828) a Covenanting tale he heard during his time in Glasgow. In light of the strong likelihood that he knew the story was fake, Liam Upton has used this point to make the suggestion that for Irving 'the myth of the Covenanters' struggle for the national Kirk, as it was preserved in the nation's folklore, was more important than the historical reality'.<sup>11</sup> As will be shown throughout this chapter and the next, Irving's thought would continue to be deeply influenced by his understanding of the Covenanting legacy in Scotland.

At the age of thirteen, Irving began attending classes at the University of Edinburgh along with his brother John. Margaret Oliphant illustrates some of the more personal aspects of 'the noisy, bustling, scolding, not over-savoury life of that old town of Edinburgh' that the two boys would have encountered.<sup>12</sup> But this adolescent experience was also young Irving's first exposure to the wider intellectual and cultural trends which had been shaping Scotland's capital and the country in general. Throughout the second half of the eighteenth century, Edinburgh University had been a bastion of the Moderate literati, including such university-affiliated clergymen as Hugh Blair, Adam Ferguson, and William Robertson. As Stewart J. Brown points out, the Moderates, under the leadership of Robertson from 1762 to 1780, believed that it was the Church's responsibility to promote a culture of moral and material improvement; the clergy were therefore encouraged to be active in all areas of intellectual life in the nation.<sup>13</sup> The ecclesiastical policy of the Moderates was founded on their consistent support for lay patronage (the issue which had already caused the Seceders to split from the Church) based on the belief, in Brown's words, 'that patrons, mainly educated landed gentlemen or Crown officials, presented a superior quality of clergymen to

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<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Lee, *'Christ's Sinful Flesh'*, 18.

<sup>11</sup> Liam Upton, "Our Mother and our Country": The Integration of Religious and National Identity in the Thought of Edward Irving (1792-1834)', in *Religion and National Identity: Wales and Scotland c. 1700-2000*, ed. Robert Pope (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), 246.

<sup>12</sup> Oliphant, *Life of Irving*, Vol. I, 27-28.

<sup>13</sup> Stewart J. Brown, *The National Churches of England, Ireland, and Scotland 1801-1846* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 59.

Scottish church livings – men of refinement, good manners, and intellectual accomplishments, who would exercise a civilizing influence on their parishioners'.<sup>14</sup> Richard B. Sher has examined this dominance of the Moderates during this period, which saw the close union between the universities and the Church of Scotland maintained through effective management of the system of patronage to further their programme of encouraging 'enlightened' values in manners, religion, and literature.<sup>15</sup> Brown claims that the Moderates reflected 'the ethos of the Scottish Enlightenment',<sup>16</sup> while Sher goes even further, defining the very essence of the Scottish Enlightenment 'simply as *the culture of the [Moderate] literati of eighteenth-century Scotland*'.<sup>17</sup>

But in the early nineteenth century, this close connection between Church and university dominated by the Moderates was being tested, manifesting in the so-called 'Leslie Affair'. In 1805, the same year Irving commenced his studies, John Playfair accepted a professorship in natural philosophy, thereby leaving vacant the chair of mathematics. A clergyman, Thomas McKnight, was put forward and supported by the Moderates, who demanded that he be allowed to retain his parish charge. Holding a university position in addition to a parish ministry was the only type of plurality allowed in the Church of Scotland, and the Moderates viewed the connection between Church and university as vital to their programme of moral and material improvement. Playfair and Dugald Stewart opposed McKnight and supported John Leslie, an accomplished scientist and (significantly) not a clergyman. The Moderates ostensibly objected to a note in Leslie's work on the properties of heat in which he seemed to endorse David Hume's conception of causation,

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<sup>14</sup> Brown, *National Churches*, 60.

<sup>15</sup> According to Richard B. Sher, some of these enlightened values included: 'a love of learning and virtue; a faith in reason and science; a dedication to humanism and humanitarianism; a style of civilized urbanity and polite cosmopolitanism; a preference for social order and stability; a respect for hard work and material improvement; an attraction to certain types of worldly pleasures and amusements; a taste for classical serenity tempered by sentimentalism; a distrust of religious enthusiasm and superstition; [...] a commitment to religious tolerance and freedom of expression; and at least a modicum of optimism about the human prospect', *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1985), 8.

<sup>16</sup> Brown, *National Churches*, 59.

<sup>17</sup> Sher, *Church and University*, 8 (emphasis in original).

and in the end, the Town Council appointed Leslie. As Thomas Ahnert points out, the issue had become politicised as the opposition sought to break the system of patronage thereby reducing the influence of the Moderates,<sup>18</sup> but the episode is also remarkable for illustrating the shifting views and values in the Church and university at this time, just as Irving was embarking on his academic career. And this incident is all the more interesting given Leslie's later role in furthering Irving's early prospects.

As this episode suggests, Irving's extraordinary career unfolded during a time of significant transformation in the Church of Scotland, as the Evangelical party (distinct from the wider Evangelical movement) steadily grew in influence before coming to dominate the General Assembly in the early 1830s. Referred to as the Popular Party in the eighteenth century, this group was based around popular opposition to lay patronage and generally adhered to a stricter Calvinism. In the early nineteenth century, a new generation of Evangelicals, including Stevenson Macgill and Sir Henry Moncrieff Wellwood, was reshaping the traditional party. According to Brown, these men were 'strongly influenced by both the thought of the Scottish Enlightenment and the Evangelical movement in England', and they 'participated in the broader culture of improvement' by joining literary and philanthropic societies and even creating their own periodical mouthpiece, the *Edinburgh Christian Instructor*, in 1810 with Andrew Thomson as its first editor.<sup>19</sup> In line with the wider British Evangelical movement in this period, these Scots were also active in anti-slavery and missionary efforts. As Grass points out, Irving is somewhat difficult to place in the dichotomy between Moderates and Evangelicals within the Church of Scotland at this time: for instance, he often explicitly criticised Evangelicals and their societies;<sup>20</sup> however, as will be shown below, on several important issues he tended to side with the Evangelicals.

As a student destined for ordination in the Church of Scotland, Irving's university education was prescribed precisely by the General Assembly. At

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<sup>18</sup> Thomas Ahnert, *The Moral Culture of the Scottish Enlightenment, 1690-1805* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 127.

<sup>19</sup> Brown, *National Churches*, 61.

<sup>20</sup> Grass, *The Lord's Watchman*, 25.

the undergraduate level, he would have studied Latin and Greek, mathematics, natural philosophy, and moral philosophy. Oliphant observes that there is no evidence regarding Irving's academic progress during this period,<sup>21</sup> but he attracted the attention of Alexander Christison, professor of Latin, and Leslie, the newly-appointed professor of mathematics, suggesting at the very least that he was competent in these areas.<sup>22</sup> We can also infer that Irving was developing a good grasp of modern languages as well during this period, as he went on to pick up first French and Italian, and later German and Spanish. Irving took his M. A. in April 1809 and began teaching at a new school in Haddington while he continued his divinity training. He secured his position at the Mathematical School on the recommendations from his professors, Leslie and Christison, and it was also through Leslie that he began tutoring the local doctor's daughter, the young Jane Welsh, who would later marry Thomas Carlyle. Irving tutored Jane in Latin twice a day and spent the rest of his time running the school, teaching fifty boys Latin and some mathematics.

During his time at Haddington, Irving began his ministerial education at the Divinity Hall in Edinburgh, which would have included courses in theology, ecclesiastical history, and Hebrew. Jack C. Whytock has detailed the kind of 'coursework' on which these students would have been examined as stipulated by the General Assembly: 'an exegesis in Latin on a Divinity Controversy[;] a homily in English[;] a lecture on some large portion of Scripture[; and] a popular sermon'.<sup>23</sup> For Irving, as for many others in a similar situation, this study took place irregularly over several years as he worked to support himself, conducted his studies independently, and showed up at Edinburgh periodically to meet the academic requirements.

Unfortunately Irving's student sermons have not survived,<sup>24</sup> but a diary which Irving kept for a short time during this period (from July to August 1810)

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<sup>21</sup> Oliphant, *Life of Irving*, Vol. I, 30.

<sup>22</sup> Significantly, these same two professors became impressed with another student just a few years later, a young Thomas Carlyle, who would soon become close friends with Irving.

<sup>23</sup> Jack C. Whytock, *"An Educated Clergy": Scottish Theological Education and Training in the Kirk and Secession, 1560-1850* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007), 102.

<sup>24</sup> If these sermons had been kept, they would not have endured Irving's decision to burn all his existing sermons several years after he was licensed, Oliphant, *Life of Irving*, Vol. I, 81.

provides a window into the development of his thought during his formative education. As a recent graduate and partial divinity student, he was eager and inquiring; for example, on 31 July 1810 he confessed feeling dissatisfied because he had '[r]eceived no additional knowledge all this day'.<sup>25</sup> In addition to the Bible, his reading at the time included at least parts of William Paley's *A View of the Evidences of Christianity* (first published 1794), Dugald Stewart's *Outlines of Moral Philosophy* (first published 1793), and several political and scientific tracts. On Irving's eighteenth birthday, he reflected on the improvement he had made on the state of his mind over the previous year, and he confirmed his intention to become a minister in the Church of Scotland.<sup>26</sup> He had a habit on Sundays of attending two to three lectures and sermons throughout the day, usually from Drs Robert Lorimer and William Sibbald (respectively ministers of the first and second Church of Scotland congregations in Haddington) as well as James Hill (pastor of the Congregational Tabernacle in the town), which he would then critically examine and digest in his diary. Irving's experience attending the sermons of a variety of ministers led him to reflect on the nature and importance of pulpit eloquence. 'Next to a correct private life', he wrote on 19 August, 'due attention to pulpit discourses is the first object of a Clergyman. They ought to be made level to the capacity of the weakest mind, and yet in such a manner as to be useful to all'.<sup>27</sup> Prompted by the examples of Hill and Lorimer, Irving complained about the deficiencies of extemporaneous discourses, due to the fact that their different parts, as he claimed, were generally unconnected.<sup>28</sup> One must be careful not to read too much into these adolescent thoughts, but they are significant for the emphasis which Irving was already placing on the careful presentation of his discourses and sermons: 'unless properly composed they [a clergyman's discourses] can scarcely be expected to interest, they may

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<sup>25</sup> Edward Irving, Diary (31 July 1810), in *Diary and Letters*, 23.

<sup>26</sup> Irving, Diary (4 August 1810), in *Ibid*, 27.

<sup>27</sup> Irving, Diary (19 August 1810), in *Ibid*, 43-45.

<sup>28</sup> Reading sermons in the pulpit became increasingly popular from the mid-eighteenth century, but, as Ann Matheson claims, there was criticism of read sermons among Evangelicals even into the nineteenth century, *Theories of Rhetoric in the 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Scottish Sermon* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1995), 29.

disgust part of the audience but can never attract, they may tend to produce infidels and careless attenders on public worship but can never reclaim them'.<sup>29</sup>

For two years Irving taught at the school in Haddington and tutored Jane Welsh until a new school opened in Kirkcaldy across the Forth in Fife. Thanks to the continuing support of Professor Leslie, Irving was put forward and accepted as the new schoolmaster. Here Irving taught Latin and mathematics to the boys and girls of the professional people of Kirkcaldy for seven years, and, as Oliphant puts it, 'had the training of a generation in his hands'.<sup>30</sup> She has described, with all the personal touches, the outdoor excursions in which Irving engaged with his classes, and even a series of moonlight astronomical lessons on the Kirkcaldy shore, though there were also tales of the harsh punishment meted out to the students for their disobedience.<sup>31</sup> This time in Irving's life was also significant for two relationships which he developed in the small coastal town. The first was with Isabella Martin (eldest daughter of the parish minister Dr John Martin) who met Irving initially as one of his pupils, and the two were engaged shortly after he left Kirkcaldy. Much has been speculated about the romantic relationship which had developed between Irving and Jane Welsh during his time at Haddington, but Grass has concluded that the traditional account is essentially correct: Irving had loved Jane, but when he was unable to break his engagement to Isabella, his honour dictated that he put Jane away and marry Isabella.<sup>32</sup> In any case, as his wife Isabella remained his constant companion and comfort through all of their personal and public difficulties, and by all accounts Irving was a loving and devoted husband.

The second was with Thomas Carlyle; the two young men would become good friends during their time together in Kirkcaldy, and for the next decade, Carlyle would be one of Irving's closest confidants. Carlyle recorded his own perspective of this early friendship in his 'Reminiscence' of Irving, where he recalled the circumstances of his call to Kirkcaldy. Contrary to

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<sup>29</sup> Edward Irving, Diary (19 August 1810), in *Diary and Letters*, 43-45.

<sup>30</sup> Oliphant, *Life of Irving*, Vol. I, 51.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 52-55.

<sup>32</sup> Grass, *The Lord's Watchman*, 38.

Oliphant's account, Carlyle claimed that Irving's severe school discipline had prompted the desire to set up a rival school among several of his patrons, who appealed to the very same professors (Christison and Leslie) for another candidate for schoolmaster; Carlyle was their choice.<sup>33</sup> Regardless of this initial rivalry, Irving immediately welcomed the new teacher, for, as he claimed, 'two Annandale people must not be strangers in Fife'.<sup>34</sup> Carlyle arrived in August 1816, and he recollected fondly on the two years he spent there with Irving. The two spent a considerable amount of time exploring the surrounding area in southeast Scotland, and we can assume that much discussion passed between them on their long walks in the country; unfortunately one can now only guess at what was said as they walked the fourteen miles back from Dunfermline after travelling to hear Thomas Chalmers preach one Sunday.<sup>35</sup>

Of special significance to Carlyle was Irving's library, where he read Edward Gibbon and Hume, and the two would discuss his daily reading. Though Carlyle seemed to have been deeply impressed by these Enlightenment writers at the time,<sup>36</sup> Grass suggests that their influence for Irving was felt not in the area of what he believed, but rather in the way that he approached preaching.<sup>37</sup> While Irving did not succumb to religious scepticism as Carlyle did, Grass points out that his sermons often indicate an awareness of the challenges this scepticism presented, and, as will be seen in his first major work, Irving emphasised the need for preachers to adopt the appropriate methods in order to reach out to unbelievers.<sup>38</sup> As will be discussed more fully in the final chapter, it was to Irving that Carlyle first admitted his religious doubts, and it is not unlikely that Carlyle presented something of a 'challenge' to Irving in this sense. Doubtless, however, there remained much intellectual common ground between them at this time, and they almost certainly would

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<sup>33</sup> Oliphant, *Life of Irving*, Vol. I, 75; Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, Vol. I, 98-100.

<sup>34</sup> Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, Vol. I, 98.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 104-105.

<sup>36</sup> Carlyle claimed that Gibbon was 'perhaps the most impressive on me in my then stage of investigation and state of mind', *Ibid*, 102.

<sup>37</sup> Grass, *The Lord's Watchman*, 19.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*.

have had mutual influence on each other, though Carlyle was three years Irving's junior.

It was also during this time in Kirkcaldy that Irving finally became a fully-licensed preacher in the Church of Scotland. In order to do so, one had to pass a series of trials, similar to the discourses required at the Divinity Hall, stipulated by the General Assembly:

1<sup>st</sup>, Catechetical trials on Divinity, Chronology, and Church History; 2<sup>nd</sup>, A trial on the Hebrew and Greek languages; 3<sup>rd</sup>, An exegesis in Latin, on some controverted head in Divinity; 4<sup>th</sup>, A Homily in English; 5<sup>th</sup>, An exercise and addition; 6<sup>th</sup>, A lecture on some large portion of Scripture; 7<sup>th</sup>, A popular sermon.<sup>39</sup>

These were completed by June 1815, at which time Irving was licensed by the Presbytery of Kirkcaldy. As per usual, Irving would not be ordained until he received a charge, but he soon began preaching wherever and whenever opportunity allowed. Much to his disappointment however, his occasional sermons in Kirkcaldy were often received with indifference or outright disapproval. As Oliphant recounts, the parishioners complained that Irving had 'ower muckle gran'ner' [too much grandeur], and she relates the story of the baker Beveridge protesting his preaching by storming out of the church.<sup>40</sup>

Carlyle, who was often present for these sermons, recalled that he and their acquaintances 'enjoyed the broad potency of his [Irving's] delineations, exhortations, and free flowing eloquences', though there were elements of his preaching which Carlyle found to be rash and over-affected.<sup>41</sup> But the most significant aspect of Irving's early preaching was the offence it caused to the majority of the congregation, as Carlyle admitted to being rather entertained 'to think of the hides it was piercing'.<sup>42</sup> These incidents go to show that, from the beginning, not only the style but also the content of Irving's sermons proved controversial, though it is unclear just what he was saying at this time. Grass suggests that this poor reception of Irving's early preaching in Kirkcaldy would

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<sup>39</sup> Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 31 May 1813, 937, quoted in Whytock, *An Educated Clergy*, 103.

<sup>40</sup> Oliphant, *Life of Irving*, Vol. I, 67.

<sup>41</sup> Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, Vol. I, 94-96.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 96.

go on to shape the low opinion he would come to express so forcefully regarding the contemporary religious world.<sup>43</sup>

In the summer of 1818, Irving, discontented with teaching and unable to find a parish of his own, moved back to Edinburgh, and Carlyle followed later that year. Though Oliphant portrays this as a period of dejection for Irving, it is significant for the light it throws on his intellectual curiosity. He began attending courses in chemistry and natural history at the University, and he continued studying French and Italian. After having participated in literary societies as an undergraduate and in Haddington, now Irving and Carlyle formed the Philosophical Association as a debating society for those beyond the undergraduate level. Significantly, Oliphant writes that the first essay Irving delivered for this society was on the subject of Bible Societies (about which he would have much to say later), though the precise content of this early discourse is unknown.<sup>44</sup> Throughout his life, Irving kept himself abreast of literary matters even as he denounced them, and, as will be shown, he often directly addressed himself to the 'intelligent classes'. Though he would clearly come to disagree with the 'enlightened' values associated with the Moderates, in other ways he was unconsciously and inescapably a product of the intellectual atmosphere of Scotland's capital which has come to be so closely connected with the Scottish Enlightenment.

It was also during this time in Edinburgh that Irving seriously began contemplating assuming the life and role of a missionary. With his prospects still uncertain, he confided in his future father-in-law: 'here I am to remain until further orders – if from the east I am ready, if from the west I am ready, and if from the folk of Fife I am not the less ready'.<sup>45</sup> The resolution to this state of affairs came in the form of an invitation to preach at St. George's in Edinburgh by its minister, Andrew Thomson, where it was made clear that the eminent Thomas Chalmers would be in attendance, as he was then looking for an assistant to help with the ambitious plans he had for his ministry in Glasgow. Following Irving's sermon, the expected response from Chalmers was not

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<sup>43</sup> Grass, *The Lord's Watchman*, 23.

<sup>44</sup> Oliphant, *Life of Irving*, Vol. I, 81.

<sup>45</sup> Quoted in *Ibid*, 91.

immediately forthcoming, prompting Irving to take the first real step towards 'missionary' life. In her sentimental telling, Oliphant describes how Irving boarded the first ship he came across, in this case bound for Belfast, where he stayed for several weeks visiting with local clergymen and preaching around the area.<sup>46</sup> Upon his return, a letter was waiting from Chalmers, who requested Irving join him in Glasgow, thus initiating the next stage in Irving's career. It is impossible to fully assess the psychological impact this early uncertainty and perceived lack of success had on Irving's thought, but his long probationary period was clearly influential on the way in which he viewed his later call to London and his ministry there.

### Thomas Chalmers and Glasgow

After a period of expectation and disappointment, Irving would soon become connected with perhaps the most famous Scottish minister at the time – Thomas Chalmers. During his time in Glasgow, Irving also gained first-hand experience of the effects of industrialisation and Evangelical reactions to these conditions, in the form of Chalmers's system of social reform.

As a young minister at Kilmany near St. Andrews, Thomas Chalmers seemed more interested in pursuing his academic ambitions than tending to the spiritual needs of his flock. After some lecturing at St. Andrews University (in addition to his ministerial duties), he even presented himself as an arguably underqualified (and ultimately unsuccessful) candidate for the mathematics chair at Edinburgh in 1805, the same one which was taken up by John Leslie after the contentious appointment process. Chalmers continued in his intellectual pursuits, with his thoughts soon turning toward the study of political economy. Following a trip to England where he toured factories and industrial areas in Birmingham and the Midlands, he composed his first major work, *Enquiry into the Extent and Stability of National Resources*, published in 1808. In what Stewart Brown describes as a culmination of his negative view of industrialising England, Chalmers argued in this text for a static and agrarian

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<sup>46</sup> Oliphant, *Life of Irving*, Vol. I, 93-95.

economic ideal, expressed his opposition to the privileged social elites, and laid out a plan for social reform.<sup>47</sup> Though Chalmers had essentially been a Moderate during this period, by February 1811 he had undergone a 'conversion' experience and emerged, in Brown's words, 'as an impassioned Evangelical preacher, proclaiming man's total depravity and alienation from God, and his absolute dependence upon divine grace for salvation'.<sup>48</sup> Following this experience, Chalmers almost immediately gained fame and influence around Scotland and beyond, he became very active in setting up local auxiliaries of the British and Foreign Bible Society, and he initiated a series of innovations, focusing on education, parochial visitations, and poor relief, intended to invigorate his ministry at Kilmany.

But Chalmers had bigger plans for the widescale eradication of pauperism by allowing the parish churches around the country to assume control over the distribution of poor relief. In March 1817, he set out his thoughts on this subject in the *Edinburgh Review*, where he criticised the legal assessments for poor relief and advocated private charity in its place. The basis of this was essentially the Malthusian argument against public poor relief: by artificially maintaining the population in poverty, the government was inadvertently incentivising pauperism. As Chalmers put it, 'hunger and cold should be enough incentive to those who can work, and those who can't can fall back on private charity'.<sup>49</sup> Throughout the article, Chalmers praised the system which, according to him, still prevailed in some rural areas of Scotland, which saw the parish poor maintained entirely through freewill offerings, and he laid out a plan for implementing this in Britain's larger towns and cities. According to Chalmers, the fundamental problem with the legal assessments was the breakdown in personal acquaintanceship between the administrators and the beneficiaries of public poor relief, therefore his system was designed to restore this natural check to pauperism. Instrumental to this were several practical suggestions, including stipulating that the administrators of relief

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<sup>47</sup> Stewart J. Brown, *Thomas Chalmers and the Godly Commonwealth in Scotland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 34-37.

<sup>48</sup> Brown, *Thomas Chalmers*, 49.

<sup>49</sup> [Thomas Chalmers], 'Causes and Cures of Pauperism', *The Edinburgh Review*, 28:55 (March 1817): 8.

should be resident in the parish, giving preference for renting seats to inhabitants of the parish, and ensuring that the minister is well-known throughout the parish.<sup>50</sup> All of this would then help to elevate the moral character of the parishioners through their close and constant contact with upstanding Christian examples, thereby mitigating against pauperism within the community as a whole.<sup>51</sup>

Chalmers had been given the opportunity to put into practice some of these propositions as minister of the Tron church in Glasgow since 1815. As Brown has recounted, Chalmers broke up his large parish into walkable districts, he briefly visited every household, including even those of Dissenters and Roman Catholics, and he instituted a system of Sabbath Schools which only admitted children who were resident in the parish.<sup>52</sup> In September 1819, Chalmers was provided with the opportunity to fully test out his system as he was given control of poor relief in the newly created parish of St. John's (primarily composed of the western portion of the Tron parish), and it was here that Edward Irving came to assist with the ambitious scheme.

Glasgow in 1819 was a manufacturing and industrial city undergoing transformative social changes. As Pamela Sharpe has illustrated, this period saw explosive population growth (with an increase of nearly 200,000 people from 1801 to 1841) and a collapse of real wages.<sup>53</sup> The city's industry was largely based on the trade in cotton textiles, which was susceptible to fluctuations in the international markets, and these often led to periodic recessions, with one occurring in 1819-20, which were then generally followed by typhus epidemics. The result, as T. M. Devine observes, was a growing population of unemployed and poor people filling up the slums around the High Street, Gallowgate, and Saltmarket areas.<sup>54</sup> These deplorable conditions not only made it an unhealthy place to live, it was dangerous as well, with fears

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<sup>50</sup> [Chalmers], 'Causes and Cures', 18-24.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 20-25.

<sup>52</sup> Brown, *Thomas Chalmers*, 99-103.

<sup>53</sup> Pamela Sharpe, 'Population and Society 1700-1840', in *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, ed. Peter Clark (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), Vol. II, 511.

<sup>54</sup> T. M. Devine, 'The Urban Crisis', in *Glasgow*, eds. T. M. Devine and Gordon Jackson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), Vol. I, 406-410.

being stoked of a radical uprising. Christopher A. Whatley has elucidated the state of political unrest among the labouring classes during this period which, following the Napoleonic Wars, included industrial disputes, attacks on property and persons, rioting, and violent confrontations with soldiers.<sup>55</sup> This discontent came to a head in April 1820 when a call to arms was issued for Britons to re-establish their rights, which was followed by a general strike, with around 60,000 people taking part in the industrialised area around Glasgow. Those in Scotland waited for word from England to confirm that uprisings there had been successful, but this never came, and the cavalry was called in to restore order. As F. K. Donnelly has observed, these risings in Scotland were confused and poorly coordinated,<sup>56</sup> but they culminated in the skirmish between a few dozen radicals and cavalymen, known as the 'Battle of Bonnymuir', which was followed by several more days of sporadic clashes before order was eventually restored. With regard to his later social criticism, it is terribly significant that Irving lived through these events even as he was allowed into the very poorest of homes. In December 1819 he had assured Carlyle: 'I think our town is safe for every leal hearted [sic] man to his Maker and to his fellow-men, to traverse without fear of scathe'.<sup>57</sup> But on 15 April of the following year, he confessed, 'It is very dangerous to speak one's mind here about the state of the Country'.<sup>58</sup>

It was this poverty which Chalmers sought to alleviate with his scheme of parish poor relief based on private rather than public charity. As has been mentioned, one of the pillars of Chalmers's system was the relationship between the church officers and the poor parishioners, and this meant actually visiting the people in their own homes to develop these connections. As Brown has pointed out, Chalmers genuinely liked the poor and enjoyed their company,<sup>59</sup> and in this his new assistant was very much the same. Irving was

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<sup>55</sup> Christopher A. Whatley, 'Labour in the Industrialising City, c. 1660-1830', in *Glasgow*, Vol. I, 385.

<sup>56</sup> F. K. Donnelly, 'The Scottish Rising of 1820: A Re-interpretation', *International Review of Scottish Studies*, 6 (1976): 30.

<sup>57</sup> Edward Irving to Thomas Carlyle (26 December 1819), in *Diary and Letters*, 79.

<sup>58</sup> Irving to Carlyle (15 April 1820), in *Ibid*, 84.

<sup>59</sup> Brown, *Thomas Chalmers*, 100.

an enthusiastic visitor to the poor, and by all accounts he really enjoyed this aspect of his position as he made his daily rounds; he admitted to Carlyle, 'My comforts are in hearing the distress of the people, and doing my mite to alleviate them'.<sup>60</sup> He was ubiquitous in the houses of the Gallowgate, and his solemn yet extravagant style was already on display in his blessing – 'Peace be to this house' – to every home he entered. Oliphant recounts some of the anecdotes attributed to him during this time; perhaps the most vivid memorialises Irving's simple sense of charity when it came to those less fortunate than himself. He was said to have been left some inheritance, which he proceeded to break up into one pound notes and hand one out each day for as long as the money lasted.<sup>61</sup> It is clear that the circumstances of his time in Glasgow encouraged him to consider some of the pressing social issues which confronted early nineteenth-century Britain. An example of Irving's speculations can be seen in a letter to Carlyle. 'I am very sorry for the poor', he wrote, 'they are losing their religion, their domestic comfort, their pride of independence, their every thing; and if timeous remedies come not soon they will sink, I fear, into the degradation of the Irish peasantry, and if that class goes down, then along with it sinks the morality of every other class'.<sup>62</sup> Though he would be accused in future of preaching only to the rich, Irving retained a deep affection for the poor and unfortunate throughout his life.

The relationship between Chalmers and Irving was an important, albeit complicated, one. While most scholars conclude that the two men ultimately could not understand each other, their similarities and differences can shed light on the development of Irving's thought during this period. As Brown has argued, Chalmers's plans for parochial reform in Glasgow were based on the Calvinist social ideal of the godly commonwealth as expressed in the foundational texts of the Scottish Church from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>63</sup> Calvinists recognised no clear separation of Church and State, and they emphasised the Old Testament concept of a covenanted nation in

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<sup>60</sup> Edward Irving to Thomas Carlyle (14 March 1820), in *Diary and Letters*, 83.

<sup>61</sup> Oliphant, *Life of Irving*, Vol. I, 114.

<sup>62</sup> Irving to Carlyle (15 April 1820), in *Diary and Letters*, 84.

<sup>63</sup> Brown, *Thomas Chalmers*, xv.

which Church and State, in Brown's words, 'would co-operate in the elevation of the whole society for the glory of God'.<sup>64</sup> Irving's fascination with the Covenanters has already been noted, and Brown claims that Irving embraced the communal goals of Chalmers's plan.<sup>65</sup> It is also significant that around the time Irving was in Glasgow, Chalmers increasingly employed (post-) millenarian language to express his belief that the Evangelical revival represented an extension of vital Christianity which would ultimately lead to the thousand-year reign of peace and blessedness.<sup>66</sup> It seems that Irving held similar post-millenarian views prior to his study of the biblical prophecies in the mid-1820s. In his later career however, Irving's understanding of Britain as a covenanted nation and his (now) pre-millenarian views, combined with his idealistic conception of the Christian ministry, would encourage him to present himself as a prophet to the country.

In Glasgow, as in Kirkcaldy, Irving's preaching was not very well-received, not least because now he was compared constantly to Chalmers in the eyes of the congregation. Oliphant writes of Irving at this time as struggling under the shadow of Chalmers, with his sermons being patiently tolerated as the Doctor's assistant.<sup>67</sup> Irving complained of feeling unfulfilled in his work in Glasgow and began contemplating missionary work again. Late in 1821 he finally received the call he had been waiting for, an opportunity to preach the gospel as he understood it to his own congregation, from the Caledonian Chapel in London. After some initial hurdles and a preliminary visit and trial sermon, which the Duke of York attended, Irving took up his charge in the summer of 1822.

The final sermon he preached to the St. John's congregation in Glasgow was also his first foray into the literary world, as it was published as a pamphlet in 1822. As would be natural, Irving used this opportunity to reminisce on his time spent in Glasgow, but the text also significantly introduced some of the controversial ideas which he would expand on in later

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<sup>64</sup> Brown, *Thomas Chalmers*, xvi.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 139.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, 150.

<sup>67</sup> Oliphant, *Life of Irving*, Vol. I, 125-127.

works. His address was an appeal to the members of the congregation and parish to return the Church of Scotland to its popular foundation, and he extolled the virtues of Chalmers's system of private, personal Christian community. He advocated visiting the poor, 'not as patrons, but as fellow-men', and he criticised the clergy of the age for focusing more on exotic missionary work than the needs of their own parishes.<sup>68</sup> In this early discourse, Irving also attacked what he saw to be the failings of the Church of Scotland in his charge to the younger generation. He proclaimed, 'let the youth destined for the holy ministry stand aloof from the unholy influences [under] which the church hath fallen; from the seats of power and patronage let them stand aloof'.<sup>69</sup> It has already been noted that the issue of patronage largely split the Church in the eighteenth century, and in his criticism of the practice Irving was following a well-worn tradition of the Church of Scotland. We have seen that the Moderates grew to embrace patronage,<sup>70</sup> but the thorny issue would resurface in the 1830s and contribute directly to the Disruption of 1843. While in other respects it may be difficult to place Irving on the Moderate-Evangelical spectrum, on the question of patronage he sided firmly with the Evangelicals.

### London and Samuel Taylor Coleridge

The fact that the majority of Irving's ministry took place in London is not trivial; this had a profound impact on the development of his thought, the way in which he was received, and the subsequent course of his career. In London he would meet several influential people, including Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and he was at the political, social, and economic heart of the nation which provided him with a platform for his preaching.

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<sup>68</sup> Edward Irving, *Farewell Discourse to the Congregation and Parish of St. John's, Glasgow* (Glasgow: Chalmers and Collins, 1822), 30-31.

<sup>69</sup> Irving, *Farewell Discourse*, 15.

<sup>70</sup> William Robertson, as leader of the General Assembly, had vigorously defended the practice in 1766, and in 1784, the Assembly dropped its annual protest to Parliament over the issue, which by then was no more than a formality, Drummond and Bulloch, *The Scottish Church*, 79-80.

It is clear that Irving saw the hand of God in his call to London, and he was eager to acquiesce. Once contacted by the Caledonian Chapel, there was an issue with a stipulation requiring the minister to be able to preach in Gaelic. Irving proposed to devote six months to study of the language; it was only after he learned from a friend that it would take years to master the language that he heard word of the requirement's removal.<sup>71</sup> With this impediment removed, he was ordained by the Presbytery of Annan in June 1822 and made his way to London shortly after. Though he would come to regard the city as 'the modern Babylon', his initial reactions were not entirely negative. During his preliminary trip he had struggled to find the words to describe London to Carlyle, but over a year later, he was much more comfortable:

You have not, you cannot have an idea of the new liberty of thought I enjoy in this City of free men, and of the effect it is working upon both my character & my mind, especially the latter, which though reckoned free I find had been dreadfully confined by the shackles of the North[.] I do feel like a man floating in a sea of thought. I see before me immense tracks to be reclaimed.<sup>72</sup>

He reiterated this less than a month later, though he was slightly more circumspect, when he asserted that 'perhaps even London may thus be instrumental in forming my character as well as my mind. It is a place of terrible labour & industry. You get wedged and wrought into your place, like a soldier in battle – and miserable is he who has not his hand-full'.<sup>73</sup>

From the circumstances which brought Irving down to London, it seems that he had made some minor name for himself in Glasgow, undoubtedly due in part to his association with the great Chalmers, and he quickly became well-known on the London scene. He wrote to Chalmers shortly after he arrived, claiming that 'much expectation hath awaited my arrival, and much interest is beginning to be excited'.<sup>74</sup> The truth of this statement can be seen in the extraordinarily rapid rise to fame Irving experienced in his first few months in

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<sup>71</sup> For the history of the Caledonian Chapel before Irving's arrival see George G. Cameron, *The Scots Kirk in London* (Oxford: Becket Publications, 1979), 103-107.

<sup>72</sup> Edward Irving to Thomas Carlyle (14 February 1823), in *Diary and Letters*, 171.

<sup>73</sup> Irving to Carlyle (8 March 1823), in *Ibid*, 178.

<sup>74</sup> Irving to Thomas Chalmers (20 July 1822), in *Ibid*, 156.

London. In September, several weeks after Irving had actually begun preaching, Chalmers (who had himself undertaken a highly-acclaimed preaching tour of London in 1817) travelled to the metropole and 'introduced' Irving to his congregation. This would certainly have generated some attention in the city, and Irving's letters during this time suggest that his sermons were already regularly well-attended. Oliphant attributed Irving's meteoric rise to a remark made in the House of Commons by George Canning, who had gone to see Irving preach after hearing about him from Sir James Mackintosh.<sup>75</sup> By November of 1822, having been there for just a few months, Irving was writing to his friend celebrating the fact that 'the church overflows every day, and they already begin to talk of a right good Kirk, worthy of our mother and our native country'.<sup>76</sup> Whatever the cause of Irving's popularity, it soon became an integral aspect of his career, a fact explored in greater detail in chapter four.

In the summer of 1823, roughly a year after Irving had arrived in London, he published his first full-length book, *For the Oracles of God, Four Orations. For Judgment to Come, An Argument, in Nine Parts*. As the title suggests, the work was split into two parts, in which he proposed to (re)introduce new forms for conveying spiritual truths: the oration and the argument. Though the extent to which these forms were an innovation was seriously doubted by the reviewers of the work, the intention is significant because it reveals aspects of Irving's underlying project. It has been shown above that he had been thinking carefully about the presentation of sermons since at least his student days in Haddington; now in London he continued to experiment with the structure and format of his discourses as he tried to find the most effective form.

Irving sought in this work to address the minds of the people using 'poetical, historical, scientific, political, and sentimental vehicles',<sup>77</sup> and in this he was following in the spirit at least of the Moderate clergy of the previous age. In the 'Orations', attention was given to the preparation needed and the manner in which the Oracles of God – the word of God as manifested in the

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<sup>75</sup> Oliphant, *Life of Irving*, Vol. I, 158-159.

<sup>76</sup> Edward Irving to David Hope (5 November 1822), in *Diary and Letters*, 164-165.

<sup>77</sup> Edward Irving, *For the Oracles of God, Four Orations. For Judgment to Come, an Argument, in Nine Parts*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: T. Hamilton, 1824), vii.

scriptures – were to be consulted in addition to obeying them, as Irving endeavoured to establish these as the surest form of knowledge and the foundation for all the human faculties. He concluded:

Political knowledge carried to excess makes men proud, bitter, and contentious. Poetical knowledge carried to excess disposeth men to be contemptuous of the wise and prosaic ordinances of customary life. Practical knowledge of affairs makes men worldly and artful. Knowledge of the Scriptures is the only wisdom which shall elevate a man's conceptions, while it purifies his principles and sweetens his temper, and makes his conduct bountiful and kind to all around.<sup>78</sup>

Thus politics, poetry, and practical affairs were not to be avoided, but they must be infused with the knowledge of God as obtained through reading the Scriptures; only then can human affairs be brought to their full potential.

The second part of the book (the 'Argument') concerned the final judgment of the world, a theme which would come to dominate Irving's thought over the course of his life, but it is crucial to note the differences in this early work from his later views. Here he set out an argument for the centrality of the divine judgment, appealing to common sense and reason and avoiding metaphysical discourse. The argument proceeded from the accordance between human nature and a state of responsibility, through the divine right to sovereignty, and Christ's sacrifice as the sole justification for submitting to divine authority. On the last judgment itself, Irving discoursed on the 25<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew, where he analysed the six afflictions listed there (being hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, without friends, and in prison) as the aspects of misery destined for those who are to be punished. He also provided descriptions of heaven and hell, which, as Irving claimed, were presented 'before the Court of human reason', being analogous to everyday intuitions of pleasure and pain.<sup>79</sup> The significance of Irving's depiction of these two states lies in the fact that, at this stage, the last judgment was largely symbolic, which can be seen in his dismissal of physical harps in heaven and fire in hell.<sup>80</sup> As Irving would continue to contemplate the topic of the last judgment over the next decade, it would become much more physically real.

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<sup>78</sup> Irving, *For the Oracles*, 84.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 408.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, 410.

Irving stated that he was prompted in part to write on this subject in response to two recent poems on the death of George III, Robert Southey's *Visions of Judgment* and Lord Byron's parody of the same. He referred to these as 'two most nauseous and unformed abortions, vile, unprincipled, and unmeaning' and felt called upon to clarify the subject.<sup>81</sup> This, along with his praise of William Wordsworth's poetry in the text, was seen by his reviewers as an incursion by a Christian minister into the sphere of literary taste, but it was in precise accordance with the kind of holistic approach that Irving had decided to take. In an extended digression, he also addressed 'the well-being of civil society', which he concluded was afflicted by two evils: 'inactivity of some of her members, and the over-activity of others – the stupor on one part, and the fever of another – sluggishness and discontent'.<sup>82</sup> He concluded his book with an examination of the sentimental, intellectual, and moral life before demonstrating the superiority of the spiritual life. This willingness to debate issues of literary taste, political principles, and social conditions is evidence of Irving's wide view of his remit as a Christian minister, and his views on these subjects constitute his criticism of the age which is examined in the next chapter. Irving's book caused something of a sensation in the London literary world, with numerous reviews appearing in the newspapers and magazines which will be examined in the fourth chapter.

Perhaps the most significant relationship Irving made during his early years in London was with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who had joined the crowds flocking to hear him preach. Many have noted Coleridge's influence, and the friendship between the two men has recently been examined in detail by Peter Elliott in his work on Irving's 'Romantic' theology. As Elliott recounts, upon his arrival in London Irving quickly befriended Basil Montagu, whose circle included, in addition to Coleridge, William Hazlitt, Leigh Hunt, Percy Bysshe Shelley, the Wordsworths, Charles Lamb, Henry Crabb Robinson, Robert Southey, and William Godwin.<sup>83</sup> But it was Coleridge from whom Irving clearly

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<sup>81</sup> Irving, *For the Oracles*, 352.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, 240.

<sup>83</sup> Peter Elliott, *Edward Irving: Romantic Theology in Crisis* (PhD thesis: Murdoch University, 2010), 43.

benefitted the most. Coleridge's early radicalism has already been noted, but like his friend Southey, he also became a patriotic supporter of the war with France in the early 1800s. In addition to his poetry, Coleridge during the first two decades of the nineteenth century was also a lecturer, political journalist, and pamphleteer. By the early 1820s his reputation as one of the chief poets of the age was finally being established, and as Rosemary Ashton has claimed in her biography of the philosopher-poet, it was around this time that Coleridge came to see himself primarily as a teacher to a new generation of young men in search of moral and spiritual truths.<sup>84</sup> Always reliant on the generosity of friends, Coleridge moved in with the Gillmans in Highgate in autumn 1823; he would soon after become known as the Sage of Highgate, a reputation which was bolstered by the publication of his *Aids to Reflection* in 1825.

As Irving catapulted to popularity in the summer of 1823, Coleridge took note. He wrote to his nephew in July of that year, 'Irving (the Scotch Preacher so blackguarded in the John Bull of last Sunday), certainly the greatest *Orator*, I have ever heard [...] is, however, a man of great simplicity, of overflowing affections and enthusiastically in earnest'.<sup>85</sup> Elliott calculates that by this date (23 July 1823) Irving and Coleridge had already met in person for the first time.<sup>86</sup> The following year there is evidence that Irving was attending Coleridge's famous Thursday evening meetings, when inquiring individuals (including among others John Sterling from 1827) made the pilgrimage to Highgate for the benefit of Coleridge's monologues.<sup>87</sup> By early 1825 (if not before), Elliott claims that the two were in near weekly contact with one another,<sup>88</sup> and it is evident from Coleridge's letters that he had become very familiar with the state of Irving's thought by this point.<sup>89</sup> To a friend Coleridge wrote of 'the pleasure, I should have in introducing you to a few choice literary

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<sup>84</sup> Rosemary Ashton, *The Life of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 354.

<sup>85</sup> This praise was slightly qualified however, as Coleridge made a distinction between oratory and eloquence, Samuel Taylor Coleridge to Edward Coleridge (23 July 1823), in *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), Vol. V, 286-287.

<sup>86</sup> Elliott, *Edward Irving*, 121.

<sup>87</sup> Coleridge to Mrs. Charles Aders (3 June 1824), in *Collected Letters*, Vol. V, 368.

<sup>88</sup> Elliott, *Edward Irving*, 125.

<sup>89</sup> See Coleridge to Daniel Stuart ([8] July 1825), in *Collected Letters*, Vol. V, 474.

Friends, who generally pass their Thursday Evenings here – particularly my friend, Edward Irving, who is more earnest in his love of Truth & more fervent in his assurance that what is *truth must* be Christianity, [...] than almost any man, I have met with – and with fewer prejudices, national or sectarian'.<sup>90</sup> Sometime in April 1827, Coleridge even listed Irving among his six or seven closest friends.<sup>91</sup> Carlyle remembered attending several of these sessions with Irving, and though he claimed not to get anything out of them himself, he recalled Irving's admiration for Coleridge: 'Good Irving strove always to think that he was getting priceless wisdom out of this great man'.<sup>92</sup> This sentiment was repeated by Chalmers, who also visited Coleridge with Irving in May of 1827. Chalmers wrote to his wife of this trip: 'You know that Irving sits at his feet, and drinks in the inspiration of every syllable that falls from him. There is a secret and, to me, unintelligible communion of spirit between them, on the ground of a certain German mysticism, and transcendental lake poetry which I am not yet up to'.<sup>93</sup>

In what would have been wide-ranging conversations in which Coleridge did much of the talking, it seems likely that one topic of discussion would have been Coleridge's own criticism of the social and economic conditions of post-war Britain. In the years immediately following the end of the Napoleonic Wars, the poet and philosopher penned two 'Lay Sermons', in the first of which (*The Statesman's Manual*, 1816) Coleridge, according to Pamela Edwards, advocated the Bible to the ruling classes 'as the best corrective to the false political economy of the present age'.<sup>94</sup> In the second of these, addressed to the 'Higher and Middle Classes', Coleridge attempted to provide an explanation for the economic distress in which the country found itself after the peace. There he had concluded that the economic difficulty was attributable to an 'overbalance of the commercial spirit' due to an absence or

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<sup>90</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge to J. Blanco White ([12 July 1825]), in *Collected Letters*, Vol. V, 476.

<sup>91</sup> Elliott, *Edward Irving*, 136.

<sup>92</sup> Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, Vol. I, 231.

<sup>93</sup> Quoted in Oliphant, *Life of Irving*, Vol. I, 403.

<sup>94</sup> Pamela Edwards, 'Coleridge on Politics and Religion: *The Statesman's Manual, Aids to Reflection, On the Constitution of Church and State*', in *The Oxford Handbook of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Frederick Burwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 240.

weakness of the traditional counter-weights.<sup>95</sup> These consisted of a due reverence for rank and social hierarchy, proper philosophical study, and religion, of which he found the first to be diminishing, the second non-existent, and the third misdirected.<sup>96</sup> Religion, Coleridge complained, had abandoned rigorous theology, thus forfeiting the beneficial effects this pursuit has of diverting the mind from the fixation on wealth. He argued that this was a symptom of the modern religious focus on righteousness to the neglect of the understanding, which leaves this unoccupied and therefore free to pursue commercial interests.<sup>97</sup> As will be shown in the next chapter, there is much here that would have attracted Irving, and he would often address this subject in his later works.

For his part, Irving acknowledged Coleridge's influence in the dedication to his next major publication, *For Missionaries after the Apostolical School* (published in 1825), where he expressed 'the gratitude of a disciple to a wise and generous teacher'.<sup>98</sup> There he also claimed that Coleridge had 'been more profitable to my faith in orthodox doctrine, to my spiritual understanding of the Word of God, and to my right conception of the Christian Church, than any or all of the men with whom I have entertained friendship and conversation'.<sup>99</sup> In his seminal work on Evangelicalism, D. W. Bebbington has made a strong claim regarding Coleridge's influence on the development of Irving's Romantic thought: 'Deep draughts of the teaching of Coleridge fortified Irving to lead the adaptation of Evangelicalism into the Romantic idiom of the day'.<sup>100</sup> Despite Irving's clear public statement of his intellectual debt to Coleridge, Elliott argues that Irving already demonstrated identifiably Romantic characteristics by the time he moved to London, including 'an advocacy of the benefits of abandoning customary paths; a central role for feelings and

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<sup>95</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Blessed are Ye that Sow beside all Waters!" *A Lay Sermon, Addressed to the Higher and Middle Classes, on the Existing Distresses and Discontents* (London: Gale and Fenner, 1817), 45.

<sup>96</sup> Coleridge, *Lay Sermon*, 82-83.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, 83.

<sup>98</sup> Edward Irving, *For Missionaries after the Apostolical School, a Series of Orations. In Four Parts* (London: Hamilton, Adams, and Co., 1825), ix.

<sup>99</sup> Irving, *For Missionaries*, vii-viii.

<sup>100</sup> D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1989), 80.

experience; [and] an incipient anti-authoritarianism'.<sup>101</sup> What Irving and Coleridge shared, according to Elliott, was 'a high view of the role of the church in God's purposes'.<sup>102</sup> Grass claims that Coleridge had 'a deeper intellectual influence on Irving than anybody else', and that Irving was particularly affected by Coleridge's reverence for the ideal.<sup>103</sup> This can be seen most clearly in Irving's work on missionaries, and in the next chapter it will be shown how he transformed his idealistic conception of the preacher into the equivalent of a prophet of the Christian dispensation.

The content of Irving's work on missionaries caused another minor sensation in London, though this time mostly confined to the religious world. Irving, as a popular preacher, had been invited to deliver the sermon at the annual meeting of the London Missionary Society on 13 May 1824; in the end his sermon lasted three and a half hours. After extensive reworking, the sermon was published as *For Missionaries*, with the proceeds going to the widow of John Smith, a missionary to Demerara (now Guyana) who died in prison in 1824 after having been arrested for refusing to take up arms against revolting slaves in the colony.<sup>104</sup> Irving's intention in this discourse was 'to bring back the Missionary to the Apostolical office, to restore the Gospel-Messenger to his dignity of place'.<sup>105</sup> For him, this meant returning to the scriptural injunction Jesus gave to his disciples regarding preaching the Gospel:

And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give. *Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat* (Matthew 10:7-10, emphasis added).

Thus missionaries were to be sent out without any external aids, trusting only in the Gospel of Christ which they were preaching. Though all would certainly

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<sup>101</sup> Elliott, *Edward Irving*, 115.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*, 110.

<sup>103</sup> Grass, *The Lord's Watchman*, 93, 96.

<sup>104</sup> Smith's was a relatively highly publicised case: more than 200 petitions were sent on his behalf to parliament, where his trial was subsequently debated in 1825, E. I. Carlyle (rev. Gad Heuman), 'John Smith', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004): <https://doi-org.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/25850>.

<sup>105</sup> Irving, *For Missionaries*, xxiv.

have recognised these biblical charges, Irving claimed that these were popularly understood to have applied only to the age of miracles, and that in the present, more practical measures were to be taken in order to succeed. He set out to argue that these instructions were for all ages of the Church. Whether or not Irving himself would have been able to live by this code when he contemplated missionary work, it is evidence of his idealistic frame of mind and biblical literalism which would come to the fore in the later stages of his career. It is not difficult to imagine how this sermon would have been received, the obvious criticism being that the LMS was at best unnecessary, and at worst actually detrimental to the missionary effort. Irving went further though to make this absolutely clear, as he railed against the prudence and expediency of the Church and the age, but this will be treated in more detail in the next chapter.

### Millenarianism

Perhaps the greatest influence on the subsequent course of Irving's career can also be dated to around this time (1825) – his deep interest in interpreting the scriptural prophecies and the subsequent pre-millenarian turn of his mind. It has already been noted that millenarian language and imagery had permeated British society since the French Revolution, but from the mid-1820s Irving would come to interpret everything through the lens of his pre-millenarian worldview.

As hinted at above, it seems that Irving had initially shared in the post-millenarian optimism of the mainstream Evangelicals during this period,<sup>106</sup> but there is an increasing pessimism which can be detected in Irving's thought from the mid-1820s. Grass attributes a degree of this to Coleridge's influence, and Lee notes specifically the impact on Irving from Coleridge's reaction to *For the Oracles* ('Let this young man know that the world is not to be converted, but judged').<sup>107</sup> But there were also personal tragedies for the Irvings during

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<sup>106</sup> Grass cites an early sermon, 'On Prayer', as evidence, *The Lord's Watchman*, 99.

<sup>107</sup> Tim Grass, 'Edward Irving: Eschatology, Ecclesiology and Spiritual Gifts', in *Prisoners of Hope?: Aspects of Evangelical Millennialism in Britain and Ireland, 1800-1880*, eds. Crawford Gibbon and Timothy C. F. Stunt (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2004), 97; Lee, 'Christ's Sinful Flesh', 203-204.

this time. Their firstborn child, Edward, died in October of 1825 after a brief illness; in total, the Irvings would have eight children, five of which died in early childhood. Though for chronological reasons the death of baby Edward cannot be used to explain Irving's interest in the biblical prophecies, Lee argues that the loss of children did have an effect on Irving's theology, namely on his views regarding infant baptism.<sup>108</sup> Also around this time, Irving's father-in-law, John Martin, was ruined financially by the collapse of a joint-stock company in the economic crisis of 1825-26, a fact which Boyd Hilton relates to the emphasis on commercial distress as divine judgment seen in Irving's sermons of the period.<sup>109</sup>

Irving had already been studying the biblical prophecies from summer 1825, and one of the main factors in his development along these lines was a new friendship with James Hatley Frere, one of the preeminent prophetic exegetes of the time. Frere had already made his name within the millenarian community in 1814 when he predicted the downfall of Napoleon with recourse only to the biblical prophecies in his *Combined View of the Prophecies* (a second updated edition of this major work was published in 1826). Ernest R. Sandeen describes this text 'as a paradigm of prophetic scholarship, combining as it does an interest in the construction of a perfect synthesis of all prophetic literature with attacks on Frere's benighted co-laborers'.<sup>110</sup> Like several who had gone before, Frere fixed the date of the seventh trumpet as 10 August 1792 (coincident with the storming of the Tuileries Palace symbolising the fall of the French monarchy), and he interpreted the French Revolution as marking the destruction of the papacy and the rise of the infidel power. A significant portion of Frere's work is dedicated to an exposition of Napoleon's role in the events comprising the end times; in this way he was seen 'as an instrument in the hands of God, of inflicting severe judgments upon

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<sup>108</sup> Lee, 'Christ's Sinful Flesh', 48.

<sup>109</sup> Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795-1865* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 132.

<sup>110</sup> Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism 1800-1930* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), 8-9.

the enemies of the Church, the Papal and Mahometan Powers'.<sup>111</sup> Frere offered a detailed analysis of the correspondence between events during the French Revolution and Napoleon's reign and the language of the prophecies, but perhaps the most important aspect of his interpretation to his British audience was the role Britain would play in these apocalyptic events. For Frere, the British nation was the 'Holy Covenant' referred to in the eleventh chapter of Daniel, and that whole prophecy regarding the fourth monarchy was read in direct relation to the antagonism between Napoleon and Britain.<sup>112</sup> As evidence of Britain's destined role, Frere pointed to 'the increased attention that was now paid to the education of the poor' and the increased support for missionary societies and efforts to translate the Bible into foreign languages.<sup>113</sup>

Frere's influence on Irving's thought was clear in his next major work, *Babylon and Infidelity Foredoomed of God: A Discourse on the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse* published in 1826. In what would be a recurring theme in Irving's publishing career, this work was originally delivered as a sermon, this time at a meeting of the Continental Society in May 1825, but was reworked and expanded for publication. As Grass points out, this sermon caused yet another controversy, as it was interpreted as both supporting and opposing Catholic emancipation,<sup>114</sup> a topic on which Irving would have much to say in the next few years. Reminiscent of his earlier dedication to Coleridge, Irving acknowledged in the preface of this work his debt to Frere, to whom he claimed to have offered himself as a pupil, 'to be instructed in prophecy according to your ideas thereof'.<sup>115</sup> As Irving described, he had become intrigued by Frere's views and resolved to study the matter further,<sup>116</sup> and this prophetic study would be a consistent occupation for the remainder of his life. In the technical exegesis, Irving actually borrowed much from Frere's

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<sup>111</sup> James Hatley Frere, *A Combined View of the Prophecies of Daniel, Ezra, and St. John; Shewing that all the Prophetic Writings are Formed upon One Plan. Accompanied by an Explanatory Chart. Also, a Minute Explanation of the Prophecies of Daniel*, rev. ed. (London: J. Hatchard, 1826), 308.

<sup>112</sup> Frere, *A Combined View*, 419-420.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 430-431.

<sup>114</sup> Grass, *The Lord's Watchman*, 104.

<sup>115</sup> Edward Irving, *Babylon and Infidelity Foredoomed of God: A Discourse on the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse* (Glasgow: Chalmers and Collins, 1826), Vol. I, vi.

<sup>116</sup> Irving, *Babylon and Infidelity*, Vol. I, v.

work, especially as it concerned Napoleon.<sup>117</sup> Frere welcomed Irving's zeal as he rejoiced in the second edition of his book that the prophecies had 'particularly engaged the talents of a minister eminently calculated, by the extent and richness of his views, to give it that prominent place in the mind of every member of the spiritual church of Christ, which it now ought to hold; and to direct our knowledge on the subject to the best practical results'.<sup>118</sup>

Though the link between infidelity and political revolution in the French mould had already been well-established, Irving's account took on a decidedly more political tone. He asserted that the antichristian spirit (infidelity), though fostered in the court of Frederick the Great of Prussia, was not in open and undisguised warfare until the Convention of the Notables on 20 September 1792 when the monarchy was abolished, the word 'republic' replaced 'nation' in their oaths, and abolition of all religious establishment was proposed.<sup>119</sup> He also drew attention to the extent to which this 'tide of infidelity and republicanism' had reached Britain: "'The Age of Reason" came forth, and the "Rights of Man," from the same pen [that of Thomas Paine], to convey poison into the very vitals of our people, while a new system of political justice was digested and promulgated for the learning and thinking classes, subversive of all social principle, and with it a system of ethics'.<sup>120</sup> In his interpretation, superstition (signifying Roman Catholicism) and infidelity had mutually forced each other to their extremes, and it was warned that Britain must avoid both extremes if it was to remain the favoured nation. In light of this, Irving's purpose in his work was to root out infidelity in all its manifestations, which, as we shall see in the next chapter, allowed him to criticise liberalism, rationalism, and the celebrated 'march of mind'. It is important to note that at this point, both Frere and Irving were inclined to interpret the apocalypse literally, though with reservations. Frere suggested that the events would not perhaps live up to 'the highly poetical and hyperbolic language of prophecy', while Irving was unwilling to speculate on the nature of Christ's return.<sup>121</sup> In subsequent years,

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<sup>117</sup> See Irving, *Babylon and Infidelity*, Vol. II, 23.

<sup>118</sup> Frere, *A Combined View*, xiv-xv.

<sup>119</sup> Irving, *Babylon and Infidelity*, Vol. I, 133.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid*, 136.

<sup>121</sup> Frere, *A Combined View*, xv (notes); Irving, *Babylon and Infidelity*, Vol. II, 168-169.

Irving became increasingly convinced of the return of Christ in person, and this soon became the theme around which all of his thought was organised.

Irving's budding interest in prophetic interpretation coincided with (and arguably helped to stimulate) something of a resurgence in the late 1820s of this age-old pursuit, as a determined group soon formed around himself and the wealthy banker and sometime MP Henry Drummond. Between 1810-12 Drummond had been an MP for Plympton Erle, but in 1817 he sold his father's estate and moved with his wife to Geneva. In 1819, he co-founded the Continental Society for the Diffusion of Religious Knowledge with Robert Haldane and Sir Thomas Baring, and in the same year Drummond purchased Albury Park in Surrey. In doing so, he became the chief landowner in the area, where he was 'much appreciated as a conscientious and caring landlord' according to Columba Graham Flegg, as well as the patron of the parish living.<sup>122</sup> As a wealthy landowner, Drummond supported a number of charitable causes, and in addition to the Continental Society, he was also active in the Society for the Restoration of the Jews, a body led by Lewis Way which was motivated by the pre-millenarian preoccupation with restoring the Jewish people to Palestine. Drummond also endowed the chair of political economy at Oxford in 1825, and he was active in debates on issues of political economy such as the currency and the corn laws in the mid-1820s. Hilton suggests that Drummond turned to (pre-) millenarian thinking after being 'alarmed by the insane speculation that was taking place in Latin American mining shares',<sup>123</sup> though Grass claims that he was finally persuaded of these views only after hearing Irving preach.<sup>124</sup> Irving likely met Drummond for the first time in 1824; by 1826, Irving was serving on the business committee for Drummond's Continental Society, and the two would become intimately connected with the Albury circle. As Grass points out, Irving was also

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<sup>122</sup> Columba Graham Flegg, 'Henry Drummond', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004): <https://doi-org.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/8067>.

<sup>123</sup> Hilton, *Age of Atonement*, 42.

<sup>124</sup> Grass, *The Lord's Watchman*, 103.

influenced by Drummond in turn, namely in the way he related his theology to the contemporary church.<sup>125</sup>

At the end of 1826, Drummond's Albury Park estate became, in Flegg's words, the 'principal centre in England for prophetic studies', as the group around Irving and Drummond met for the first of what would become five annual conferences dedicated to interpreting the unfulfilled scriptural prophecies.<sup>126</sup> Irving himself gave an account of the first of these meetings, where he detailed the subjects which were discussed:

First, The doctrine of holy scripture concerning the times of the Gentiles. Secondly, The duties of Christian ministers and people, growing out thereof towards the gentile churches. Thirdly, The doctrine concerning the present and future condition of the Jews. Fourthly, The duties growing out of the same towards the Jews. Fifthly, The system of the prophetic visions and numbers of Daniel and the Apocalypse. Sixthly, The scripture doctrine concerning the future advent of the Lord. And Lastly, The duties to the church and the world arising out of the same.<sup>127</sup>

The first of these 'Albury conferences', as they came to be known, lasted six days, and there were about twenty people who attended, which in addition to Drummond and Irving included Frere, John Tudor, and Joseph Wolff, a converted Jew who had become a missionary and expert in Near Eastern languages. From Irving's account, each full day was taken up with reading and debate, from 8 am to 11 pm; the only recourse which could be made in their interpretations was to the scriptures in the original Hebrew or Greek. Some conclusions from these conferences were later published by Drummond, and the ideas discussed would form the majority of the content of *The Morning Watch*, a quarterly magazine published between 1829 and 1833 (with Tudor as editor) and dedicated to the interpretation of biblical prophecies. The Albury group would go on to play a major role in the controversy involving the manifestation of spiritual gifts and ultimately form the foundation of the Catholic Apostolic Church.

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<sup>125</sup> Grass, *The Lord's Watchman*, 103-104.

<sup>126</sup> Columba Graham Flegg, *"Gathered Under Apostles": A Study of the Catholic Apostolic Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 41.

<sup>127</sup> Edward Irving, *Preliminary Discourse to the Work of Ben Ezra's Entitled The Coming of Messiah in Glory and Majesty* [1827]. *To Which is Added, an Ordination Charge, Delivered by Mr. Irving in 1827; and also his Introductory Essay to Bishop Horne's Commentary on the Psalms* (London: Bosworth & Harrison, 1859), 198.

Another significant influence on the development of Irving's pre-millenarian thought was his reading of *The Coming of Messiah in Glory and Majesty*, written by a Chilean Jesuit named Manuel De Lacunza (under the pseudonym of a converted Jew, 'Ben-Ezra'). According to Grayson Carter, Irving had been introduced to this work by Henry Drummond;<sup>128</sup> in any case, Irving spent several months studying Spanish during the summer of 1826 with the specific intention of translating the work into English. Lee claims that this text 'intensified [Irving's] longing for the coming kingdom and his attachment to the study of biblical prophecy'.<sup>129</sup> Irving's translation of Lacunza's book was published in April 1827, with the proceeds going to aid Spanish refugees who had recently fled to London following a failed Constitutionalist revolution. He appended a lengthy 'Preliminary Discourse' to this work which was published with the translation of *The Coming of Messiah* but also separately. The primary purpose of this discourse was to highlight 'the unawakened and even dead condition of all the churches' regarding the second coming.<sup>130</sup> Throughout the text, Irving argued for a pre-millenarian understanding of the second advent, which held that the world would become progressively worse until the return of Christ ushered in his millennial reign; this was contrasted with the much more common post-millenarian view based on the conversion of the world to Christianity leading to an earthly reign of blessedness, only at the end of which Christ would return to transport the believers to heaven. It will be shown in the next chapter how Irving's pre-millenarian vision of history provided the structural foundation for his criticism of British society and ultimately impelled him to make a public (and prophetic) stand on 'political' issues.

Key for Irving in the debate over the second coming was the belief that the apocalyptic judgments would conclude with Christ's 'own personal appearance in flaming fire' to usher in a 'millennial reign of righteousness' in Jerusalem on earth.<sup>131</sup> Bebbington has noted that Irving's belief that Christ would return in the flesh was a genuine innovation in the Evangelical world

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<sup>128</sup> Grayson Carter, *Anglican Evangelicals: Protestant Secessions from the Via Media, c. 1800-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 174.

<sup>129</sup> Lee, 'Christ's Sinful Flesh', 206.

<sup>130</sup> Irving, *Preliminary Discourse*, 1.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*, 6-7.

during this period, having been part of no accepted doctrine previous to the 1820s.<sup>132</sup> Bebbington has used this point to argue for the inflow of Romantic ideas and imagery into Evangelicalism, where ‘the coming king could readily be pictured by poetic imaginations fascinated by the strange, the awesome and the supernatural’.<sup>133</sup> This view is strongly supported by Irving in his ‘Preliminary Discourse’ when, in refuting the existence of an intermediate state between death and the resurrection, he wrote, ‘I desire for myself some object and event so glorious as shall carry my eye clean over and beyond this chasm and abyss of being; some joyful and powerful, some majestic and glorious act, to which I can look’.<sup>134</sup> Also evident in this text are Irving’s views on the Church of Scotland as it had come to be in the eighteenth century. In this as in other discourses, Irving railed against ‘the intellectualisation of the times’ and especially against the intellectual and philosophical spirit of the Scottish Church.<sup>135</sup> The ecclesiastical institutions of Scotland, he declared, ‘are eminently fitted to cultivate intellect, and are at present wholly inefficient to overawe their own child’, as matters of doctrine are judged at the bar of intellect rather than that of faith.<sup>136</sup> He argued that philosophical methods for conveying Christian truth fosters a spirit of speculation and convinces people of ‘the sufficiency of their intellect’ which was exemplified for Irving by the Moderates – ‘[Hugh] Blair and his school’ – whom he referred to as ‘fair sportive creatures of the sun-beam’.<sup>137</sup>

Over the next few years, Irving continued to work out his interpretation of the prophecies concerning the end times. In the summer of 1828, he published *The Last Days: A Discourse on the Evil Character of these Our Times*, based on sermons preached to his congregation from January to May of that year, wherein he sought to show how the current times corresponded to the biblical last days, in this case taken from 2 Timothy 3:1-6:

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud,

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<sup>132</sup> Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 83.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid*, 84.

<sup>134</sup> Irving, *Preliminary Discourse*, 57-58.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid*, 115.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid*, 80.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid*, 88.

blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.

Irving proceeded systematically through this list as he explicated each term and attempted to prove how it applied to the present time. He included within his view all of Christendom, and made no distinction between the religious and secular spheres, and he invariably found everything to be evil within it.<sup>138</sup> 'The general characteristic of the times' he declared to be selfishness, which engendered all the rest.<sup>139</sup> In this work, Irving criticised religious societies, the periodical press, capitalists and manufacturers, philanthropists, and government ministers. In so doing, he argued against what he saw to be the prevailing public opinion which heralded the liberality of the age as the enlightened march of intellect. Irving saw only infidelity and the workings of Satan in this, and his aim was to warn his congregation so that they might be able to protect themselves. This was the last of Irving's major works to be widely reviewed in the magazines, and it will be examined in much more detail in the next chapter.

### The Public Preacher

By the late 1820s, Irving began exercising increasing influence on the Scottish church in London. It was also during this period that he began to publicly address national issues, including most importantly the relationship between church and state as called into question by the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts and Catholic emancipation.

In the midst of this prophetic speculation, an impressive new church had been built for Irving and his congregation. Although, as John Hair has noted, a proposal to build a new church had been made even before Irving began his

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<sup>138</sup> Edward Irving, *The Last Days: A Discourse on the Evil Character of these our Times: Proving them to be the "Perilous Times" of the "Last Days"* (London: R. B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1828), 40.

<sup>139</sup> Irving, *The Last Days*, 41.

ministry in London,<sup>140</sup> Irving's early popularity surely accelerated the pace. As early as December 1822, Irving had boasted in a letter to Mrs. Welsh that 'there are already £3000 subscribed to build a new church which will be finished in less than a year to contain 2000 people and cost toward £10,000'.<sup>141</sup> The proposal was approved by the congregation in May 1823, and the foundation stone was laid on 1 July 1824 in a ceremony at which Carlyle was present (though he complained that he could not hear Irving).<sup>142</sup> The church at Regent Square was finally opened on 11 May 1827, and both Chalmers and Dr Robert Gordon travelled down to London to preach opening sermons for Irving. Oliphant suggests that the opening of the new church was ultimately anticlimactic for Irving, though he himself was not conscious of this.<sup>143</sup> While it may be possible to come to this conclusion by looking at the entirety of Irving's life as she has done, at the time, the opening of the National Scotch Church initiated a new stage in Irving's career, one in which he became even more visible and vocal. Irving's new church was, in Liam Upton's words, 'the largest and most impressive building ever to be occupied by a Church of Scotland congregation in London', and with a congregation of around 2,000, was probably, according to Grass, the largest of any denomination in the city at the time.<sup>144</sup>

Just a few months before moving into his new church, in March 1827 Irving delivered the ordination charge to Hugh Maclean who had been called to minister to the congregation of the Scots Church at London Wall. In his charge, Irving laid out his understanding of what it meant to be a Scottish minister (and particularly a Scottish minister in London), but in so doing he also sought to stamp some of his distinctive theological positions onto the religious discourse of the capital. He advocated study of 'the *prophetic method* of divine truth' in the scriptures and reiterated his belief in the imminent bodily return of

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<sup>140</sup> John Hair, *Regent Square: Eighty Years of a London Congregation* (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1898), 45.

<sup>141</sup> Edward Irving to Mrs. Welsh (6 December 1822), in *Diary and Letters*, 166.

<sup>142</sup> Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, Vol. I, 244.

<sup>143</sup> Oliphant, *Life of Irving*, Vol. I, 408-410.

<sup>144</sup> Upton, "Our Mother and our Country", 255; Grass, *The Lord's Watchman*, 112.

Christ.<sup>145</sup> Maclean largely agreed with Irving on his Christological views, which, as will be shown in the next section, would bring him, and ultimately Irving, into trouble with the Church of Scotland. Around this time, Irving also took on the first missionary of the National Scotch Church – Alexander J. Scott – whose duties included preaching in local schools, assisting elders with visitations, and teaching and preaching ‘among the spiritually destitute population of Westminster’.<sup>146</sup> Though Scott had been licensed by the Presbytery of Paisley in 1827, he had been unable to sign the Westminster Confession on conscientious grounds, but in London Irving offered him the freedom to preach what he liked.<sup>147</sup> It is significant that Irving was gathering likeminded people around him, as he was beginning to exercise considerable influence over the Scottish Church in the capital.

At the beginning of 1828, a pastoral letter from the Scotch Presbytery in London, published as a pamphlet (and reprinted in its entirety in the *Morning Chronicle* from 25-28 January), aimed to set out an ‘exact statement’ of ‘the condition of spiritual poverty into which’ the Scottish Church in the metropolis had fallen.<sup>148</sup> Though it was signed by ministers of the Scottish churches in England, including Irving and Maclean, Grass notes that it was Irving who had composed the letter at the request of the presbytery in 1827.<sup>149</sup> It was reckoned that out of no fewer than 100,000 Scots living in London who had been baptised into the Church of Scotland, no more than 1,000 were in regular communication with a Scottish church in the city, and the letter complained that half a dozen churches or congregations in the city with a Church of Scotland connection had disappeared within living memory, a situation which was compared unfavourably to the state of affairs before the Union of 1707.

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<sup>145</sup> Edward Irving, ‘Ordination Charge to the Minister of the Scots Church, London Wall, March 15, 1827’, in *The Collected Writings of Edward Irving*, ed. G. Carlyle (London: Alexander Strahan & Co., 1864), Vol. I, 528, 531 (emphasis in original).

<sup>146</sup> Grass, *The Lord’s Watchman*, 115-116.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid*, 115.

<sup>148</sup> ‘A Pastoral Letter from the Scotch Presbytery in London, Addressed to the Baptized of the Scottish Church Residing in London and its Vicinity, and in the Southern Parts of the Island’, *The Morning Chronicle*, 18210 (25 January 1828): n.p.

<sup>149</sup> Grass, *The Lord’s Watchman*, 135.

Irving's hand can be seen throughout the entire text, but especially in the pastoral plea which laid out the judgments of God under which the Scottish Church was suffering. One of these was a 'bias and inclination to infidelity', several causes of which were said to be peculiar to Scots.<sup>150</sup> It was claimed that as the worship and doctrine of the Church of Scotland focused primarily on the invisible, there was no superstition which might help to hold the people's minds against infidelity. But perhaps the most significant of these causes, in line with Irving's previous criticism of the people and ideas associated with what would later be called the Scottish Enlightenment, was 'the infidel character with which the most famous of our Scottish philosophers, and economists, and men of science and literature, have been impressed for almost a century', the seat of which was in Edinburgh and its university.<sup>151</sup> Because of this, the Scots were blamed for playing a substantial role in 'the work of leavening this city and land with infidel and disloyal principles'.<sup>152</sup> Members of the Church of Scotland were urged to separate themselves from Catholics and non-Trinitarian Christians and strongly discouraged from leaving the communion of their mother church. Finally, the signatories expressed their desire to publish similar letters in the future along the lines of pastoral letters which had been produced previously by the General Assembly during 'trying times'.<sup>153</sup>

Though Irving's criticism often touched on political issues in the widest sense, he generally did not address himself to any practical political concerns, save on one occasion: the interrelated state of affairs concerning the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts and the granting of Catholic emancipation. By the late 1820s, Irving's world had become so saturated with prophecies and portents that it would have been impossible for him not to view this new development as a sign of the utmost import. As the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts was gaining public support in 1828, Irving published a pamphlet addressed directly to the king himself wherein he pleaded with

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<sup>150</sup> *The Morning Chronicle*, 18212 (28 January 1828): n.p.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

George IV not to 'sign away the charter of this kingdom, as a Christian kingdom'.<sup>154</sup> Against the argument for repeal which held that use of the sacraments to determine eligibility for office was a violation of their sanctity, Irving argued that it was not the state that had violated said sanctity, but rather the church for not fulfilling its duty.<sup>155</sup> The original laws stipulated that the prospective officeholder not only take the sacraments in the established church, but also be in good standing with the same, and it was here that Irving claimed the church had failed to uphold its rigorous standards. Nevertheless, the Churches of England and Scotland had not deviated from their original constitutions according to Irving, and therefore the state was not capable of altering their position 'as the guardians of religion and morality' for the king's subjects.<sup>156</sup> Finally, Irving attacked the clause included in the repeal bill requiring officeholders to prevent harm being done to the established churches, which he claimed protected them only politically without acknowledging their apostolic origin. He argued that the Christian religion was not simply patronised by the state, but was 'the ground and basis of the State'; acknowledgement of this entailed acknowledgement of the established churches, both of which in actuality were the Church of Christ, their national establishment being only accidental.<sup>157</sup> Protecting the established churches therefore meant upholding the Church of Christ, which entailed that the king's authority was held in the name of Christ, ultimately leaving the king powerless to alter the constitution with respect to this issue.<sup>158</sup>

As Catholic emancipation seemed increasingly likely in light of Irish unrest, Irving published a pamphlet in 1829, entitled *The Signs of the Times*, in which he desperately argued his case against it from his reading of the biblical prophecies. In this work, he warned of the trials Britain would face in the coming events, though he retained hope that it would persevere to accomplish the work of restoring the Jews to Jerusalem, a necessary

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<sup>154</sup> Edward Irving, *A Letter to the King, on the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Laws, as it affects our Christian Monarchy* (London: James Nisbet, 1828), 4.

<sup>155</sup> Irving, *Letter to the King*, 15-20.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid*, 23.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid*, 24-25.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid*, 25.

prerequisite for the second advent of Christ. This hope however rested entirely on Britain, as the bastion of God's chosen people, remaining separate from papal Europe. The Protestant constitution of Britain, he asserted, represented 'a great testimony' for the Lord against 'that abomination of Rome'.<sup>159</sup> Things had progressed in the prophetic timeline since Irving's account in *Babylon and Infidelity*, including especially the re-constitution of an independent Greece, and he now looked for all three antichristian spirits – tyranny or absolutism, infidelity, and superstition – to be simultaneously at work in the world. He saw the first in the Holy Alliance between Russia, Austria, and Prussia created after the defeat of Napoleon, and he saw infidelity in 'Radicalism and Liberalism, and that new form of Dissenterism which strikes at the foundation of the Christian Constitutions of the kingdom and the established authority of the Church'.<sup>160</sup> And of superstition he saw a resurgence as well, in the restoration of the Jesuits, but also in the more insidious 'leanings and inclinations of the heart towards that abomination; which is defended, apologised for, yea, praised, and cried up, in the heart of Protestant Britain'.<sup>161</sup> He stated simply that if the bill removing the remaining Catholic disabilities should be made into a law, 'then this kingdom ceaseth to be the intercessor between God and a guilty world'.<sup>162</sup> From this point on, Irving would become decidedly more desperate as he looked every day for signs of Christ's speedy return.

By this time, Irving had become a familiar figure around the country (as evident in the newspapers examined in the fourth chapter), and he continued to attract both praise and criticism. In 1828, he was still being invited to deliver anniversary sermons for various organisations and societies, 'though with fear and trembling' now from the managers and committee members as Oliphant put it.<sup>163</sup> And in May of that year, he travelled to Edinburgh while the General Assembly was convening in order to preach a series of sermons on the second advent. After the excitement of Edinburgh where he had to be moved to the city's largest church to accommodate the crowds, Irving took his message to

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<sup>159</sup> Edward Irving, *Signs of the Times* (London: Andrew Panton, 1829), 15.

<sup>160</sup> Irving, *Signs of the Times*, 21-22.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>163</sup> Oliphant, *Life of Irving*, Vol. II, 2.

some of the other towns and cities of central Scotland, and the continued popularity of his preaching is particularly evident in the tragic event at Kirkcaldy. On 15 June, a crowd had gathered in the church there to listen to Irving; as he made his way he heard news that the galleries had collapsed killing several people, but the resulting crush caused by the panic increased the death-toll manifold. Washington Wilks put the number of dead at 28, though Chalmers claimed as many as 35 had been killed.<sup>164</sup> In May the following year, Irving returned to Edinburgh but struggled somewhat to find an audience, though he continued to be well-received in his open-air sermons in the surrounding countryside.

### Trials and Controversies

The first serious controversy of Irving's career – concerning the human nature of Christ – surfaced during the late 1820s and would vex him for the rest of his life. With the manifestation of the 'tongues' in the early 1830s, Irving and his views would again be put under the spotlight, and after two trials, he would be removed from his London church and deposed from the Church of Scotland altogether.

The first of these controversies was initiated when the Rev. Henry Cole (from Cambridge) heard Irving preach in October 1827 and took issue with one of his comments regarding the nature of Christ; Cole made his views clear to Irving in an open letter published in December of that year. As Lee observes, the conventional contemporary opinion, as expressed by Cole, held that Christ's human nature was fundamentally different from ours: like Adam before the Fall, Christ was believed to have had 'an inherently immaculate humanity'.<sup>165</sup> After pondering the issue, Irving would thereafter consistently argue that Christ had the same humanity as everyone else, but though he therefore had the propensity to sin, he was nevertheless kept sinless through his perfect faith in the Father and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. As Lee

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<sup>164</sup> Washington Wilks, *Edward Irving: An Ecclesiastical and Literary Biography*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: W. Goddard, 1860), 189-190; Oliphant, *Life of Irving*, Vol. II, 30.

<sup>165</sup> Lee, 'Christ's Sinful Flesh', 117-118.

points out, the foundation of Irving's argument was his belief that without a fully human nature, Christ would not have been truly tempted by Satan, and therefore his temptation would have been meaningless.<sup>166</sup> Lee claims that Irving had mentioned Christ's 'sinful flesh' as early as his 1823 discourse on John the Baptist, but his understanding of the human nature of Christ was first formally developed in his *Homilies on the Lord's Supper* (1826) and received its fullest expression in the first volume of his *Sermons, Lectures, and Occasional Discourses*, entitled *Doctrine of the Incarnation Opened*, published in November 1828.<sup>167</sup> Following further criticism from the religious establishment, Irving issued a firm restatement of his position in the *Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine of our Lord's Human Nature*, published in January 1830, though this would ultimately be used as evidence against him in his troubles with the Church.

By 1830, the Church of Scotland began prosecuting several ministers who had connections to Irving for this view of Christ's human nature which had been deemed heretical. Hugh Maclean, for whom Irving had delivered the ordination charge at London Wall in 1827, had been due to take up the charge at Dreghorn in Ayrshire in March 1830, when attention was drawn to the views he shared with Irving by the parishioners. He was called to answer for these, initiating a case for heresy which proceeded through the ecclesiastical courts. A few months later, the same thing happened to A. J. Scott, who had been Irving's assistant since 1828, when he was to be ordained at the Scots Church in Woolwich, London. When Scott still proved unable to sign the Westminster Confession, his case was dragged through the courts, and the press took the opportunity of Scott's connection to Irving to attack him during this time as well. Towards the end of 1830, the Presbytery of London publicly condemned Irving and his views on this matter. In response, Irving declared that the Presbytery in Scotland was the sole authority, effectively separating himself from that of London. A letter which was later published in *The Times* was written by Irving, the office-holders, and the congregation of the Scotch Church declaring them

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<sup>166</sup> Lee, 'Christ's Sinful Flesh', 116.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid*, 112-113.

to all be of one mind on the issue of Irving's teaching regarding the nature of Christ, seeming to settle the matter for the moment.<sup>168</sup>

But perhaps the most significant of the developments that took place during this eventful year occurred in the parish of Row (now Rhu) just northwest of Glasgow. In 1825, a young minister named John Macleod Campbell had taken up the charge of the parish, where he soon began preaching what was known as the doctrine of 'universal atonement'. This held that Christ had died for all of humanity and not just for the elect, thereby going against the Westminster Confession; coincidentally this was also being expounded in Scotland at the same time by a layman of Scottish Episcopalian background, Thomas Erskine of Linlathen. Irving came to be influenced by Macleod Campbell's views after meeting him in Edinburgh in 1828, and the two developed a friendship, with Macleod Campbell later preaching a Gaelic sermon in Irving's church in London. Macleod Campbell was ultimately called to trial for heresy by the presbytery of Dumbarton, which lasted from autumn of 1830 to March 1831.

But, as Oliphant suggests, the effect of Campbell's preaching, Irving's itinerant ministry in the district, and the religious fervour caused by ongoing theological controversies had already been felt in this rural area of Scotland.<sup>169</sup> In March of 1830, one Mary Campbell (no relation to John Macleod Campbell) lay apparently dying in her house on the Gareloch northwest of Glasgow, when, as Irving later described it, the Holy Ghost 'constrained her to speak at great length, and with superhuman strength, in an unknown tongue, to the astonishment of all who heard'.<sup>170</sup> Around this time just across the water in Port Glasgow, another young woman, Margaret Macdonald, was also apparently on her death-bed, when she declared her brother James to have the power of the Holy Ghost, who immediately and miraculously cured his sister. He then proceeded to write to Mary Campbell, proclaiming her to be cured as well, after which she recovered from her illness. Thus it seemed the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit had been manifested in a quiet corner of

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<sup>168</sup> See *Diary and Letters*, 276-277.

<sup>169</sup> Oliphant, *Life of Irving*, Vol. II, 105-106.

<sup>170</sup> Quoted in *Ibid*, 129.

Scotland, and through the advocacy of Irving they would come in time to make headline news in the metropolis of London.

These manifestations quickly became a topic of debate among some circles in Scotland, and Irving came to believe they heralded the second advent. According to his own account, Irving had become convinced by his assistant Scott of the theoretical possibility for the spiritual gifts to exist in all ages and not just the apostolical, though he had not thought to look or to pray for them.<sup>171</sup> After several deputations were sent to investigate the persons involved with these events in Scotland, Irving became convinced that they were indeed true manifestations of the Holy Spirit, though significantly Scott and Macleod Campbell came to the opposite conclusion. Over a year later, in May of 1831, Irving instigated a series of early-morning prayer sessions in London as the General Assembly sat in Edinburgh deciding upon the fates of Maclean, Scott, and Macleod Campbell. Upon the decision to uphold the charges against these three and censure Irving due to his writings on Christ's human nature, the group began to pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, prayers which were duly answered. Irving initially tried to restrict these manifestations to the early morning group, fearing the response from his more respectable congregation members, but at length he could not contain them. Irving described the first time the tongues were heard in his church: the lady felt compelled to restrain herself, but after rushing out 'was forced to give vent to that volume of majestic sound which passed through two closed doors, and filled the whole church'.<sup>172</sup> In November of that year, he addressed the trustees of the church in a letter, wherein he laid out the new structure for his services, which allowed space at various times for an exhibition of the gifts if anyone felt themselves so compelled.<sup>173</sup>

This last innovation proved too much for the trustees of the new church which was only a few years old, as they worried that people would be alienated by the tongues and seat-rents would be lost. Though Irving pleaded with the

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<sup>171</sup> Edward Irving, 'Facts Connected with Recent Manifestations of Spiritual Gifts', *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country*, 4:24 (January 1832): 756.

<sup>172</sup> Irving, 'Facts Connected with Recent Manifestations', 760.

<sup>173</sup> See *Diary and Letters*, 287-289.

trustees not to do so, they brought a case to the Presbytery of London, claiming that Irving's sanctioning of the tongues and his accommodation for them in his service violated the trust-deed of the church. The trial commenced on 26 April 1832 at the Scots Church, London Wall. The case revolved around the clause in the trust-deed of the church which required the service conducted therein to be in accordance with the ordinances as laid down by the Church of Scotland. The charges therefore were that Irving had allowed his service to be interrupted by persons who were neither members, seat-holders, ministers, nor licentiates of the Church of Scotland, or who were female.<sup>174</sup> For Irving, the fundamental question was whether or not the utterances were manifestations of the Holy Spirit; if so, then no unauthorised 'persons' interrupted the service, but rather the voice of God. He appealed to the scriptures over and above the discipline of the Church of Scotland, but the presbyters would not countenance his argument, claiming that the issue was not one of doctrine but discipline. The presbyters had reminded Irving of the proper process for discussing anything new in the form of worship or doctrine – it was to be brought to the presbytery and thence up to the General Assembly and the decision would then be disseminated through the presbyteries – but Irving rejected this vehemently.<sup>175</sup> He referred to this process as 'Satan's trap to keep all things as they are, to prevent all things from returning to what they have been, and to prevent them from going forward to further things'.<sup>176</sup> Irving rejected the idea that his liberty of preaching could be bound up in any number of articles which had been decided upon by 'a council that sat at Westminster in turbulent and rebellious times', and elsewhere he admitted that he had signed the Westminster Confession 'not as absolute truth, but as truth checked by Scripture'.<sup>177</sup> Irving's defence lasted for just over four hours, and during

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<sup>174</sup> *The Trial of the Rev. Edward Irving, M. A. Before the London Presbytery, Containing the Whole of the Evidence; Exact Copies of the Documents; Verbatim Report of the Speeches and Opinions of the Presbyters, &c.; Being the Only Authentic and Complete Record of the Proceedings, Taken in Short Hand by W. Harding* (London: W. Harding, 1832), 3.

<sup>175</sup> *Trial before the London Presbytery*, 35.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid*, 36.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid*, 36, 68.

that time he was called to order no fewer than four times for what were considered to be personal attacks on the court.

Following Irving's expulsion from the National Scotch Church, he and his congregation initially met in the old Horse Bazaar in Gray's Road Inn, but Irving also regularly preached in the open air in Britannia Fields, Cold Bath Fields, Islington Green, and East London to large crowds. In October of 1832, a space for worship was secured in Newman Street (significantly there were no pew rents at this new church), and it was the congregation which gathered there that went on to form the Catholic Apostolic Church. This included Albury group members such as Drummond, Tudor, and Spencer Perceval (the son of the assassinated prime minister), but also new faces such as John B. Cardale. The Cardales had joined Irving's congregation during the controversy over the 'tongues', when Emily Cardale (wife of John B. Cardale) had been one of the prominent figures 'prophesying' in the tongues, and John would go on to become the first apostle ordained for the new Church.

Despite Irving's expulsion in London, he was still an ordained minister in the Church of Scotland, and the Presbytery of Annan (by which he had been ordained) was forced by these events to act. The trial in Annan was held at noon on Wednesday, 13 March 1833, and according to the published account, the church 'was crowded to excess'.<sup>178</sup> Unlike the trial in London, the precise issue at question this time was Irving's Christological views which, as manifested in several of his works, had been denounced as heretical by the General Assembly in 1831. Despite this, several of the presbyters, including the moderator (James Roddick of Graitney), praised Irving's 'piety, sincerity, and candour'.<sup>179</sup> Roddick suggested that while sincerely searching after truth, Irving had 'plunged into an ocean of hypothetical speculation which knows no bounds', thereby placing himself and others 'in the utmost danger of being

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<sup>178</sup> *Trial of Mr Edward Irving, Late Minister of the National Scotch Church, Regent Square, London; Before the Presbytery of Annan, on 13<sup>th</sup> March, 1833; With an Appendix, Containing Copies of some of his Letters, and Other Documents, a Refutation of his Errors, and an Account of the Supposed Supernatural Manifestations Exhibited by the "Gifted" of his Congregation; Also some Notices of Similar Manifestations in the French Prophets, and Others* (Dumfries: Journal Office, 1833), 16.

<sup>179</sup> *Trial before the Presbytery of Annan*, 18.

drowned in perdition'.<sup>180</sup> Irving spoke in his own defence for nearly two hours, during which time he denied the right of the Presbytery and the General Assembly to pass judgment on him. Just as in the trial in London, Irving was called to order several times for preaching to the audience. Though it was recognised by the Presbytery that they had no jurisdiction over London,<sup>181</sup> it was concluded that Irving could no longer remain a minister in the Church of Scotland. After the trial, he remained in the area for several days preaching to large crowds.

Drummond and Bulloch have interpreted the Scottish Church in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as having been restricted by the Westminster Confession of Faith. They claim that the Moderates in the eighteenth century were able to come to something of a compromise, by holding to the Confession with their own private reservations.<sup>182</sup> Ahnert argues that they sought 'to steer a middle course between the extremes of an overemphasis on doctrinal orthodoxy on the one hand, and religious "enthusiasm" on the other'.<sup>183</sup> Again, Irving is somewhat difficult to place on the Moderate-Evangelical spectrum: he was unable to hold to the rigid orthodoxy of the Confession, but he was equally unable to keep those reservations private. Elliott argues that the events of these trials can best be explained by Irving's (essentially Romantic) egalitarianism and anti-authoritarianism.<sup>184</sup> As will be discussed in the next chapter, Irving by this point recognised Christ as the sole authority over and above any ecclesiastical structures, and he would present himself during these trials as a prophet being persecuted by the Church for his adherence to Christ.

Following Irving's removal from the Presbyterian ministry, he was prohibited from administering the sacraments by the apostles of the new group until he could be re-ordained, which he shortly was.<sup>185</sup> It seems that Irving

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<sup>180</sup> *Trial before the Presbytery of Annan*, 19.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid*, 51.

<sup>182</sup> Drummond and Bulloch, *The Scottish Church*, 62.

<sup>183</sup> Ahnert, *The Moral Culture*, 138.

<sup>184</sup> Elliott, *Edward Irving*, 294.

<sup>185</sup> Contrary to the opinion of some contemporaries and modern scholars, Tim Grass claims that this should not be understood as a slight on Irving, *The Lord's Work: A History of the Catholic Apostolic Church* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2017), 25.

struggled with the apostolic leadership, though he submitted for the most part to the prophets of the congregation (those prophesying in the tongues). In light of Irving's role in the movement, it seemed likely that he might have expected to be called as an apostle, but Robert Baxter had prophesied that this would not be the case due to the Church of Scotland's rejection of episcopacy; instead it was said that he would be made a prophet for the benefit of his native land. Grass suggests that this may have influenced Irving to return to Scotland in 1834 despite the fact that he was seriously ill by this point.<sup>186</sup> His final trip to Scotland is vividly recounted through his own letters to Isabella (and reproduced in Oliphant's biography). After preaching wherever possible along the way, Irving arrived in Glasgow at the end of October 1834, where he continued to work when well enough, but his health continued to deteriorate. He died in the early morning on 8 December; a few days later he was laid to rest at Glasgow Cathedral. Grass has debunked the colourful and oft-repeated legend regarding several women in white waiting at Irving's tomb confident in their belief that he would be resurrected,<sup>187</sup> though the existence (and persistence) of this myth is testament itself to the aura surrounding Irving's dramatic life.

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It is clear from this brief look at Edward Irving's life and career that he is a significant figure for the intellectual history of the period. He was close with some of the most influential people of the day, including Chalmers and Coleridge, and he interacted in meaningful ways with Evangelical, Romantic, and millenarian currents of thought which were prevalent to a greater or lesser extent at the time. But Irving was also a pivotal figure in the history of the Church of Scotland. He was educated in the intellectual milieu of Edinburgh at the tail-end of the Moderates' dominance of the Church and had first-hand experience of Evangelical efforts to address the problems caused by

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<sup>186</sup> Grass, *The Lord's Work*, 27.

<sup>187</sup> Grass, *The Lord's Watchman*, 297-298.

urbanisation and industrialisation. Though he was ultimately deposed from the Church, this was not before he was able to reshape the Scottish Church (and to some extent the wider religious discourse) in the capital through his preaching and publications. In the next chapter we will see how Irving, using his prominent position in London, employed the language and rhetoric of an Old Testament prophet as he sought to bring Britain back to God.

## Irving as Prophet

Like many at the time, Edward Irving had strong opinions on the social and political issues of the day: the effects of rampant poverty, the greed exhibited by those in the upper classes, and measures such as Catholic emancipation were just a few of the topics he addressed in his sermons and publications. What set Irving apart from others, though, was the fact that he justified his authority to express these opinions through his self-portrayal as an Old Testament prophet, and he ultimately grounded his views in his interpretation of biblical prophecy and history. Throughout his career, Irving maintained an exceedingly high view of Christianity, requiring considerable responsibility and sacrifice from the ministers thereof. For him, a preacher of the Gospel was called to be a prophet to a wayward people; this meant that no topic was off limits for the preacher, including politics. Irving carried out this prophetic function by addressing the social evils as he saw them in British society, such as the degradation of the labouring poor, which have come to be associated with industrialising Britain in the first few decades of the nineteenth century. As he delved deeper into prophetic study, however, he began to see the events of the period as apocalyptic in significance, constituting the beginning of the end times rather than temporary phenomena. His view of divinely-ordained history which looked forward to the universal dispensation and thousand-year reign of Christ implied a rejection of the belief in Protestant supremacy, which set him at odds with the religious world and public opinion. By the early 1830s, his warnings and predictions became increasingly dire and his position increasingly desperate, as he depicted himself and his dwindling circle of friends as besieged bearers of the truth against a wicked world which was fast hastening towards its destruction.

## The Preacher as Prophet

It will be recalled that the 1810s saw parliamentary attempts at church reform, including the building of new churches to address the growing urban population. As S. J. Brown has remarked, the established churches felt a new sense of confidence and purpose in the early years of the 1820s.<sup>1</sup> In October 1822, just as Irving was settling into London, William Magee, the Archbishop of Dublin, delivered a fiery charge in which he denounced both the Roman Catholics and Presbyterians in Ireland and called on the Irish clergy to evangelise among both groups. The 'New Reformation' in Ireland of the mid-1820s (symbolically initiated by Magee's charge) was part of a wider movement for reform, with an emphasis on pastoral care and missionary-like zeal, within the established churches during this period. It was in this highly-charged atmosphere which Irving developed an exalted understanding of the Christian minister, ultimately seeing his role in London as that of a prophet called to bring the British people back to God.

As was shown in the previous chapter, some of Irving's earliest recorded thoughts (from his time in Haddington) on the duties of a preacher demonstrate evidence of a high intellectual strain. Years later, during his extended probationary period in Glasgow, he continued to develop his thought. In a letter to Jane Welsh, Irving claimed, 'My soul is divorcing itself from the world and its tastes, and longing to be wedded to purity and wisdom and effulgence of love which are in God, and which are revealed in Christ'.<sup>2</sup> This was consistent with what he was saying to Thomas Carlyle at the time as well. As an assistant to Thomas Chalmers, Irving moved among the higher social orders in Glasgow, however he claimed that he received little from this. In the same letter, Irving admitted that 'there is a higher object in life than to be amused, and perhaps there is as high a one as to improve oneself – *I mean to impart improvement to others* – this is what I am engaged with at the present'.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Stewart J. Brown, *The National Churches of England, Ireland, and Scotland 1801-1846* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 73.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Irving to Jane Welsh (9 July 1821), in *The Diary and Letters of Edward Irving*, ed. Barbara Waddington (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 113.

<sup>3</sup> Irving to Thomas Carlyle (14 March 1820), in *Diary and Letters*, 83, (emphasis added).

It is clear then that Irving entertained higher goals than the pleasures of a comfortable life, but he needed a vehicle to broadcast his ideas, and he found this in the pulpit. While he suggested the press as the means for Carlyle getting his voice heard, he intimated his own views of the pulpit: 'You have not the pulpit as I have, and there perhaps I have the advantage'.<sup>4</sup> He reiterated this more clearly after the encouragement he received from his trial preaching in London, where he confessed, 'The pulpit I am now beginning to study as a means of power, formerly I arose no higher than to contemplate it as a means of livelihood, or rather for I never was a mercenary, as a prison house of fruitless exertion'.<sup>5</sup> As Irving's move to London became increasingly likely, he admitted that it was the opportunity for an audience which most interested him, which would enable him to make his message heard. His mission, as he laid it out to Carlyle, was 'to bring the spirit and power of antient eloquence into the pulpit, which appears to me the only place in modern manners for its revival'.<sup>6</sup> Decades after Irving's death, Washington Wilks, in his sympathetic biography, would claim that Irving was in advance of his contemporaries in 'his restoration of the pulpit to the rank of a social power'.<sup>7</sup>

Despite his insistence on the power of the pulpit, Irving was keenly aware of the influence of the press for the cause of religion. In *For the Oracles*, where he explicitly sought to contend with the influence of literary men, he argued that ministers of the Gospel needed to take the fight to the literary world: 'For the press hath come to master the pulpit in its power; and to be able to write powerful books, seems to me a greater accomplishment of a soldier of Christ, than to be able to preach powerful discourses'.<sup>8</sup> He compared a religious discourse to a single dart, while a book was likened to a catapult which could launch a thousand darts.<sup>9</sup> Irving remained committed to this ideal, as a third edition of *For the Oracles* was published within the same year, and

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<sup>4</sup> Edward Irving to Thomas Carlyle (26 December 1819), in *Diary and Letters*, 78.

<sup>5</sup> Irving to Carlyle (22 January 1822), in *Ibid*, 129.

<sup>6</sup> Irving to Carlyle (9 February 1822), in *Ibid*, 132.

<sup>7</sup> Washington Wilks, *Edward Irving: An Ecclesiastical and Literary Biography*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: W. Goddard, 1860), 272.

<sup>8</sup> Edward Irving, *For the Oracles of God, Four Orations. For Judgment to Come, An Argument, in Nine Parts*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: T. Hamilton, 1824), 468.

<sup>9</sup> Irving, *For the Oracles*, 468.

he continued to compose and publish his discourses throughout his career. As Tim Grass has observed, it is necessary to take into consideration the thought Irving gave to publishing his works, providing an indication of his careful use of the press.<sup>10</sup> Towards the end of his life when controversies swirled, he sent letters to the editor of *The Times* and even wrote an extensive piece on the manifestations of the spiritual gifts for *Fraser's Magazine* in an attempt to engage with the public debate and set the records straight. 'To warn this nation', Irving wrote in his *Fraser's* article, 'to warn the world as far as I have power to do it, is the reason for which I take up my pen to write in this publication, which, though I approve not in some things, is read by immortal souls; and my commission is to every creature under heaven'.<sup>11</sup>

In his published discourses, Irving would set out his exalted view of Christian ministry and his idealistic image of the preacher as prophet. In his farewell sermon to the Glasgow congregation, Irving had elaborated on his ideal image of the minister in an analogy: he likened most preachers of the Gospel to 'traders from port to port' who followed the customary course and were 'hailed by the common voice of the multitude'.<sup>12</sup> But there was a higher form of preacher, which Irving compared to one who adventured 'over the whole ocean of human concerns' but unfortunately was 'always derided as having lost all guess of the proper course'.<sup>13</sup> The apostle Paul, Martin Luther, and John Calvin were all of this latter class according to Irving, and in some ways so was Chalmers. Irving called for more of these adventurers, and it is easily argued that he saw himself fulfilling this role, or at the very least aspiring to. Peter Elliott argues that Irving's Romantic worldview was already firmly in place before he moved to London and met Coleridge, and he lists this emphasis on the benefits of abandoning the traditional paths as one of the

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<sup>10</sup> Tim Grass, *The Lord's Watchman: A Life of Edward Irving (1792-1834)* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 122.

<sup>11</sup> Edward Irving, 'Facts Connected with Recent Manifestations of Spiritual Gifts', *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country*, 5:26 (March 1832): 205.

<sup>12</sup> Edward Irving, *Farewell Discourse to the Congregation and Parish of St. John's, Glasgow* (Glasgow: Chalmers and Collins, 1822), 19.

<sup>13</sup> Irving, *Farewell Discourse*, 19.

Romantic characteristics which Irving demonstrated before leaving Scotland.<sup>14</sup> In a further statement, Irving claimed that there were plenty of ministers to keep the flock safe but asked, 'where are they to make inroad upon the alien, to bring in the votaries of fashion, of literature, of sentiment, of policy, and of rank?'<sup>15</sup> As was shown in *For the Oracles*, Irving made it clear that he intended to be the one to take on wider society and reclaim the pre-eminence of religion.

Irving's standard for the ideal minister of the Gospel was lofty indeed. In his farewell charge to the youth of St. John's, he spoke of 'an apostle's toilsome calling', and he urged them to go 'without staff, without scrip' where God will find a field for them.<sup>16</sup> This reference to Christ's instructions for his apostles was developed much further in Irving's sermon to the London Missionary Society in 1825. There he argued against what he took to be the common consensus, which held that Christ's instructions in Matthew 10 were temporary rules only applicable to the first apostles; by restoring the apostolic office, Irving meant to elevate the missionary enterprise. He declared that, based on Christ's original orders, the missionary 'is a messenger not of time but of eternity; that his soul is dressed not in the confidence and trust of time, but of eternity; that he is a man of faith, and of faith alone, and there able to plant faith wherever he is permitted'.<sup>17</sup> There was no inherent distinction for Irving between a missionary and a minister, and his exhortations were generally addressed to anyone who preached the Gospel. As is suggested in the previous quotation, a Christian messenger, as a man of faith alone, must necessarily stand in an antagonistic relationship to the world. 'He who propagates the Gospel', Irving wrote, 'must be separate from worldly interests, and stand aloof from worldly occupations'.<sup>18</sup> This was now quite far removed from the Moderate ideal of the minister which had prevailed in the Church of Scotland in the second half of the eighteenth century, but he went even further

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<sup>14</sup> Peter Elliott, *Edward Irving: Romantic Theology in Crisis* (PhD thesis: Murdoch University, 2010), 233, 115.

<sup>15</sup> Irving, *Farewell Discourse*, 21.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 15-16.

<sup>17</sup> Edward Irving, *For Missionaries after the Apostolical School, a Series of Orations. In Four Parts* (London: Hamilton, Adams, and Co., 1825), 79.

<sup>18</sup> Irving, *For Missionaries*, 83.

to claim figuratively that a missionary-minister's work was no less than 'to overthrow the prince of this world, seated upon the bounty and pleasantness, upon the magnificence and glory of the visible creation'.<sup>19</sup>

Perhaps the fullest exposition of Irving's exacting standards of the preacher's office was given in his ordination charge to Hugh Maclean, newly-ordained minister of the Scots Church at London Wall, in 1827. In the introduction to the discourse, Irving made his views clear to Maclean: 'Of all the offices which are sustained in this world, you have now, by the solemn ordinance of the laying on of the hands of the presbytery, been set apart to the most burdensome and responsible'.<sup>20</sup> Irving proceeded to lay out his view of 'the sacred character of a minister' in five aspects, that of scholar, preacher, pastor, churchman, and man (that is, member of society). As a scholar, Irving strongly recommended studying the ancient languages, the scriptural prophecies, and the history of the church, including the history of heresy and the apostacy (i.e. Roman Catholicism).<sup>21</sup> On preaching, Irving's disdain for most of what passed for preaching was clearly evident: 'Make not thyself a mere sermon-maker, or a talker or a declaimer, or a clerk of religious accounts, or a committee-man, or a polite payer of visits, or a drudge of any kind'.<sup>22</sup> Irving complained that the pastoral office was lost in London and had been replaced with 'a certain idea of society and companionship which is totally fruitless of any spiritual good'.<sup>23</sup> In light of this, Irving urged Maclean that he demand respect as a pastor from his congregation by spending no idle hours with them, meeting only for 'spiritual counsel or instruction'.<sup>24</sup> As a member of the Church of Scotland, Irving maintained that Maclean owed brotherly communion to all trinitarian Protestants, most especially members of the Church of England. But, he claimed that there was reciprocal duty for each church to offer 'rebuke

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<sup>19</sup> Irving, *For Missionaries*, 103.

<sup>20</sup> Edward Irving, 'Ordination Charge to the Minister of the Scots Church, London Wall, March 15, 1827', in *The Collected Writings of Edward Irving*, ed. G. Carlyle (London: Alexander Strahan & Co., 1864), Vol. I, 527.

<sup>21</sup> Irving, 'Ordination Charge', 528-529.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 529.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 532.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 533.

and reproof' for the 'backslidings in doctrine and discipline' of one another.<sup>25</sup> The Roman Catholic and the Socinian, on the other hand, deserved no mercy. Finally, as a member of society, Irving advised the newly-ordained minister to be hospitable and warned against accumulating riches: 'Thy cloak and thy parchments, brother – that is, thy decent apparel and thy books – be these thy riches'.<sup>26</sup> The image that is constructed from these views then is one of an erudite minister who can hold his own amongst high society yet stays separate from it. His faith should be pure and simple, and he should stick to the message of truth despite the vicissitudes of the age. He should not pursue wealth nor power, but rather must stand up to and against these. This last provides a clue to what would become for Irving perhaps the most important function of a preacher of the Gospel in the world in which he found himself.

Irving pushed this ideal to the next logical step: portraying the role of the preacher as the same as that of the prophet of old. '[T]hou art a prophet to cry aloud to the Ninevites, to this Babylon', he charged Maclean.<sup>27</sup> Far from being just an instance of rhetorical excess in what was already a highly-strung discourse, this sentiment fit into a larger process whereby Irving increasingly viewed his work in the vein of an Old Testament prophet who had been called to rebuke a society which had profoundly lost its way. Already in *For the Oracles*, when an attack on contemporary Christianity and preaching had reached fever-pitch, Irving exclaimed, 'the theme is fitter for an indignant prophet, than an uninspired sinful man'.<sup>28</sup> While this may be viewed as innocuous exaggeration, Irving would go on to express his understanding of the role and relevance of the prophet more explicitly in later works. Though the aim of *For Missionaries* was to argue for the continued existence of the apostolic office, he also took the opportunity to discuss the prophetic office, which he explicitly equated to that of the preacher. 'The preacher here at home,' he stated boldly, 'is no other office than that of the ancient prophet to

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<sup>25</sup> Irving, 'Ordination Charge', 535-536. Irving's views on the relationship between the established churches of Britain are interesting in their own right, but it generally takes this form of mutual criticism from a position of love and respect to the benefit of both.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 537.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Irving, *For the Oracles*, 101.

the land of Israel'.<sup>29</sup> For Irving, Christian preachers were 'the prophets of the New Dispensation'.<sup>30</sup> A prophet was defined as one who was 'to prophesy in the midst of the people who know [the Gospel] but obey it not, to call them to repentance, and to read out their doom if they repent not'; and like the apostolic office, he argued that this was an office which had been established for all time.<sup>31</sup> As will be shown in the next chapter, Irving's contemporaries commenting on this work did not accept his view of the prophetic office as eternal, implying a significant rejection of his idealistic understanding of the preacher as prophet.

Irving went further though than just this theoretical justification of the prophetic role in modern society: he began to explicitly portray himself as a prophet. The preamble to his address to the London Missionary Society offers an excellent example of this, as he prepared to rebuke a powerful and influential society:

God be my help! I have hardly proved the armour of this warfare, before I am called to give counsel to the leaders of the host, and the assembled camp. The burden is too great, and oppreseth my spirit, and I would flee, like the prophet Jonah, from declaring the message with which my spirit is oppressed, were there not a heavy woe denounced upon every prophet who shunneth to declare the whole counsel of God.<sup>32</sup>

Here Irving made it clear that he was under a higher authority with a more vital mission than to stroke the collective ego of those assembled, and this rhetoric would be a ubiquitous feature of his sermons throughout his career. On another occasion the following year, Irving preached a sermon to raise a collection for those affected by the panic and subsequent failure of the banks during the economic crisis of 1825. There he stressed his 'constraint and obligation to fulfil the office with fear and trembling, which I have undertaken, of declaring the sin and iniquity for which the land laboureth under the frown of Jehovah'.<sup>33</sup> He frequently employed the imagery of a watchman of the city,

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<sup>29</sup> Irving, *For Missionaries*, xx.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, xxi.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 5-6.

<sup>33</sup> Edward Irving, *Sermons, Lectures, and Occasional Discourses* (London: R. B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1828), Vol. III, 896.

prompting the title of Grass's biography, an expression of which (quoted by Irving) is found in the 33<sup>rd</sup> chapter of Ezekiel:

When I bring the sword upon a land, if the people of the land take a man of their coasts, and set him for their watchman: If when he seeth the sword come upon the land, he blow the trumpet, and warn the people; Then whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning; if the sword come, and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head [...] But if the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and take any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; *but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand* (Ezekiel 33:2-6).<sup>34</sup>

On Irving's portrayal of his prophetic role, it was his divinely appointed duty to warn his society of its failings; to shrink from this would be to open himself up to blame and judgment. It will now be shown precisely what Irving as watchman understood those failings to be.

### Social and Political Views

In the first few decades of the nineteenth century, there was a growing split within British Evangelicalism between what Boyd Hilton refers to, for the sake of convenience, as the 'moderate' and 'extreme' factions. Diverging over the issue of moral versus material improvement, there were significant differences in the social and political views between these two groups. The 'moderates' (not to be confused with the Moderate party in the Church of Scotland), represented by the Clapham Sect and the Eclectic Society of London, viewed improvement largely in moral terms. Materially *laissez-faire*, they were opposed to governmental intervention as they believed that individuals should, as Hilton claims, 'be left to work out their own salvation' without interference.<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, 'extreme' Evangelicals, including Irving and his circle as well as Alexander Haldane and those associated with his *Record*, were materially paternalistic, being in favour of an interventionist approach to social, political, and economic issues. On Irving's view, the sins of omission among the ruling classes had contributed to the notorious condition of the labouring

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<sup>34</sup> Quoted in Irving, *Sermons*, Vol. III, 896 (emphasis added).

<sup>35</sup> Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795-1865* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 16.

classes, though he rejected the 'expedient' policies intended to address the problems.

Irving's high view of Christian ministry and self-assumed prophetic role encouraged and enabled him to address the pressing social and political issues of his day. 'I am not a politician', he declared in a sermon on 'Ireland's evil condition' (in 1825), 'and do not choose to intermeddle in their angry quarrels; but I am a minister of God, consecrated by authority, and invested with power in this nation to declare the whole counsel of God, for the instruction of all ranks and offices of men within this realm'.<sup>36</sup> One constant and familiar topic in Irving's thought was the character and make-up of society, and he discoursed on it regularly in his sermons. In an extended digression in the 'Argument for Judgment to Come' from *For the Oracles*, Irving portrayed civil society as being pulled apart by the inactivity of some and the over-activity of others, and he aimed to show 'the effects of the divine constitution upon political society'.<sup>37</sup> A bleak picture was painted of all classes, doomed to a mechanical drudgery in one form or another: 'The greater number of almost every state are sunk into a mere animal being; consuming food, propagating their kind, labouring the earth, manufacturing its commodities into various shapes, and transporting them from place to place'.<sup>38</sup> For the lower classes, there was only 'hard and incessant labour, broken with fierce gleams of jollity and debauch, poorhouse dependence and poorhouse discontent, nocturnal adventures of the poacher and the smuggler and the depredator, sabbath breakings, sabbath sports and sabbath dissipations'.<sup>39</sup>

Irving developed his views of political society in more detail in his sermon occasioned by the financial distress of 1825, which he attributed to God's judgment brought on by a breakdown of divinely-ordained social obligations. In self-conscious imitation of the Old Testament prophets, Irving proposed in this work to expose first the sins of the rulers and governors before moving on to the sins of the common people.<sup>40</sup> The fundamental political

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<sup>36</sup> Irving, *Sermons*, Vol. III, 1231.

<sup>37</sup> Irving, *For the Oracles*, 240.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 241.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 244.

<sup>40</sup> Irving, *Sermons*, Vol. III, 920.

principle for Irving was that authority flowed from God down through the temporal governors and ultimately to the people, and as such all power in a Christian government was ultimately held in trust for Christ the King.<sup>41</sup> His complaint against the ministers of the state was that this vital principle had been almost completely ignored, and an idol had been raised in its place – ‘the sovereignty of the people’.<sup>42</sup> And, beneath the legislators of the country, the nobles were authorised by God to hold the land in Christ’s name, though here too they had disappointed. In exchange for certain ‘privileges, honours, and divine functions’, the nobles were to perform certain duties and obligations, including supporting the church, educating the people, and maintaining the poor.<sup>43</sup> Irving claimed that the nobility had forsaken this divine function and had grown ‘vain, and ambitious, and luxurious, and profuse’; they had become distracted, considering it of more importance ‘to occupy a prominent place in the park parade, or to figure at a levee, or to be trumpeted abroad by a morning newspaper, or to sport a superb equipage, or to riot in the night-time at balls, routes, and assemblies’ than to fulfil their obligations to God and their people.<sup>44</sup>

But even more significant than the debauchery of the nobility, according to Irving, were the sins of the ‘merchants, traders, and moneyed people’, which he regarded as ‘the chief enormity of this land, and most likely to be the means of its downfal [sic]’.<sup>45</sup> He argued that the very property that this class of people owned, not land but capital, was often gained in ways which were harmful to the spirit: by selfish interests for merchants, exploitation of the labour of others for manufacturers, and usury and speculation for money lenders.<sup>46</sup> Yet even these were under obligations from God. Irving compared the companies of merchants from the previous century – ‘God’s chief instruments for civilizing the world’ – to a joint-stock company of the present day, which he likened to ‘a rope of sand, a rock to wreck hopes upon, a quicksand to engulf valuable

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<sup>41</sup> Irving, *Sermons*, Vol. III, 897-898.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 900-901.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 906.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 907-908.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 908.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 916-917.

goods'.<sup>47</sup> These merchants, Irving declared, were lower even than lawyers 'in the scale of knavery'.<sup>48</sup> Similar to the nobility, manufacturers, as masters 'of hundreds and thousands of ingenious men', were obliged to care for those in their charge, and as such had the potential to be something great.<sup>49</sup> But they had, as a class, fallen short of this ideal, and Irving largely blamed them for many of the social evils complained of at the time:

But how, alas! it is become! In good times beating up for workmen by tuck of drum, advertising for them to come in from distant parts, to settle by their factories; and, in bad times, paying them off, and casting them far away to starve, if the parish cannot maintain them. In good times, allowing them to drink and whore, and live in concubinage; to enslave their immature children, to profane the Sabbath, to blaspheme the Lord, to educate their children in infidelity, and to club together for all manner of political disaffection: then in bad times turning them over to their unreclaimed wills, and ferocious passions, to revenge, and violent acts, which can be repressed only by the sword.<sup>50</sup>

Irving stressed the paternal responsibility placed on the manufacturers, much as Carlyle would do later in the faith he put in the new 'captains of industry'.

For Irving, the sins of the common people were very much the product of these offences of the higher orders, and thus the people were held less accountable. His political and social views were paternalistic, stating that 'the duties and offices by which [the social orders] are bound together should all descend from above in acts of condescension, and then return from below in acts of thankfulness'.<sup>51</sup> Thus like unruly children, when the upper ranks forsook their duties and obligations, 'the lower ranks fall away from the true respect and dutifulness of their station, into selfishness, discontentment, discord, and finally rebellion'.<sup>52</sup> The first sin of which Irving accused the people was 'disaffection to, and evil-speaking of, dignities', citing the fact that there seemed to be no longer any conscientious obedience, but rather only 'fear of the consequences of disobedience'.<sup>53</sup> 'Reverence for those over us in authority is departed', he complained, 'and the venerable insignia of office are

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<sup>47</sup> Irving, *Sermons*, Vol. III, 917.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 918.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 918-919.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 923.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 924.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 926.

despised as a fool's bauble, and every act is looked upon with suspicion, judged and censured unsparingly'.<sup>54</sup> The second offence Irving charged to the lower classes was the brutish, ignorant, and mendicant character of the country-dwellers. As evidence, he highlighted the complaints against the poor which would have been familiar to every reader of Malthus:

Early and improvident marriages, proceeding for the most part out of concubinage, and a desire of children stimulated by the parish allowances; a family of paupers, and not ashamed of it, cleaving immovable to their parishes like limpets to the rock; having no ideas beyond eating and drinking, and labouring the soil, and enjoying the paradise of an alehouse.<sup>55</sup>

As has been shown, Irving's attitude toward the poor was more complicated than this quotation suggests, with ample evidence of mutual regard between him and those in the lower classes. Grass has claimed that this social critique of Irving's, grounded as it was in his experience among the poor in Glasgow and London, was not particularly common in the Evangelical pulpits of the day.<sup>56</sup> However, despite his experience in Glasgow under Chalmers, his proposed remedy for alleviating their condition was far from the solution implemented in St. John's.

Though he recognised these evils in society, Irving criticised attempts at finding political solutions to them; this can be seen particularly clearly in two sermons included in his 1828 collection. The first was preached at the opening of a Scotch Church in Birmingham in 1824; the topic was labour ('Adam's curse') and the detrimental effects this has had on humanity. After painting a dismal picture of the labouring classes – 'heart-broken, half-starved in body, wholly starved in mind, brought up to end their days in the work-house, or some worse place of confinement' – he rejected the suggestion of decreasing the amount of labour done by any political means.<sup>57</sup> The evil, he argued, was 'not in the fact of labouring, but in that for which we labour'.<sup>58</sup> The remedy therefore was 'not in discontenting the people with their humble and miserable condition,

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<sup>54</sup> Irving, *Sermons*, Vol. III, 926-927.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 932.

<sup>56</sup> Grass, *The Lord's Watchman*, 64.

<sup>57</sup> Irving, *Sermons*, Vol. III, 1058.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, 1062.

which is to pour vinegar upon their wounds, but to teach them that they have a soul as well as a body for which to be anxious, and to use exertion'.<sup>59</sup> Irving suggested that the only certain way of improving the condition of the people was by implanting in them tastes for higher things which manual labour could not gratify, and as evidence he pointed to the example of Paul preaching among the slaves.<sup>60</sup> Not by meddling with political establishments did Paul effect change, but simply through preaching the Gospel which served to elevate the people by breaking the yoke of labour.<sup>61</sup>

The second instance was a sermon preached for the Hibernian Society in 1825 on 'the cause and remedy of Ireland's evil condition'. Though government administrators were often blamed for Ireland's condition, again he argued that the cause was internal rather than external.<sup>62</sup> As Catholicism applied itself to the senses, he claimed that it was futile to think that any external system of laws, education, or anything else would make the Irish people 'moral, provident, refined, or spiritual'.<sup>63</sup> The polemical issue in question was regarding allowing Irish children to be educated as Catholics, and Irving was adamant that only evil could come from this. His proposed remedy called for Protestants, namely members of the Church of Ireland, to resist these measures and be zealous against 'the mortal errors with which the people and their children are oppressed'.<sup>64</sup> In both of these examples, it was not political expediency, but only through the power of the (true interpretation of the) Gospel that any 'improvement' could be effected. By highlighting the pressing need for proper preaching, Irving's criticism extended beyond these political questions to the state of Christianity itself in Britain.

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<sup>59</sup> Irving, *Sermons*, Vol. III, 1063.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, 1066, 1074.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, 1074, 1089.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, 1201-1202.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, 1208.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 1251.

## Religious Criticism

The need for effectual preaching of the Gospel only emphasised for Irving the wide gulf between Christianity as it should be and how it was practiced by his contemporaries. Despite the seeming success of the Evangelical societies in the first two decades of the nineteenth century, D. W. Bebbington points out that doubt began to grow over their efficacy, especially regarding mission work, as evident in a work of 1821 by James Haldane Stewart in which he called 'for a special effusion of the Holy Spirit'.<sup>65</sup> In the mid-1820s Irving would take up this charge against the so-called 'moderate' Evangelicals as he criticised anything that relied upon expediency, and he would ultimately come to denounce the entire British nation for worshipping the idol of wealth. Though Irving was not alone in this (among others both Coleridge and Chalmers had made similar claims), the vehement rhetoric he used along with his belief in the special providence of God contributed to an image of Irving as a prophet pleading on behalf of a sinful society.

The implication of his idealistic image of Christian ministry expressed in his farewell sermon in Glasgow was an inherent criticism of the current practice of preaching. Irving proposed that

if churchmen would become once more the shepherds of the people, not petty politicians, or pitiful dependents upon the great – would they stand for themselves upon the basis of their sacred function, and become God's royal nation, Christ's ambassadors, and the captains of the militant church, then would health spring up in darkness, and the cities, now famous for disaffection, and branded with sedition, would become the nurseries of new devices for the good of church and state.<sup>66</sup>

On this view, the ministers of religion were actively failing in their duties, leading to, or at the very least allowing for, the well-known social ills of industrialising Britain, and he became increasingly convinced of this from his experience in London. Perhaps the most controversial articulation of these views was in the preface to the first edition of *For the Oracles*. There he claimed that years of meditation upon the subject had led him to the

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<sup>65</sup> D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1989), 76.

<sup>66</sup> Irving, *Farewell Discourse*, 36-37.

conclusion, that 'the chief obstacle to the progress of divine truth over the minds of men is the want of its being sufficiently presented to them'.<sup>67</sup> This had precipitated the dire situation wherein, according to Irving's calculation, 'in this Christian country there are, perhaps, nine tenths of every class who know nothing at all about the applications and advantages of the single truths of revelation, or of revelation taken as a whole, and what they do not know they cannot be expected to reverence or obey'.<sup>68</sup> But, to the dismay of his fellow clergymen, Irving attributed this not to any lack of inquisitiveness on the part of the people, but rather 'to the want of a sedulous and skilful ministry on the part of those to whom it is intrusted'.<sup>69</sup> This is what had prompted Irving to attempt new ways of disseminating Christian truths. As the ministers of the day prepared 'for teaching gipsies, for teaching bargemen, for teaching miners', Irving sought to address the political, scientific, and literary leaders 'who bear the world in hand'.<sup>70</sup> As might be expected, this was not particularly well-received by his contemporaries, but an examination of the reactions to these claims will be seen in the following chapter.

While he castigated contemporary ministers for not preaching in a way that might appeal to the influential members of society, Irving simultaneously criticised a form of Christianity which had become all too intellectual and abstract. He claimed that a 'logical and metaphysical' form of religion prevailed, 'playing about the head, but starving the well-springs of the heart, and drying up the fertile streams of a holy and charitable life'.<sup>71</sup> He stressed approaching the word of God with simplicity, and denounced 'the baneful effects of holding so much acquaintance with formularies of doctrine, and so little with the Word itself'.<sup>72</sup> Despite these views, Irving had little praise for those who were actively trying to revive religious feeling in Britain during this period, particularly the Evangelicals among the Clapham sect. Not long after his arrival in the metropole, Irving wrote to Chalmers to describe a dinner he

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<sup>67</sup> Irving, *For the Oracles*, v.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, vii.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 47-48.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

had attended with the 'religiosi' (Irving's own term), including Sir Thomas Baring and William Wilberforce. His criticism of this group encapsulated his initial view of modern religion in the capital:

They are essentially stupid people, blighted with a loss of faculties, and an overgrowth of prosing. Wilberforce sees a little further; he confessed to me the constraint of preaching and talked with some sense about Calvinism. But depend upon it this *Regime* cannot last. It makes converts, but it knows not what to make of the converts when they are made. Oh such prosing! Such idle prosing! May the Lord refresh the waste-places of his church, and send us men of some English understanding & English character.<sup>73</sup>

A few years later, he reconfirmed this sentiment (in another letter to Chalmers): 'I have found the Evangelical people but a broken reed [...] the glory of the reformed churches are gone. The revival of the last 50 years is the dying of the Spirit, his last effort to enliven the rotten and corrupt Gentility which is soon to end'.<sup>74</sup> As will be argued, much of what was hailed as the revival of religion was viewed by Irving as almost entirely worldly, substituting expediency for faith.

The expediency which Irving denounced in the political and social spheres had, on his view, infiltrated the religious world as well, heralding the impending triumph of the visible over the invisible. It is significant to note just how natural criticism of the religious state of society seems to have come to Irving, as an entry from his early diary illustrates. On the people of Haddington, he wrote in 1810:

Possessed normally of a happy mediocrity they seem to pride themselves in their happiness, they are very apt to throw of [sic] all allegiance to God as the giver of every good, and to believe that their present comfortable circumstances arise solely from their prudence and carefulness. They are in general in that careless state which is, perhaps, the most dangerous. Their external conduct is not glaringly bad, but yet inconsistent. Like the Pharisees of old they make clean the outside, they attend on religious ordinances & partake of holy things but all within is rottenness and corruption.<sup>75</sup>

Overlooking the accuracy of such a statement from an eighteen-year old university student, this observation displays the kind of criticism in which Irving

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<sup>73</sup> Edward Irving to Thomas Chalmers (10 March 1823), in *Diary and Letters*, 180.

<sup>74</sup> Irving to Chalmers (26 March 1827), in *Ibid*, 239.

<sup>75</sup> Edward Irving, Diary (20 August 1810), in *Ibid*, 46.

would engage throughout his life. In his controversial criticism of the missionary enterprise, he stated boldly, 'This is the age of expediency, both in the Church and out of the Church; and all institutions are modelled upon the principles of expediency, and carried into effect by the rules of prudence'.<sup>76</sup> This train of thought supposedly had been prompted by a statement made at a public meeting Irving had attended, where the first, second, and third most important qualifications of a missionary were said to be 'prudence', which Irving characterised as 'the ruler of the ascendant'.<sup>77</sup> Though the leaders of the religious societies would certainly have argued for the beneficial effects such prudence could have on the propagation of Christianity, Irving equated this expediency with all things sensual, and set it against faith, or all things spiritual.<sup>78</sup> Irving claimed that this expediency, with its emphasis on the utility of a thing, already had banished such principles as patriotism, virtue, and wisdom, and would 'become the death of all ideal and invisible things, whether poetry, sentiment, heroism, disinterestedness, or faith'.<sup>79</sup> In *The Last Days*, Irving again picked up this theme, where he railed against 'these days of expediency and prudence'.<sup>80</sup> The dichotomy between faith and expediency exposed a fundamental antagonism between Christ, as possessor of the invisible world, and Satan, of the visible.<sup>81</sup> Irving maintained this inherent opposition between God and the world in all of his later works. Furthermore, he refused to make any arbitrary distinctions between 'the religious world and the professing world', addressing all of Christendom and thereby inextricably blending his social and religious criticism.<sup>82</sup>

In the eyes of many, the age in which Irving found himself was an improving one – the country was becoming more prosperous (though not all benefited equally), and Christianity and liberty were being spread abroad. As

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<sup>76</sup> Irving, *For Missionaries*, xiv.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, xiv-xv.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, xv.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, xv-xvi.

<sup>80</sup> Edward Irving, *The Last Days: A Discourse on the Evil Character of these Our Times: Proving them to Be the "Perilous Times" of the "Last Days"* (London: R. B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1828), 251.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, 323.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, 40.

is evident, by the mid-1820s Irving fundamentally disagreed with this perception, and he took pains to disabuse his audience of this delusion. *The Last Days* was one such example wherein he systematically argued that the age was sunk in wickedness and depravity. Among other similar characteristics, Irving bemoaned the boastfulness, pride, and covetousness which he saw everywhere around him. 'Compare the deep humility and loud lamentations of our fathers over the evil character of their times,' he implored his audience', with the self-sufficient commendations and garrulous boasting of the enlightened character of these above all former times'.<sup>83</sup> Though 'the outward signs and symbols of rank' were being levelled, Irving claimed that 'there never was within this land such an abuse of the gifts of understanding, and the advantages of rank and station to the aggrandizement of self, as there are in these times'.<sup>84</sup> Meanwhile, 'there never was such a barrenness of true condescension and generous sacrifice for the well-being of our inferior dependents'.<sup>85</sup>

But perhaps the most damning characteristic for Irving was the ubiquitous covetousness, and this was a topic with which he treated on multiple occasions. In *The Last Days*, Irving repeated his attack on the religious societies who were obsessed with 'the state of their funds', and he likened them to 'the begging friars, seeking alms to enrich their overgrown and luxurious convents'.<sup>86</sup> But this trait was much more noticeable in the commerce of everyday life. Again compared with 'the regular and quiet diligence' of the previous age, Irving condemned 'the wild and wide-spread speculation for great gains, the rash and hasty adventures which are daily made, and the desperate gamester-like risks which are run'.<sup>87</sup> Technological inventions and innovations, he argued, had so tempted humanity that the youth were being raised 'with the ambition of making a fortune, retiring to their ease, and enjoying the luxuries of the present life'.<sup>88</sup> Significantly, this greed was not

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<sup>83</sup> Irving, *The Last Days*, 54-55.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*, 60.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, 52-53.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, 48.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*.

only detrimental in itself, but was also undermining all social and religious relationships and obligations. This view is summed up in the 1826 sermon preached following the economic distress. There, Irving asserted that capitalists, whom he called 'the lords of this new creation of political economy', were

hasting to work out of our ancient Christian system of the state, all principle of obedience towards God, all obligation of man to man, all sense of reciprocal duty, all the dignity and burden of office, all the graces of life, and to reduce everything to the increase of gain, and the accumulation of wealth, which from the Commons House of St. Stephens in the west, to the Exchange in the east, is the great subject of conversation, and the great object of pursuit; the great cause of dispatches and expresses from nation to nation, the first cause of power, the great end of combination.<sup>89</sup>

In light of this, Irving provoked, 'I may say, in answer to the question, 'What is the chief end of man now become?' The chief end of man is now become to glorify mammon, and to enjoy him how and while we can'.<sup>90</sup> The reference to 'mammon', originally an Aramaic word meaning 'riches', is ultimately to Matthew 7:24: 'No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon'. In Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the concept was developed further as it was personified as a member of Satan's horde: 'Mammon, the least erected Spi'rit that fell / From Heav'n; for e'en in Heav'n his looks and thoughts / Were always downward bent, admiring more / The riches of Heav'n's pavement, trodden gold, / Than ought divine or holy else enjoy'd / In vision beatific'.<sup>91</sup> It has already been noted that Irving's style was heavily influenced by Milton, and in his condemnation of greed he invoked both Matthew and Milton, concluding that the pursuit of wealth 'is a forsaking of God, a disowning of him, and a worshipping of the basest spirit which fell from heaven'.<sup>92</sup>

With the implications from the passage in Matthew, Irving was accusing the vast majority of his countrymen of not simply failing in their duties as

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<sup>89</sup> Irving, *Sermons*, Vol. III, 919-920.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, 920.

<sup>91</sup> John Milton, *Paradise Lost, in Twelve Books. With a Life of the Author, and a Critique of the Poem* (London: J. Johnson, *et al*, 1802), 28.

<sup>92</sup> Irving, *Sermons*, Vol. III, 918.

Christians, but of directly turning away from God and worshipping a golden idol. This was fundamentally a religious criticism, as monetary exchange had replaced the divinely ordained social relations between individuals and classes, and he prophesied misfortune and disaster as the consequence. 'The golden cord of life hath been untwisting' for the last century, he claimed, 'and now hardly holdeth together the orders of the community'.<sup>93</sup> In place of support and protection, labourers received from those for whom they laboured 'a piece of money in charity, some pittance with which to keep body and soul together, which verily we refuse not to our domestic animals'.<sup>94</sup> He augured that these frayed and fraying social relations would not prevent the kind of armed uprisings which terrified the ruling classes (Irving might have had in mind some of the scenes he witnessed during his time in Glasgow). 'That is the way of it', he concluded, 'it begins in the thirst of gold, and it ends in the mediation of steel; gold the god, the sword the mediator, hell upon earth the consummation. Oh! oh! it is a system such as the world hath never seen, and crieth to Heaven for vengeance: it is mammon's sowing-time; his harvest is ripe, and his jubilee will come; and woe, woe, woe, when he putteth in the sickle'.<sup>95</sup>

One of Irving's most sustained prophetic critiques of this idolatry of wealth came at the end of *Babylon and Infidelity*, where he again took the opportunity afforded by the economic shock in 1825 to warn the British people. He urged his audience to consider the calamity as an omen from God, all the more poignant as it came during 'the most high and palmy state of British grandeur, when all men were offering incense to the idol'.<sup>96</sup> His rhetoric was exaggerated and his denunciation extreme:

we have been, during the last century, and are now, a Mammon-worshipping people, idolaters of political economy, of national wealth, and commercial greatness, and that the poor are miserably depressed by our mechanical systems, whom all our witty inventions have not profited, nor their children, who have become a pigmy race of mechanical slaves, the

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<sup>93</sup> Irving, *Sermons*, Vol. III, 940.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 919.

<sup>96</sup> Edward Irving, *Babylon and Infidelity Foredoomed of God: A Discourse on the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse*, (Glasgow: Chalmers and Collins, 1826), Vol. II, 410-411.

hopes of Mammon's kingdom, and a sacrifice to his altar; instead of being the hopes of the Church, and an offering to the Father of spirits.<sup>97</sup>

Rather than testifying against this 'worship of Mammon', the Church had confederated with his worshippers, which, Irving claimed, brought on the economic crisis and also hampered the success of missionaries around the world.<sup>98</sup> For Irving, it simply was not possible to be a true Christian while partaking in the greed which defined Britain for him since the end of the Napoleonic Wars. He exhorted his audience, 'Be either for God or against him. Either expect from Providence, or expect from Mammon; ye cannot serve them both. Either labour for industry and righteousness' sake, and be thankful for daily bread; or labour for thousands by the year, and curse the god of fortune if you realize them not'.<sup>99</sup> The sins of the British people and the corresponding punishments which Irving had exposed were not arbitrary, but, as will be shown below, rather fit into his wider prophetic-historical framework.

Irving was not alone in this criticism of 'Mammon-worship', as Hilton cites Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 1817 *Lay Sermon* (discussed in the previous chapter) as perhaps the central text inveighing 'against the abandoned Mammonism of the age'.<sup>100</sup> There Coleridge had argued that the commercial spirit of the British people was no longer restrained by the traditional checks. He stated clearly, 'We are [...] a busy, enterprising, and commercial nation. The habits attached to this character must, if there exist no counterpoise, inevitably lead us, under the specious names of utility, practical knowledge, and so forth, to look at all things thro' the medium of the market, and to estimate the Worth of all pursuits and attainments by their marketable value'.<sup>101</sup> While the commercial spirit had grown insensibly over the previous century, the religious check had not increased proportionally, and Coleridge complained that the best of modern religion, which aimed at righteousness alone, left the understanding unoccupied and therefore free to be used in commercial

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<sup>97</sup> Irving, *Babylon and Infidelity*, Vol. II, 413.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*, 416.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*, 428.

<sup>100</sup> Hilton, *Age of Atonement*, 120.

<sup>101</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "*Blessed are ye that Sow beside all Waters!*" *A Lay Sermon, addressed to the Higher and Middle Classes, on the Existing Distresses and Discontents* (London: Gale and Fenner, 1817), 73.

pursuits.<sup>102</sup> In reference to Christ's warning to the rich man (in Matthew 19:16-24), Coleridge wrote that the 'Christian Mammonists' appear 'as a drove of camels heavily laden, yet all at full speed, and each in the confident expectation of passing through the EYE OF THE NEEDLE, without stop or halt, both beast and baggage'.<sup>103</sup>

Thomas Chalmers, like most Evangelicals, was aware that the profit motive underpinning political economy was potentially dangerous, and he addressed this topic directly in his *Commercial Discourses* (1820), a work which, according to Hilton, Chalmers regarded as his most important to the end of his life.<sup>104</sup> In the final discourse, 'On the Love of Money', Chalmers criticised the unrestrained pursuit of profit, and in poetic language he likened the love of money to idolatry. The miserly businessman was said to work at his desk 'as if the ledger over which he was bending was a book of mystical characters, written in honour of some golden idol placed before him'.<sup>105</sup> This wealth would take the place of God, and continuing this analogy, Chalmers wrote:

Its various lodging-places, whether in the bank, or in the place of registration, or in the depository of wills and title-deeds – these are the sanctuaries of his secret worship – these are the high-places of his adoration; and never did devout Israelite look with more intentness towards Mount Zion, and with his face towards Jerusalem, than he does to his wealth, as to the mountain and stronghold of his security.<sup>106</sup>

With reference to the verse in Matthew, Chalmers made the direct connection between this love of money and idolatry of the anthropomorphised Mammon.<sup>107</sup> Chalmers concluded that this covetousness, though it seemed perfectly respectable to society, was worse even than infidelity while also being nearly universal. 'Wealth is the goddess whom all the world worshippeth', he lamented.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Coleridge, *Lay Sermon*, 83-86.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, 78.

<sup>104</sup> Hilton, *Age of Atonement*, 117.

<sup>105</sup> Thomas Chalmers, *The Application of Christianity to the Commercial and Ordinary Affairs of Life, in a Series of Discourses* (Glasgow: Chalmers & Collins, 1820), 262.

<sup>106</sup> Chalmers, *Commercial Discourses*, 264.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid*, 271.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid*, 272-273.

It is significant that these discourses were published while Irving was still in Glasgow as Chalmers's assistant, but though there are similarities in language and imagery between the two, their views on this topic differed drastically. The difference lies in another distinction between 'moderate' and 'extreme' Evangelicals, this time over the nature of God's providence in the world. Though the distinction was not completely rigid, most 'moderate' Evangelicals understood divine providence as operating generally through natural laws which were only very rarely contravened (in the form of miracles), an idea which was also extended to the economy.<sup>109</sup> As Hilton explains, Chalmers, as a representative of this 'moderate' faction, was developing a 'mechanical' explanation of business cycles during the early 1820s based on his reading of Malthus's *Principles of Political Economy*, and while the economic crisis of 1825 gave him pause to reconsider the limits of capitalism, he did not view the crisis as an interruption of the natural order.<sup>110</sup> For Chalmers, the idolatry of 'Mammon' was more of an ever-present, generalised phenomenon in commercial society and not the direct cause of crises and bankruptcies, which were understood to operate according to ordered laws. For 'extreme' Evangelicals, according to Hilton, God was instead seen 'as constantly directing earthly affairs by special warnings and judgments'.<sup>111</sup> Though Irving developed no economic theories and had no intention of doing so (in this he was much closer to Carlyle's blanket denunciation of the entire study of political economy), for him the crisis of 1825 was a direct punishment or chastisement from God for unique acts of national idolatry and apostasy, and the appropriate response to this was national humiliation and contrition. Irving was not alone in his views on the divine origins of the crisis, but his high public profile and extreme rhetoric harkened back to the ancient prophets. As will be shown in the final chapter, Carlyle would use much the same language as he denounced the 'Gospel of Mammonism' and the 'idolatry' of such unscrupulous characters as the railway fraudster George Hudson.

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<sup>109</sup> Hilton, *Age of Atonement*, 13-16.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid*, 119.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

## Prophetic-Historical Framework

In the second half of the 1820s Irving had immersed himself in speculation on the biblical prophecies, a pursuit which increasingly came to shape his entire worldview. It will be recalled that millenarianism and apocalypticism had entered the public consciousness during the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars. Though 'moderate' Evangelicals maintained a belief in the progressive (post-millenarian) conversion of the world through the missionary enterprise, by the early 1820s, prophetic exegetes such as Lewis Way, George Stanley Faber, and William Cuninghame of Lainshaw were arguing for a literal (pre-millenarian) interpretation of the biblical prophecies. By the late 1820s, this pursuit became dominated by Irving, Drummond, and the Albury circle, who believed that the world was not to be redeemed through human effort but only through the second coming of Christ. During this time, Irving developed a prophetic understanding of history, in which the Christian dispensation was successively sapped by the forces of tyranny, superstition, and infidelity, culminating in an apostate Protestantism which had been undermined by Satan.

By 1826-7, Irving had embraced a pre-millenarian eschatology which looked forward to the imminent return of Christ in the flesh, ushering in the thousand-year reign on earth, followed by the general resurrection and final judgments. His views on this most important of topics developed over time, but by the late 1820s, he had nothing but contempt for any ameliorationist views of Christianity. As we have seen, he largely criticised the Evangelical agenda; this was because it entailed a post-millenarian expectation of converting the world and transitioning seamlessly into the millennial reign. On this view, the world was slowly to be Christianised and improved leading to a reign of blessedness, only after which Christ would more or less metaphorically return for the consummation of the earth. The post-millenarian doctrine went against scripture, Irving argued, and the millennium to which its adherents looked forward was not that of scripture, but rather 'the optimism of the

philosophers'.<sup>112</sup> Instead of searching the scriptures, he claimed that these believers consulted 'the proverbs of earthly wisdom, and the resources of worldly wealth'.<sup>113</sup> 'It endeth not in the glory of Christ', Irving concluded, 'but in the glory of man; it maketh progress by policy and expediency, not by faith'.<sup>114</sup> *The Last Days* was written directly to counter this post-millenarian position, where he attempted to show from the text in 2 Timothy that the end days would be bad and not, as in the post-millenarian view, good. His message is summed up in a statement there: 'this is exactly the present case of the church, to think that we are steering full sail into the pacific and blessed region of time, when we are hurrying headlong, and as it were absorbed, stern foremost, into the jaws of an almost inevitable whirlpool'.<sup>115</sup>

On Irving's prophetic scheme, based primarily on the books of Daniel and Revelation, the history of the church of God since the captivity in Babylon was broken up into three distinct ages when successive antichristian spirits – tyranny, superstition, and infidelity – were in the ascendant. He treated with this topic on several occasions, but a sermon preached to the Continental Society in 1827 offered a succinct synopsis. There he traced the historical manifestations of these spirits by mapping them onto conspicuous real-world events. Out of the mouth of the dragon came 'the autocratic and self-willed spirit of absolute power, which mocks the Father's sovereignty'.<sup>116</sup> This was embodied in the Babylonian, Persian, Macedonian, and Roman empires of the ancient world, which, Irving argued, had been allowed by God to bring the church into captivity and punish the earth for its wickedness.<sup>117</sup> His political views were on display here when he claimed that 'regular and permanent government, however oppressive, is infinitely more favourable to religion than the changing and fluctuating humours of popular commonwealths, or the

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<sup>112</sup> Edward Irving, *Preliminary Discourse to the Work of Ben-Ezra; Entitled The Coming of Messiah in Glory and Majesty* [1827]. *To Which is Added, an Ordination Charge, Delivered by Mr. Irving in 1827; and also his, Introductory Essay to Bishop Horne's Commentary on the Psalms* (London: Bosworth & Harrison, 1859), 77.

<sup>113</sup> Irving, *Preliminary Discourse*, 78.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> Irving, *The Last Days*, 36.

<sup>116</sup> Irving, *Sermons*, Vol. III, 853.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 854-855.

successive waves of foreign conquest'.<sup>118</sup> To a relatively obscure edict of the Byzantine emperor Justinian I in 533, Irving, along with several other prophetic exegetes, dated the ascendancy of the spirit of superstition, which was said to come out of the mouth of the false prophet.<sup>119</sup> For Irving, the papacy had assumed Christ's threefold office of prophet, priest, and king, and for that reason the pope, whom Irving referred to as the 'priest-monarch mongrel', was the very embodiment of blasphemy.<sup>120</sup> But Irving was much more concerned with the spirit of infidelity, and he called this out wherever he perceived it.

For Irving, the third spirit, out of the mouth of the beast, was much closer to home. The time of the false prophet, representing the papacy, was said (through a complex calculation based on certain passages) to last for 1260 days, which was read as years by historicist students of prophecy. Herein lay the significance of the year 533: calculating 1260 years from that time brought one to the year 1792-3, the climax of the French Revolution. This was for him and many others of his generation *the* defining moment of the age, and Irving saw in this the triumph of the spirit of infidelity. In *Babylon and Infidelity*, he traced, along the lines laid down by James Hatley Frere, the development of the phenomenon in close detail. The groundwork had begun, he reasoned, in the middle of the eighteenth century with the attacks on Christianity from the *philosophes* in France and Voltaire under Frederick the Great in Prussia.<sup>121</sup> Events such as the storming of the Tuileries Palace, the abolition of the monarchy, and the execution of the king were identified as significant symbolic points in the prophetic history of the period. What began as an abstract principle of infidelity in the revolution soon found an embodied form, in the person of Napoleon Bonaparte, whom Irving referred to as 'God's executioner'.<sup>122</sup> Napoleon was to be used then as 'the sword of Christ in the throat of the Papal beast, to punish it for its most wicked oppression'.<sup>123</sup> But

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<sup>118</sup> Irving, *Sermons*, Vol. III, 854-855.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid*, 851.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid*, 853, 862.

<sup>121</sup> Irving, *Babylon and Infidelity*, Vol. I, 132-133.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid*, Vol. II, 10.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid*, 66.

this was not yet the end; first France was defeated by Britain, then rebellions and revolutions in Turkey, Greece, Naples, Lombardy, Portugal, and Spain in the early 1820s were successfully suppressed.<sup>124</sup> And at the end of thirty years, the old dynasties and kingdoms of Europe had been restored but had not learned their lesson: ‘They have been tried, but they have not repented; they have been humbled, but they have not returned to the Lord’.<sup>125</sup>

Under the sixth vial, the three antichristian spirits Irving had explicated – tyranny, superstition, and infidelity – were allowed to confederate to usher in the battle of Armageddon, and he judged this to be happening in his own lifetime. The signs of infidelity (‘Radicalism and Liberalism, and that new form of Dissenterism’) have already been shown, but Irving saw the revival of the former two spirits in recent political events.<sup>126</sup> As evidence of the resurgence of arbitrary power, Irving cited the Holy Alliance, between Prussia, Austria, and Russia in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars, ‘and their frequent conferences and congresses, in order to preserve their dominions inviolate, and to resist every effort of every kind to restrain their absolute power, or to mitigate its severity’.<sup>127</sup> But more worrying for Irving was the rehabilitation of superstition following the near destruction of the papacy by the French Revolution and Napoleon. Irving claimed that Catholicism was reviving in Ireland and on the continent, manifested partly by the restoration of the Jesuits.<sup>128</sup>

According to Irving, Britain was to play a favoured role in the events comprising the end times. Though infidelity threatened the country – he cited such examples as *The Age of Reason* and *The Rights of Man* by Thomas Paine – it was ultimately the British nation, guided and strengthened by God, which defeated Napoleon as infidelity incarnate.<sup>129</sup> As it was the role of infidelity to cast out superstition (in the form of Roman Catholicism), Irving came to see this as Britain’s peculiar destiny. He claimed that the British church was uniquely constituted to oppose the papacy, ‘and in the end, in the

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<sup>124</sup> Irving, *Babylon and Infidelity*, Vol. I, 236, 238.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 244-245.

<sup>126</sup> Edward Irving, *The Signs of the Times* (London: Andrew Panton, 1829), 21.

<sup>127</sup> Irving, *Signs of the Times*, 22.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> Irving, *Babylon and Infidelity*, Vol. I, 136, 233.

Lord's name, to direct the bloodhounds of infidelity, who are now unkennelling for its destruction'.<sup>130</sup> Britain had thus been favoured by the Lord in order to carry out his divine purpose. Infidelity, he declared, had found the magnetic pole through which to channel its power in Britain, which would discharge 'it with volcano force upon every thing which hath a foundation or cement, until it shall have brought all into one vast wave of turbulence and strife; a sea without a shore, men without principles, people without bonds, nations without a religion'.<sup>131</sup> Nevertheless, Britain remained for Irving a sealed nation. Because it had once been part of the Catholic church (one of 'the ten horns of the beast'), Britain would not escape punishment, however Irving hoped that this would take the form of chastisement rather than destruction.<sup>132</sup> As hinted at above, this was mainly due to Britain's unyielding opposition to the pope since the Reformation, but there were new political developments which shook Irving's faith in the Protestant constitution of the country.

What prompted several direct interventions and dire warnings from Irving was the increasing public and political support for repealing the Test and Corporation Acts and ultimately removing the Catholic disabilities in Britain. Removing the religious tests and allowing Catholics to hold political office was tantamount for Irving to abolishing Britain's Protestant constitution, and signified nothing short of Britain's complete confederation with the papacy. Prompted by this issue, Irving set out an account of the appropriate relationship between church and state in *The Church and State Responsible to Christ, and to One another* (1829), in which he provided a history 'of God's providence over kings and kingdoms, from the time of Nebuchadnezzar unto the coming of the Son of Man in the clouds of Heaven'.<sup>133</sup> We have seen in the previous chapter that he was influenced by the idea of the covenanted nation, but with his study of the biblical prophecies, this concept was given a pre-millenarian twist. Irving's interjections on the 'Catholic question' will be examined more

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<sup>130</sup> Irving, *Sermons*, Vol. III, 868.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*, 887-888.

<sup>132</sup> Irving, *Signs of the Times*, 28.

<sup>133</sup> Edward Irving, *The Church and State Responsible to Christ, and to One another. A Series of Discourses on Daniel's Vision of the Four Beasts* (London: James Nisbet, 1829), 518.

thoroughly in the next section, where it will be shown how his belief in Britain as a nation in covenant with God encouraged him to present himself as a prophet to the country at a time of tremendous change.

That to which Irving looked with expectation was the second coming of Christ, but his understanding of this culminating event had developed throughout his career. As late as in *Babylon and Infidelity*, his sustained work of prophetic exegesis, he had been unwilling to discuss the nature of the millennial reign and was unsure as to Christ's bodily return.<sup>134</sup> This uncertainty seems to have been dispelled during Irving's study of Lacunza's book, as he claimed there that there could not be, and never had been, a question as to Christ's bodily return, though 'the faith of the Protestant churches is so withered by absolute infidelity' that they start at this notion.<sup>135</sup> This belief came to serve as the linchpin for Irving's entire prophetic system, without which he claimed the scriptures were inconsistent and incoherent. 'The coming of Christ in power and majesty', along with the resurrection, casting out of Satan, and reign of the saints Irving declared to be the proper and worthy object of hope for the church.<sup>136</sup>

And he looked to the near future for the final fulfilment of the prophecies. Based upon his calculations and reading of the political events mentioned above, he concluded that 'the time of the end' had begun in 1823.<sup>137</sup> By 1846, the battle of Armageddon will have been fought and the sanctuary in Jerusalem cleansed.<sup>138</sup> In the 21 years following, up to the year 1867, the Gospel will have covered the earth, commencing the millennial reign of Christ.<sup>139</sup> Irving's conception of the end times was based on a tripartite division of history with three distinct stages: the Jewish dispensation, the Gentile dispensation, and the universal dispensation culminating in the end of the world.<sup>140</sup> Irving elaborated on this view in his introduction to the translation of Ben-Ezra, where

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<sup>134</sup> Irving, *Babylon and infidelity*, Vol. II, 150, 168-169.

<sup>135</sup> Irving, *Preliminary Discourse*, 45.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid*, 59.

<sup>137</sup> Irving, *Babylon and Infidelity*, Vol. II, 215.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid*, 218.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid*, 244.

he referred to the development of the church from the time of Abraham to the present as a growth from infancy to maturity.<sup>141</sup> As such, the subsequent dispensations were in truth one unfolding development which had not yet reached its culmination. 'The dispensation from Abraham to the present time is one dispensation', he wrote, 'which is incomplete and inexplicable but by the belief of another dispensation of glory about to follow'.<sup>142</sup> It was Christ's ministry which fulfilled the former dispensation, with the dissemination of this doctrine being the purpose of the present one.<sup>143</sup> And, as he would argue for the remainder of his career, it was Christ's personal reign on earth which would accomplish the universal dispensation. On this view, the Gentile dispensation was but a stepping-stone to the universal one, and he was arguing against 'the commonly-received notion [essentially the post-millenarian view], that the present Gentile dispensation was about to burst forth with great verdure and fruitfulness, and fill the whole earth with the millennial blessedness'.<sup>144</sup> The unpalatable consequence of Irving's views for his contemporaries was that an increasingly enlightened Protestant Christianity spread throughout the world was not the end of history, a point which Irving made very clearly in his criticism of the times.<sup>145</sup>

As Irving turned to focus on prophetic subjects, Grass has claimed that 'a strong vein of social critique' remained in his preaching, that one was not abandoned for the other.<sup>146</sup> I argue further that Irving's prophetic studies actually provided a framework for his social critique, allowing him, from his own perspective, to make his claims with greater authority and force. The prophetic-historical framework sketched out above allowed Irving to portray the development of Protestantism, despite its noble first principles, as a weakening

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<sup>141</sup> Irving, *Preliminary Discourse*, 73.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid*, 95.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid*, 98.

<sup>144</sup> Irving, *Preliminary Discourse*, 8.

<sup>145</sup> Recently Ted Underwood has used Irving's views on the dispensation to provide a counter-example to the traditional legacy of Romantic historicism (which traces a line of influence from Coleridge through to the Broad Church movement), to which he adds an alternative lineage from Coleridge through Irving to dispensational fundamentalism, 'If Romantic Historicism Shaped Modern Fundamentalism, Would that Count as Secularisation?', *European Romantic Review*, 21:3 (June 2010): 330.

<sup>146</sup> Grass, *The Lord's Watchman*, 256.

of faith ultimately making possible the kind of infidelity which he denounced. It must be acknowledged (and discussed more fully in the next chapter) that while in his interpretation of the biblical prophecies Irving seems to have found a source of authority for his jeremiads, his reviewers often remained unconvinced and even dismissive.

In Irving's 1827 sermon to the Continental Society, he explicitly warned against Protestant pride and complacency, and he provided a spiritual reading of the history of Protestantism in which Satan had successfully poisoned the dispensation.<sup>147</sup> From its very inception, he claimed, Anabaptists, Sacramentarians, and the Arminian heresy deviated from the true interpretation; Arianism was revived, which ripened into Socinianism, and culminated in Unitarianism.<sup>148</sup> These had overcome the Protestant churches of Europe, but Britain had held to the true religion, so Satan had begun to work on the country's policy, literature, and customs.<sup>149</sup> For Irving, ever conscious of the importance of literature to the nation's religious conscience, the effects of Satan's work were obvious:

look now what a condition our poetry hath arrived at; profane, licentious, and immoral in the last degree, and our novels most scornful of religion, and murderous of religious men; and our books of science acknowledging no God, and scoffing at revelation; and our books of education beginning to be constructed so as diligently to exclude all reference to the peculiarities of Christianity; and our books touching the national weal, treating of money and trade, and laughing at the prejudices of our fathers, who thought that government had to do with higher objects; our reviews and magazines, the proper index of the current taste, full of vanity, scandal, and malice, and sectarian shibboleths; our newspapers, the sweepings of ruined minds, and the scum of dissipated hearts.<sup>150</sup>

The Protestants, through 'free discussion, and bold inquiry, and ready protestation', scored some initial victories against the Catholics, however, they allowed these to be taken to extreme, and so were led to unbelief on Irving's view.<sup>151</sup> Satan had introduced infidelity into the very essence of the Reformation by magnifying 'the right of private judgment and interpretation'

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<sup>147</sup> Irving, *Sermons*, Vol. III, 874-878.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid*, 875-878

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid*, 879.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid*, 879-880.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid*, 880.

beyond all bounds of wisdom, reason, and scripture, which had 'opened the door to every heresy and schism and wild imagination of man'.<sup>152</sup> This overreliance on 'private judgment and interpretation' was the same symptom which Mill would diagnose in his 'Spirit of the Age' articles.

In *Babylon and Infidelity*, Irving portrayed this weakening of faith as directly correlated with an increasing intellectualism. Despite all the Evangelical zeal for spreading the Gospel at home and abroad, Irving declared 'that never, since the Reformation, was there a period of weaker faith in the Church of Christ than at the present time'.<sup>153</sup> For the last century, especially among the Protestants on the Continent, he claimed that faith had been steadily decreasing, to the extent

that every mystery of the Gospel hath been entirely exploded, and the Christian revelation hath died away into a system of morals, its miracles explained away into juggling tricks, or deceptions of unlettered men, its prophecies set at naught, and its doctrines disputed and generally rejected; its discipline, even to outward observation of the Sabbath, obsolete and foregone.<sup>154</sup>

Even among the spiritual, faith had grown thin, meagre, and insufficient, there being 'a constant appeal to the useful, to the visible fruits, to the good that is done'.<sup>155</sup> 'The intellect hath become all-sufficient', he concluded; therefore, 'we must preach from the intellect to the intellect'.<sup>156</sup>

For Irving, a general diffusion of knowledge was a sign of the times, but what he criticised was the nature of that knowledge. He saw that the increase was 'of natural knowledge in general, mechanical and chemical, which proceedeth from the examination of things created and made, and is built up by the method of induction'.<sup>157</sup> Irving attributed the root of the sciences to Francis Bacon 'in the light and liberty of the reformation', though Satan had skilfully manipulated these to turn the Protestant nations away from their faith

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<sup>152</sup> Irving, *Sermons*, Vol. III, 882.

<sup>153</sup> Irving, *Babylon and Infidelity*, Vol. II, 262.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 264.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 265.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 189-190.

in God.<sup>158</sup> The effect was that the physical had come to almost entirely supplant the spiritual. 'The spiritual sciences', he wrote:

which have their origin in the soul, and proceed by silent meditation of our own being, and stationary contemplation of the outward works of God, are gone down into the very earth, and can nowhere be found. But the physical sciences, which are outward, and proceed by mechanical helps and motions, and mixtures and resolutions, have taken the firmament of knowledge unto themselves, and swept the steadfast and everlasting lights away, and exalted themselves against all that is called spiritual and divine.<sup>159</sup>

Thus, he lamented, 'the body hath become the end of all science, and philosophy, and policy'.<sup>160</sup> In anticipation of Carlyle's famous criticism in 'Signs of the Times', Irving concluded: 'It is a poor mechanical age, with expediency for its pole-star, and reason for its divinity, and knowledge for its heaven'.<sup>161</sup> As will be shown in the final chapter, the similarities here between Irving and Carlyle were no coincidence.

Like many people at the time, Irving speculated on the nature of society itself, and he concluded that the social orders were breaking down due to the neglect of social and political obligations. The majority of his disapproval was reserved, however, for the Evangelical religious societies, which he denounced as worldly institutions perpetually concerned for the most part with the state of their funds. He condemned his society in passionate language, characterising its members as 'Mammon-worshippers' who put wealth above all else, including God. As Irving studied the biblical prophecies beginning in 1825, he began to fit his negative views of society into a broader prophetic-historical framework, wherein the end times, including the fated battle of Armageddon, were imminent, and the last hope of salvation for the world was the personal return of Christ in the flesh. This led him to view Protestant Christianity as an intermediate stage in the dispensation of God's word from Abraham through to Christ's millennial reign, which set him at odds with what he viewed as the self-congratulating Evangelical Christianity of the first few decades of the nineteenth century.

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<sup>158</sup> Irving, *Babylon and Infidelity*, Vol. II, 269.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid*, 190.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid*, 190-191.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid*, 191.

## The Public Prophet

Though Britain had known popular prophets before (Richard Brothers and Joanna Southcott had both made a stir in the preceding decades), Edward Irving was something new to Britain in the 1820s. He was still a popular minister who was gathering likeminded individuals around him and exercising increasing influence within the Presbytery of London. He had developed a coherent worldview based on the special providence of God with Britain as a covenanted nation. Furthermore, as a minister who believed that his office was exactly the same as that of the ancient prophet, he saw it as his prophetic duty to intervene at critical moments to warn the nation's leaders and to plead on behalf of the people. This view of Irving as a public prophet can be seen in a series of letters, pamphlets, and petitions published between 1828 and 1831.

Though Irving often employed the rhetoric of a prophet, he never suggested that he was divinely inspired, but he did claim that he was more adept at reading the signs of the times due to his understanding of scripture. His early analyses of human nature and society, especially in *For the Oracles*, largely stood without any particular claim to authority, perhaps attributable to a youthful self-confidence, but as he delved deeper into the scriptural prophecies, he began to read the terrible significance of seemingly unconnected events. He described this process of applying prophecy to current events in detail, when he wrote that those who study prophecy 'are kept watchful, and we observe every event; we observe the deliberations of councils, we observe the progress of opinions, *we feel the pulse of feeling beating beneath apparent quietness*'.<sup>162</sup> In his extended criticism of the present times set down in *The Last Days*, Irving endeavoured 'to read upon the face of the times those very characteristics' delineated in the text from 2 Timothy.<sup>163</sup> At this stage however, he claimed to have been aided in his understanding by his adoption of certain doctrines, and he also alleged to have been granted by God greater insight into 'the ordinances both of human society

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<sup>162</sup> Irving, *Preliminary Discourse*, 49-50 (emphasis added).

<sup>163</sup> Irving, *The Last Days*, 37.

and the state' because he acknowledged his sovereignty.<sup>164</sup> Irving took pains though to assure his audience that his reproof came from a place of love:

And here I am, night after night, not like an anatomist discoursing in the theatre upon the disease of which the patient hath died, but like a son pointing out to a most unnatural, light-hearted, unbelieving family, the signs of decay in the mother's countenance, and the seeds of death in the mother's frame.<sup>165</sup>

He always maintained that his warnings and predictions were meant as edification for the British people, that he was constrained to fulfil his obligation however much it pained him. 'I am forced', he wrote, 'by my love of [Britain's] salvation, to declare to her painful truths'.<sup>166</sup>

The first day of the year in 1828 had been designated as a fast day by the London Presbytery on account of the low state of religion among the Scots in the city, and this occasion prompted two instances in which Irving played the prophet for his home country of Scotland. The first of these was the Pastoral Letter produced under the guiding hand of Irving, in which the Scotch Presbytery assumed the role of prophet to point out the backslidings of the Church of Scotland members in England and to plead on their behalf. It was claimed that the low state of the Scottish Church in London could not be attributed to any faults in the preaching in the individual churches (understandable as this was written by ministers at the said churches), and so it was to be regarded 'as a visitation of lukewarmness and blindness with which it hath pleased God to afflict us for our sins'.<sup>167</sup> As Irving had done before, the tokens of this divine judgment were enumerated as they exhibited themselves by class, beginning with the nobles and MPs, through 'the active and industrious classes', the dependent classes (including the men of letters, tradesmen, and artisans), and finally the poor.

This letter is exceedingly clear regarding Irving's prophetic influence, intent, and rhetoric, and it is worth reproducing several passages at length to demonstrate this.

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<sup>164</sup> Irving, *The Last Days*, xi, 523

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid*, 320.

<sup>166</sup> Irving, *Babylon and Infidelity*, Vol. II, 393.

<sup>167</sup> 'A Pastoral Letter from the Scotch Presbytery in London, Addressed to the Baptized of the Scottish Church Residing in London and its Vicinity, and in the Southern Parts of the Island', *The Morning Chronicle*, 18210 (25 January 1828): n.p.

When we examine the history of God's church and people, as it is recorded in his holy word, to see how his anger in times past was wont to be turned away, we find that a humble acknowledgement of their common sins, and hearty repentance of the same, and a ready returning unto the ordinances of his worship and the ways of his commandments, have ever prevailed to turn away the fierceness of his wrath and the weight of his deserved judgments. And, therefore, the Presbytery, feeling itself to stand unto the children of the Scottish Church, whose backslidings we have been declaring, as Ezra the priest stood to the remnant which had done according to the abominations of the heathen people, would now, after his example, and that of all the prophets, endeavour to lay open before the Lord, and all the dispersion of our countrymen, the great guiltiness on account of which we have been brought into our present low and miserable estate.<sup>168</sup>

And:

We are not afraid to offend you, we care not to be judged of you; but we are afraid to lose you for want of a witness and a warning, and we care greatly for the judgment of Christ. Therefore, though you may be displeased with our faithfulness, we tell you that you are become a worldly, ambitious, self-seeking, and time-serving people in this metropolis; and that till you humble yourselves before his footstool, and cease from your vanities and ambitions, you shall sink deeper and deeper in the pit and perish in the end from the [word blotted out] of peace which ye have not sought.<sup>169</sup>

Fully conscious of the examples of the prophets and relying upon his understanding of special providence in which God's judgment can be averted by repentance, Irving, representing the entire Presbytery of London, pleaded with the Scottish people to return unto the rightful worship of the Lord.

Around the same time, Irving delivered another sermon (also published) in which he discoursed on the low state of religion in the mother church in Scotland. Here he portrayed the Church of Scotland as suffering due to the neglect or misunderstanding of certain doctrines, including most especially the doctrine of the Trinity. This, he argued, had led to confusion over the doctrine of election, an incapacity to understand the person of Christ, and an ignorance of the Holy Spirit.<sup>170</sup> Upon this last point Irving claimed that the Church of Scotland was 'upon the very eve of rejecting the Spirit altogether' just as the

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<sup>168</sup> *The Morning Chronicle*, 18210 (25 January 1828): n.p.

<sup>169</sup> *The Morning Chronicle*, 18212 (28 January 1828): n.p.

<sup>170</sup> Edward Irving, *An Apology for the Ancient Fulness and Purity of the Doctrine of the Kirk of Scotland: A Sermon preached on the Occasion of a Fast appointed by the Presbytery of London, to be held in all their Churches on the First Day of the Present Year, because of the Low Ebb of Religion among the Children of the Scottish Church residing in these Parts* (London: James Nisbet, 1828), 18-23.

Jewish church had rejected Christ.<sup>171</sup> Foreshadowing the momentous developments of the next few years, Irving also argued that the relationship between the church and the state, which had formerly been the strength of Britain, was breaking down. Throughout this text, Irving exhibited the lamentations of a prophet pleading to God on behalf of the people. He reiterated his belief (commensurate with his views on special providence) 'that nothing but measures of repentance and reformation, the most prompt and effectual, can save us from the wreck of Christian nations and the consumption of Christian churches which God hath decreed upon the Gentiles, and which we believe He is at hand to execute'.<sup>172</sup> He wrote of the heavy burden which he bore in exposing the sins of the Church of Scotland, and in closing he pleaded dramatically: 'Hear, oh! hear the voice of our strong crying and lamentations. Turn not away from us for evermore'.<sup>173</sup>

But perhaps the clearest example of Irving in his role as prophet to the sealed nation of Britain is his *Letter to the King* of 1828 protesting the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts. There Irving rejected the idea that the king ultimately derived his power from the people, and he reminded George IV that as king he held his power in the name of Christ.<sup>174</sup> '[Y]ou are only the Lieutenant of Christ', he stated boldly, addressing himself directly to the king.<sup>175</sup> As Stewart Brown has pointed out, Scottish Presbyterianism was established against the opposition of the Crown in the sixteenth century, and this fact was illustrated poetically in 1596, when Andrew Melville plucked the sleeve of James VI (and I of England) and referred to him as 'God's sillie vassal'.<sup>176</sup> For Irving, who was not only steeped in the history and traditions of the Scottish Church but had made them a subject of active study as well, it is not surprising that there are traces of this confrontational attitude in his public statements.

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<sup>171</sup> Irving, *An Apology*, 23.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 18, 48.

<sup>174</sup> Edward Irving, *A Letter to the King, on the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Laws, as it affects our Christian Monarchy* (London: James Nisbet, 1828), 5, 11.

<sup>175</sup> Irving, *Letter to the King*, 8.

<sup>176</sup> Brown, *National Churches*, 23, 28.

But, as Liam Upton has observed, Irving's combative Presbyterianism (seen especially for instance in his *Pastoral Letter* of the same year) did not prevent him from participating in the wider British Protestant national identity.<sup>177</sup> In his *Letter to the King*, Irving reiterated the role Britain had played in standing up to the Papacy at the Reformation and to infidelity in the form of the French Revolution, and it seems that Irving sought to flatter the king by pointing out his own place in the prophetic saga.<sup>178</sup> But Britain's position was never entirely secure, and as the combined forces of infidelity and superstition threatened to dismantle the Protestant constitution Irving warned the king and the country:

[I]f we forget [God's deliverance of Britain from Napoleon], and open the high places of the kingdom unto unprofessing and unbelieving men, and even unto infidels, then, as surely as Nebuchadnezzar was raised up in Sennacherib's room, to lay Jerusalem on heaps, and carry her people unto Babylon, so surely shall God raise up a scourge for Britain, to do that of which it will be a pain even to hear the report.<sup>179</sup>

As a pre-millenarian, Irving was clearly interpreting political events in light of his reading of Britain as the anti-type of the Jewish nation (he would build on this the following year in *The Signs of the Times*), but he went even further than that. In this direct address to the king, Irving explicitly presented himself as a lonely prophet standing up against the rulers of a nation which had cast off the fear of God:

[T]hough I be but a mean man amongst your Majesty's subjects, and my voice should be as the lonely voice of one crying in the desert, I do lift it up, in its strength, and cry aloud with solemn invocation to your Majesty, to our Royal Princes, to our Noble Peers, and Honourable Commons, and to all the people, and in solemn protestation against such an awful act, do warn all of the fearful wrath and judgment of God, which will alight upon the head of a nation, which, being lifted up to heaven, and exalted to all but almighty power, hath, in her wantonness, and pride, and boastfulness, thrown off the authority of God, and worshipped human wisdom, rather than Christ. Surely such a nation shall be cast to the ground, be brought unto the ashes upon the earth, and made a terror unto men.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Liam Upton, "Our Mother and our Country": The Integration of Religious and National Identity in the Thought of Edward Irving (1792-1834)', in *Religion and National Identity: Wales and Scotland c. 1700-2000*, ed. Robert Pope (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), 243.

<sup>178</sup> Irving, *Letter to the King*, 13.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid*, 14-15.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid*, 21-22.

As it seems that there was little public opposition to the repeal of these acts,<sup>181</sup> it is possible that Irving was indeed perceived as a prophet crying alone in the wilderness, but when this opened up the question of Catholic emancipation, he had the majority of the country on his side.

In 1829, Irving published *The Signs of the Times* as a direct response to the impending parliamentary bill proposing to grant Catholic emancipation. He began his pamphlet by retelling the history of the Jewish people (in three acts: a time of favour with God; a time of chastisement and captivity among the nations; and a time of redemption when they will be gathered together and the nations judged) which he referred to as the primary example of 'God's dealings with man, written firm and large upon the fluctuations of the world'.<sup>182</sup> For Irving God's judgment of the Gentiles and redemption of the Jews were but two sides of the same act of providence, and the purpose of his pamphlet was to warn the world that this divine act was imminent. He reiterated his entire prophetic scheme which has been analysed above, and he pointed to recent political developments as signs of the coming judgment, including among others the ongoing revolution in Greece.<sup>183</sup> But the sign which Irving feared above all was a treaty between Britain and Rome, in the form of Catholic emancipation, which would signify for him nothing less than Britain joining the Papal confederacy and reuniting the ten horns of the beast.<sup>184</sup> As he laid out his case against Catholic emancipation, Irving dramatically pleaded on behalf of his countrymen:

Oh God! hold our hand from signing and from sealing our own death-warrant! hold our hand from that fatal act, which will open the dark and fearful day of judgment, bring ourselves low in bondage, and set up over Babylon, and over us, if we then be found a part of her, that king of pride, who shall exalt himself to the very seat of God upon the earth.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> As Boyd Hilton points out, there were only twenty-eight petitions against the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts and very few pamphlets, *A Mad, Bad, Dangerous People? England, 1783-1846* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 405.

<sup>182</sup> Irving, *Signs of the Times*, 1-6.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid*, 11-12.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

But he held out a glimmer of hope yet: the fact that the prophecies had begun again to be seriously studied and the Second Coming to be honestly expected Irving claimed as signs of Britain's sealed state.<sup>186</sup>

These hopes were ultimately dashed however, as is evident in the postscript written following the proposal made in Parliament to repeal the remaining Catholic disabilities. There Irving finally gave up hope for the British state, though a glimmer yet remained for the church. Parliament had become an idol for the nation and so had grown vain and blind; what was needed at this desperate moment was a 'noble protestation' by the Church. Irving criticised the attempt by the government to separate politics from religion, and as might be expected, his rhetoric was exalted: 'Would that I had a thousand tongues, would that I had a thousand persons, and permission to occupy every pulpit of every parish in Scotland! I would lift up my voice like a trumpet against the self-prostitution of our rulers; for the salvation of the Church I would lift it up'.<sup>187</sup> This latest development only served to convince him further regarding the impending events of the end times, and consequently his parting address was gloomy: 'Look, then, O my countrymen, every man, every family, every congregation, every township, every borough, every city, unto its own preservation'.<sup>188</sup>

Of course the wider opinions on Catholic emancipation varied across the spectrum, but it is significant to note that views similar to Irving's were being expressed, and an example of this can be seen in several letters to the editor (republished in 1829 as a pamphlet) on the subject by the prophetic exegete George Stanley Faber. There Faber claimed to have previously avoided the political question of Catholic emancipation, focusing rather on the 'theological errors' of Catholicism, but as the issue was being debated in Parliament and looked increasingly likely to pass, he threw such 'delicacy' aside.<sup>189</sup> He rejected the notion that the political side of the question could be separated from the religious, and he based his argument on the oath declaring

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<sup>186</sup> Irving, *Signs of the Times*, 32.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid*, 38.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid*, 40.

<sup>189</sup> George Stanley Faber, *The Rev. G. S. Faber's Four Letters to the Editor of "The St. James's Chronicle"* (London: L. B. Seeley and Sons, 1829), 3.

Catholicism to be idolatry to which all MPs were required to swear.<sup>190</sup> In his third letter, Faber responded with lessons from both the Old Testament and the New to an objection suggesting that though a theological union with idolatry was expressly forbidden, nothing was said about a political union. Reading the Old Testament as instruction, he concluded that in every instance in which the Israelites had made a union with idolatry in any form divine punishment was their reward.<sup>191</sup> But from the New Testament, he looked to 'the prophetic part of that specially christian code' where literal idolatry was referred to as 'spiritual whoredom'.<sup>192</sup> If plagues were to be visited on the idolaters, then a political union would damn the non-idolaters as well, as it would be impossible to distinguish between them; so his argument ran, and he used lessons from England's past and prophecies of divine judgment as evidence to support it. '[S]ince the time of the reformation', Faber declared, 'whenever England has dishonestly coquetted with popery, she has never failed to experience national degradation and calamity: whenever she has boldly and conscientiously opposed it, she has, through God's blessing, stood forth pre-eminent as a chief among nations'.<sup>193</sup> Looking forward to the future:

God's people are solemnly warned, that, unless they come out from idolatry, and avoid all union with it, of whatever description; they must expect to receive of those temporal plagues, which are prophetically announced as impending over idolatry. The times and the seasons of national vengeance, God has, indeed, reserved in his own hand; but, if the Bible be true, *those times and seasons will assuredly at length arrive*.<sup>194</sup>

Here was another instance of a student of prophecy objecting to Catholic emancipation on scriptural grounds and publicly warning of divine retribution to follow if Britain failed to heed God's word.

While the views expressed on this issue by Irving and Faber are very similar, the difference between what the two men were actually doing is significant. Whereas Faber was essentially publishing his private opinions, Irving continually used the platform of his public pulpit in an attempt to sway

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<sup>190</sup> Faber, *Four Letters*, 4.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid* (emphasis added).

the national conscience, and this can be seen in another clear example of Irving as a public prophet. At the end of 1830, a petition to the king was drafted by Irving, signed by the elders and deacons of his congregation, and delivered to Lord Melbourne, the Home Secretary, as a representative of the government. Published as a pamphlet the following year, this petition laid out Irving's call for a day of national humiliation as well as a series of Christian reforms to avoid God's impending judgment of Britain. In the introductory statement, Irving's pre-millenarian views, along with his belief in special providence, combine with Old Testament imagery to set the prophetic tone of the message:

We, your Majesty's most loyal and dutiful subjects, taking to heart the many and aggravated sins of this and other Christian lands, and observing God's dealings in his providence with them, and diligently searching out his mind in the Scriptures of truth, have now of a long time been convinced, that a "day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" is at hand, from which nothing can preserve your Majesty's kingdom, but some such instant humiliation as saved Nineveh of old, together with some such godly reformation as was set about in the days of Josiah and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.<sup>195</sup>

The petition proceeded to enumerate the sins of other European countries before moving onto those peculiar to Britain and finally proposing several measures of 'godly' reform.

The July revolution in France seems to have added even greater urgency to this reading of the times: 'With or without cause, the people are rising against their rulers, and the blood of brethren and citizens has been poured out by brethren and citizens, with recklessness and infatuation'.<sup>196</sup> In Catholic countries it was claimed that the rulers' blind obedience to Rome had deadened the people 'to every sense of religious obligation, whether to God, or to their rulers, or to one another'.<sup>197</sup> Because of this, 'the people of all ranks are breaking loose from the bonds which hold society together, casting off all religion as priest-craft, and hating the very mention of the great name of God,

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<sup>195</sup> [Edward Irving], *To the King's Most Excellent Majesty. The Petition of the Minister, Elders, and Deacons of the National Scotch Church, Regent Square, London, in Session Assembled* (Edinburgh: J. Lindsay, 1831), 3.

<sup>196</sup> [Irving], *To the King's Most Excellent Majesty*, 4.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*

and of the Lord Jesus Christ'.<sup>198</sup> And in Protestant countries the same effect was being 'produced by the relaxation of discipline and the dereliction of duty on the part of the office-bearers of the church, and of the state, and of all classes of the community'.<sup>199</sup> 'Undisguised infidelity', this reasoning continued, 'practical, and, in many cases, avowed Atheism, and, at the best, indifference to all that is peculiar and vital in our holy faith, have begotten a rage for political systems constructed by human sagacity, without any foundation in religion or morals'.<sup>200</sup> While they 'would refrain from matters merely political', they employed the classic argument regarding the prophet being compelled to speak by a higher authority, and the message struck at the root of nineteenth-century political developments:

we are yet constrained, by a higher authority than any human or earthly, to lift up our solemn testimony and protestation before God, and all God-fearing men, against that principle which in this work of revolution hath been avowed and embodied, – That all power is from the people, and that to them it belongs to set up and to pull down, to plant and to root out.<sup>201</sup>

As Irving had done on numerous occasions, the audience was reminded that all power and authority was given by, and ultimately held in trust for, Christ, and the example of Nebuchadnezzar was invoked as the destined fate of those who would seek to rule in their own right.

These apprehensions of crisis were only confirmed further when turning to examine the condition of Britain. The laxity and worldliness of Christian ministers were blamed for the indifference of religion seen in the rich as well as the poor. Nobles were accused of forsaking 'their ancient seats', neglecting their duties, 'wasting their subsistence in riotous living', and falling away from the 'superintendence of the people's morality and comfort'.<sup>202</sup> From this 'there has followed an almost entire breaking up of that reverence which inferiors owe to their superiors; that loyal attachment to their persons, and ready observance of their wishes, which is the strength of a State and the bond of social well-being'.<sup>203</sup> And regarding 'the trading people in the large towns',

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<sup>198</sup> [Irving], *To the King's Most Excellent Majesty*, 4.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*

there was one particular evil which was ‘of very great account in the sins and miseries of this kingdom’: ‘the love of money and the desire to get rich’.<sup>204</sup> In ‘hasting to get rich’, the trading people and landlords ‘have all, by the grinding down of the faces of the poor, carried on a competition wherein man is too often regarded and valued only as a productive animal’.<sup>205</sup> This lust for wealth, it was claimed, had led not only to the degradation of the lower classes but was also ‘fast breaking down the middle classes of our society’ by concentrating the profits in the hands of the few.<sup>206</sup>

The constitution of society hath undergone a very great change for the worse; the unity of the kingdom is fast breaking up; the fellow-feeling of the ranks of society is sadly destroyed; the love which man owes to man is weakened; distrust, the forerunner of disorganization, every where prevails, with a dismay which can be better felt than described, because it fears to speak aloud.<sup>207</sup>

Proof of this was seen in the manufacturing districts and recently – in the form of ‘insurrections of the peasantry, and burnings of the kindly fruits of the earth’ – in the agricultural areas referring to the recent ‘Captain Swing’ riots.<sup>208</sup>

This petition encapsulates Irving’s role during the period 1828-31. As head of a large (and still influential) congregation, Irving had done much to shape the religious discourse in the capital generally, but especially within the Scottish churches. He used this position to make public, prophetic warnings regarding the state of society in Britain, first to the Scottish people and then directly to the king and Parliament. In the final section, it will be shown how the controversies and trials Irving faced in his final years confirmed for him a sense of persecution.

### The Persecuted Prophet

All of these aspects of Irving’s thought – his prophetic style and criticism of society against the tide of common opinion – resulted in his self-conscious

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<sup>204</sup> [Irving], *To the King’s Most Excellent Majesty*, 8.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid*, 8-9.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid*, 9-10.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

portrayal as a besieged bearer of the truth in the midst of an unheeding society. When he came under increasing scrutiny from the Church in the late 1820s and early 1830s for his controversial Christological views and acceptance of the spiritual gifts, Irving began to present himself as being persecuted for speaking the truth.

As Irving increasingly portrayed himself as a prophet sounding the doom of the present dispensation, he consciously set himself against what he considered to be 'public opinion'. As early as August 1823, just as the reactions to his first major publication poured forth from the periodical press, Irving revealed his inherent sense of self-righteousness in a letter to Carlyle:

I have had to pull against the whole stream of the religious, and half the stream of the irreligious. My every motive is watched, my every sentiment waited on; I am like our Saviour among Pharisees, these vile panderers of the Ecclesiastical & political state would glory to cut me down. If I can keep the field a little longer I shall establish the greatest influence over the public mind, which any person in my station has had for an age'.<sup>209</sup>

In the preface to the third edition of *For the Oracles*, Irving attacked the newspapers and magazines, which he denounced as distorters of the public conscience. 'The creatures', he complained of journalists, 'are in general hired men, and partake the slavery of hirelings; panders for the public appetite, consulting chiefly, almost entirely, for the sale of their commodity; a kind of under-servants, in the temple of knowledge'.<sup>210</sup> He claimed to 'have been abused in every possible way, beyond the lot of ordinary men', though he prayed 'for their unregenerate souls', because 'their criticisms show that they are still in the gall of wickedness and the bond of iniquity'.<sup>211</sup> In Irving's *Preliminary Discourse*, he railed against what he called the 'British Inquisition', signifying the periodical press:

that court whose ministers and agents carry on their operations in secret; who drag every man's most private affairs before the sight of thousands, and seek to mangle and destroy his life as an instructor, trying him without a witness, condemning him without a hearing, nor suffering him to speak for himself.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Edward Irving to Thomas Carlyle (16 August 1823), in *Diary and Letters*, 181.

<sup>210</sup> Irving, *For the Oracles*, xviii.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid*, xi-xii.

<sup>212</sup> Irving, *Preliminary Discourse*, 23.

In Protestant Britain, he claimed, this was ‘producing as foul effects against truth’ as ever did the inquisitions instituted by the church in Rome.<sup>213</sup> While reminiscing on his time in London in the preface to *The Last Days*, he denied that he ever courted the attention of public opinion despite his enormous popularity in the early days, and he expressly refused ‘the powers of the tribunal to take cognisance’ of him.<sup>214</sup>

Irving also often represented himself as blazing a trail for others to follow. In his attempt at addressing modern religious literature in *For the Oracles*, he declared that he felt ‘like the knight that breaks his first lance in the cause of honour’.<sup>215</sup> And he expressed his ‘hope of summoning from the host of the Lord of Hosts some one [...] able and willing to take the field in the fair conflict of truth, and cast back into these blasphemous throats their vain bravadoes against the armies of the living God’.<sup>216</sup> Later he described himself as ‘a sort of pioneer and forerunner of the Elias-dispensation which is to introduce the kingdom, [rather] than a herald of the kingdom’.<sup>217</sup> Following Irving’s prophetic turn, his rhetoric became more combative, as evident in the above quotations, and he often employed the imagery of battle and warfare. Grass has noted Irving’s view of ‘ministry as warfare’ as a continuing theme throughout his career, evidence of which is abundant in the language he used.<sup>218</sup> Though he claimed to be fit only ‘to hew wood and to draw water for the camp’, he declared himself to be ‘a rough rude man like my fathers, formed for border warfare’.<sup>219</sup> In a dedication to Henry Drummond, he stated that their group of prophetic exegetes were in ‘noble conflict with a self-satisfied and vain-glorious generation’.<sup>220</sup> As he expressed his view regarding the nearness of the judgment, he called upon those ‘who do know the Lord’ to ‘stand in the breach like Moses, and plead for the wicked nations’.<sup>221</sup> In his ‘Ordination

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<sup>213</sup> Irving, *Preliminary Discourse*, 24.

<sup>214</sup> Irving, *The Last Days*, ix, 209.

<sup>215</sup> Irving, *For the Oracles*, 468-469.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid*, 532.

<sup>217</sup> Irving, *Sermons*, Vol. III, 778.

<sup>218</sup> Grass, *The Lord’s Watchman*, 301.

<sup>219</sup> Irving, *Sermons*, Vol. III, 778.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>221</sup> Irving, *Babylon and Infidelity*, Vol. II, 226.

Charge', he exhorted Hugh Maclean to 'arm thyself for the warfare which thou hast to wage from this place against the materialism, the Socinianism, the Deism, and the latitudinarianism which are come up against this city'.<sup>222</sup> The aim of his *Preliminary Discourse* he declared to be 'contending with weapons of heavenly warfare against the king of terrors'.<sup>223</sup> The culmination of this can be seen in the preface to *The Last Days*, where he addressed his congregation as to a veteran band of warriors. 'As we took every new step in advance', he wrote, 'the archers shot at us; but have not prevailed against us'.<sup>224</sup> He went on, 'we are not unknown, nor unnoticed, by the enemies of Christ. Satan owes us many a grudge; and he will come'.<sup>225</sup>

Further evidence of this combativeness can be seen in the personal controversies and trials of Irving's later career, where he portrayed himself as a martyr being persecuted for a noble cause. Following the momentous General Assembly of 1831, with its decisions against John Macleod Campbell, Maclean, and A. J. Scott, Irving viciously attacked the Church of Scotland for this 'persecution'. Irving proclaimed, 'the Church of Scotland without the truth [as represented in the preaching of Macleod Campbell and Maclean (and, by extension, Irving himself)] is but the synagogue of Satan'.<sup>226</sup> As we have seen before, there is clear evidence in this provocative article of Irving explicitly comparing his role in relation to the Church of Scotland with that of the ancient prophets to Israel: 'Things are now come to a crisis; the church is in the condition in which Jerusalem was in the days of Jeremiah, and the word of the Lord is to us as it was unto him'.<sup>227</sup> It was the exercise of this function which impelled Irving to make his prophetic warning: 'The Church of Scotland is shooting fast a-head; already the rapids have a hold of her, and she is not far from the fatal plunge: the precipice and the yawning gulf are hard at hand. Brethren, there is a God who beholdeth! there is a God who revengeth! Let

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<sup>222</sup> Irving, 'Ordination Charge', 529.

<sup>223</sup> Irving, *Preliminary Discourse*, 180.

<sup>224</sup> Irving, *The Last Days*, xii.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid*, xiii.

<sup>226</sup> Edward Irving, 'A Judgment – As to what Course the Ministers and the People of the Church of Scotland should Take in Consequence of the Decisions of the Last General Assembly', *The Morning Watch*, 5:1 (March 1832): 93.

<sup>227</sup> Irving, 'A Judgment', 102.

the righteous hold up their head, for their redemption draweth nigh. The end of all things is at hand'.<sup>228</sup>

In his trial before the Presbytery of London in 1832, Irving claimed that he was being tried on 'the most ponderous cause, the most momentous cause, the like of which hath not been heard in a court of Christendom for some centuries'.<sup>229</sup> He declared that he stood before the court in the name of Christ, and he indicated further that he felt directly and personally responsible to his Lord.<sup>230</sup> Though Irving certainly would not have been alone in feeling this way, this is evidence of how he viewed the trial: for him nothing less than the power of the Holy Ghost was at issue. In refusing to put the decisive question – whether or not the 'tongues' were manifestations of the Holy Ghost – to the test of scripture, Irving claimed that the court was not operating under the laws of the King of Great Britain and so was no court at all, but 'only a court of antichrist'.<sup>231</sup> Irving threatened curses on the city and the kingdom if the Presbytery should 'shut the only church in Britain in which the voice of the Holy Ghost is heard'.<sup>232</sup> And he stated his conviction boldly regarding the Protestant apostasy:

I do solemnly declare my belief that the Protestant churches are in the state of Babylon, as truly as is the Roman church; and I do separate myself, and my flock standing in me, from that Babylonish confederacy, and stand under the Holy Ghost, and under the Great Head of the church, waiting his appearing, constituting no schism, but a minister believing his Lord is soon to appear.<sup>233</sup>

It is clear that the action being taken against him was only serving to reinforce his sense of being persecuted for Christ.

On the same evening in which the verdict of expulsion was delivered, Irving was allowed to preach his final sermon at the National Scotch Church, which was subsequently printed and published. In it he preached on the topic

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<sup>228</sup> Irving, 'A Judgment', 115.

<sup>229</sup> *The Trial of the Rev. Edward Irving, M. A. Before the London Presbytery, Containing the Whole of the Evidence; Exact Copies of the Documents; Verbatim Report of the Speeches and Opinions of the Presbyters, &c.; Being the Only Authentic and Complete Record of the Proceedings, Taken in Short Hand by W. Harding* (London: W. Harding, 1832), 45.

<sup>230</sup> *Trial before the London Presbytery*, 19, 35.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid*, 44-45.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid*, 49.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid*, 50.

of suffering for the sake of righteousness (from 1 Peter 3:14), and he assured his congregation that, 'as the devil hath the mastery of the world, and the greater part of its people, the righteous must expect tribulation, and they are not to consider it a strange thing'.<sup>234</sup> The message could not have been more explicit, but Irving went further and reiterated his own sense of self-righteousness in his suffering: 'I have not been afraid of speaking the truth, and never will. I do not entertain hard thoughts of the people, but I say it is the testimony of Jesus that hath brought upon us the hatred of the world and this persecution'.<sup>235</sup> He sought to console his audience in dramatic, Old Testament language – 'betake yourselves to your tents, O Israel! neither be troubled, put it away, weep not for me' – as he urged them to put their trust in God and not in each other.<sup>236</sup> Irving further assured his congregation that they would be provided for with a place of worship (just as he had been anonymously provided with a portable pulpit), and he warned that they must put their faith solely in Christ, implying a refusal of the fleshly combination of church and state.<sup>237</sup> Finally, he expressed his willingness, indeed even eagerness, 'to go unto the high ways and preach to the poor',<sup>238</sup> which for him was the logical conclusion for the prophet persecuted for simply speaking the truth.

Once Irving had been removed from his church, he exhibited the response of an angered and indignant prophet. When he found the door to the National Scotch Church locked the day after the trial, in front of the gathered members of his congregation he publicly cursed the church. In an article prompted by the publication of Oliphant's biography of Irving in 1862, the *Quarterly Journal of Prophecy* recalled the incident:

we have heard from those who told it to us in sadness, not in anger, that he went, along with some followers, to the opposite part of the street where his church stands, and uttered, in old prophetic language, fearful maledictions against all connected with it, praying that there might never

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<sup>234</sup> Edward Irving, *The Last Sermon Preached at the National Scotch Church, Regent Square, on Thursday Evening, the 3d of May, 1832* (London: W. Harding, 1832), 1.

<sup>235</sup> Irving, *The Last Sermon*, 2.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid*, 4-5.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid*, 6-7.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

be another pastor there; that a blight would rest upon it; with many other grievous anathemas, both against its walls and its worshippers.<sup>239</sup>

Over the summer months, Irving preached in the open air. In one of the first of these sermons, delivered just a few days after his trial, he accused the ministers of religion of having 'profaned the covenant of the Lord' by seeking after their own advantage 'instead of seeking the souls of the people'.<sup>240</sup> Furthermore, the church was guilty of committing an abomination by casting out the voice of the Holy Ghost as evident from Irving's trial.<sup>241</sup>

In his exposition of the third chapter of Jeremiah a month later, Irving accused the church of idolatry. After defining 'a man's god' as 'that which he serveth' (whether that be riches or 'pleasure and sensual enjoyment'), he declared, 'Now every one of you who hath not followed after the true God, hath an idol whom you have worshipped'.<sup>242</sup> And it was for this reason that the Holy Ghost, symbolised by 'the latter rain', had been withheld from the Church.<sup>243</sup> As an example of God's anger, Irving pointed to Paris, which had suffered from cholera, where the people despised God and were busy 'cutting each other's throats' and 'murdering each other by thousands'.<sup>244</sup> But God had been merciful to London according to Irving, by mitigating the effects of the cholera, keeping the city safe despite political agitation, and protecting himself and his fellow preachers in the streets.<sup>245</sup> Nevertheless, he claimed that the city was fast turning away from God, and when that should happen, 'it also shall become the object of indignation of the Lord, and his right hand shall be seen in the midst of us'.<sup>246</sup>

Discoursing on verses 5-8 of the text, Irving explicitly linked modern European history with its prophetic type in the Old Testament: Israel was likened to the papacy and Judah to Protestantism; just as Israel had, the papal

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<sup>239</sup> 'Edward Irving', *Quarterly Journal of Prophecy*, 14 (July 1862): 243-244.

<sup>240</sup> *Exposition and Sermon by the Rev. E. Irving, M.A. delivered in the Fields of Clerkenwell, on Sunday Morning, May 6th. 1832* (London: W. Harding, n.d.), 2.

<sup>241</sup> *Exposition and Sermon* (6 May), 2.

<sup>242</sup> *Exposition and Sermon by the Rev. Edward Irving, M.A. at Cold Bath Fields, Sunday Morning, June 10th, 1832; Together with a Manifestation by Miss Cardale* (London: W. Harding, n.d.), 10.

<sup>243</sup> *Exposition and Sermon* (10 June), 10.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-12.

church went astray, in consequence of which God sent Napoleon as his scourge; and though Britain was threatened by this as well, in the end it triumphed, just as Judah ultimately escaped punishment from the Assyrian king Sennacherib.<sup>247</sup> Though Britain had been rewarded for its faithfulness in its struggle against Napoleon, for Irving this faithfulness had been forsaken by the state's decision to treat Catholics and Protestants equally before the law.<sup>248</sup> Having thus forgotten the lesson God had taught Britain, Irving claimed, 'we are going farther than Israel, vexing him more than Israel, and so he is grieved with us, and will come upon us also with a swift destruction'.<sup>249</sup> Irving exhorted his audience to repent and return unto the Lord, and he offered them a vision of the new Jerusalem on earth which would be their reward.<sup>250</sup> But, just days after the reform bill passed the Lords, Irving warned against the allure of political solutions:

the constitution of a kingdom, your Magna Charta, your Councils, your Bill of Rights, and now your Reform Bill, all these are hills and mountains to which this people are looking for salvation [this is in reference to the passage in Jeremiah 3:23]. I say it is in vain; I say *it is in vain*; I say the third time, IT IS IN VAIN, that you should look for salvation from the hills and from the mountains. Let them be ever so great, let them be ever so good, salvation is only from the Lord.<sup>251</sup>

Following a manifestation in the tongues by Miss Cardale, Irving summarised his prophetic warning: 'Repent, and the Lord will have mercy; but if you repent not, the day of judgment is at hand when his wrath shall be kindled, and it shall burn like an oven, and shall consume the stubble, leaving neither root nor branch'.<sup>252</sup>

While Irving's reactions to this 'persecution' by the Church are perhaps understandable from a personal perspective, it is nonetheless striking how his views on the Church of Scotland changed over just a few years. Where before he spoke tenderly of his mother church, now he saw it as the very 'synagogue of Satan'. It will be recalled that the Presbytery of Annan pressed Irving on his

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<sup>247</sup> *Exposition and Sermon* (10 June), 12.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-13.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

views following the trial in London, and his response illustrates just how far he had come. Replying to the Presbytery, Irving not only confirmed his authorship of the proscribed books, but pointed out that his article in the *Morning Watch* (examined above) was written 'to denounce the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland as one of the most *wicked of all Gods [sic] enemies upon the face of the Earth for having denied and fought against all the foundations of the truth as it is in Jesus* and cast out his servants for preaching the same'.<sup>253</sup>

By the time of his trial in Annan, Irving was separated from the Church of Scotland in all but name, but he seems to have been interested in making the most of the public platform which it afforded him. During his defence he often addressed himself and seemed to preach directly to the large audience which had gathered: 'Now, men and brethren, I am here this day to tell unto all the people what Christ has done for them. Men and brethren, I call on you to listen and attend'.<sup>254</sup> When he was interrupted and reminded to address himself to the presbyters and not the audience, his response seems perfectly calculated for dramatic effect: 'Moderator, I am sorry to be conceived out of order, but I forget not the situation in which I am now placed – I know where I now stand. I stand in the church where I was first baptised, and then ordained – but in my zeal, I could not separate the ministers of this presbytery from their flocks. I did not think that the ministers would desire to be separated from their people'.<sup>255</sup> He iterated the pain he felt being separated from his flock (having been removed from the National Scotch Church), nevertheless, he claimed that his preaching in London was having effect. As he declared:

You shall not go one half mile in London, but you shall see some of our Scottish youth, yea, and of our English youth also, standing up to preach that truth for which I now appear at this bar. At Charing Cross – at London Bridge – at the Tower, and in all the high places of the City, you shall find

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<sup>253</sup> Edward Irving to the Members and Elders of the Presbytery of Annan (13 October 1832), in *Diary and Letters*, 324.

<sup>254</sup> *Trial of Mr Edward Irving, Late Minister of the National Scotch Church, Regent Square, London; Before the Presbytery of Annan, on 13<sup>th</sup> March, 1833; With an Appendix, Containing Copies of some of his Letters, and Other Documents, a Refutation of his Errors, and an Account of the Supposed Supernatural Manifestations Exhibited by the "Gifted" of his Congregation; Also some Notices of Similar Manifestations in the French Prophets, and Others* (Dumfries: Journal Office, 1833), 28.

<sup>255</sup> *Trial before the Presbytery of Annan*, 28.

them preaching to a perishing people, holding a controversy with the infidels of the land, to save a sinking church.<sup>256</sup>

As he concluded his defence, Irving proclaimed, 'O, ye ministers and people! why stand ye debating and questioning about reforming this, and reforming that, when the life of your mother is dying? Oh! the land is sick to death, and the judgment of God is ready to burst upon it!'<sup>257</sup>

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The image that we have from Irving's writings from the mid-1820s is one of a prophet who saw himself to be in a noble struggle with his generation. His conception of the ideal Christian minister contributed to a lofty view of his own calling, and ultimately led to his self-portrayal as a prophet for the Christian dispensation. As such, no topic was outside of his remit; he broadcasted his views in the pulpit and publications on a number of social and political issues, from poverty to Catholic emancipation. Furthermore, he increasingly portrayed himself as being under attack by the press and public opinion for daring to hold his views, which of course were seen to be the truth in his own eyes. The events of Irving's later life and career, namely the revival of the spiritual gifts and the controversy with the Church leading to his expulsion, only confirmed him in his pre-millenarian belief that the end times were near and that he and his group were being attacked for their adherence to the truth. By the early 1830s, he had become something a public spectacle, but at the height of his career, he had commanded the ear of government ministers, literary men, and members of the nobility. The next chapter will examine the reception of Irving's views to demonstrate just how familiar the reading public was with his prophetic message.

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<sup>256</sup> *Trial before the Presbytery of Annan*, 36.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid*, 37.

## Reviews and Reactions

Edward Irving presented himself as a public, and finally persecuted, prophet in his preaching and publications from the mid-1820s, but it was his early popularity in London and around Britain that ensured his message was heard. Irving's spectacular rise to fame was so sudden that his popularity itself became a topic of heated debate in the early 1820s, as commentators discussed the qualities of his preaching which drew such large crowds to the Caledonian Chapel. Though many predicted that he would soon fade from the public's attention, the periodical press kept him constantly in the public consciousness as he continued to cause controversy throughout his career. His first major work, published at the height of his popularity, was reviewed in all the major magazines; though his later works were less extensively reviewed, Irving's scathing criticism of the religious world prompted consistent responses from the influential *Eclectic Review* and *Evangelical Magazine* among others. Even when these reviews were hostile, the authors were obliged to debate on the terms set by Irving, and his high profile helped to inject pre-millenarian discourse into the debates over Catholic emancipation. But most importantly, it was frequently noted, though often criticised, by the writers for the press that Irving delivered his denunciations with the authority of an 'inspired' prophet, and towards the end of his life, Irving as a doomsayer became a familiar caricature.

### Irving's Popularity

Within just a few months of Irving's move to London in 1822, he had achieved spectacular fame as people crowded in to hear him preach, including the political and literary elites. It will be recalled that the first few decades of the nineteenth century saw a proliferation of newspapers and magazines, and Irving's popularity coincided with this phenomenon, as the periodical press rushed to discuss the latest fashion of the day. Contemporary and modern

commentators have debated the nature of his popularity in London; while this aspect of his career has come to define his entire life and posthumous reception, it cannot be overstated. Through the fame produced by his preaching and publishing career, as well as his connections with several influential people, Irving was recognisable throughout Britain (and beyond), and this would have ensured that his message was heard regardless of its reception.

Though Irving's popularity entered a new phase in London, it did not begin there, as there is evidence that he had been earning a name for himself while still in Glasgow preaching periodically under Chalmers. In a letter to Carlyle in 1820, he referred to 'the greater publicity and notoriety' he was drawing as assistant to Chalmers, though he went on to note that 'every minister in Glasgow is an oracle to a certain number of Devotees'.<sup>1</sup> The committee from London's Caledonian Chapel must have heard of Irving's reputation, as he wrote to one of their number, William Dinwiddie, to manage their expectations. 'Report speaks oftener false than true', Irving claimed, and he suggested that it would take him some time to study London in order to succeed.<sup>2</sup> The Duke of York, being instrumental in the establishment of the chapel several years earlier, attended Irving's trial sermon in December of 1821, and afterwards presented Irving with a Bible for his own use. Though Peter Elliott suggests that Irving's invitation to the Caledonian Chapel was probably less of a compliment 'than a reflection of the dwindling fortunes of the congregation',<sup>3</sup> in London Irving would soon attract widespread attention.

Once in London Irving steadily attracted attention. The dinner following his induction to the church in October 1822 was covered in minute detail in the *Representative* (reprinted in both *The Morning Chronicle* and *Morning Post*). With 200 people said to be in attendance for the dinner at the Freemason's Tavern, toasts were made to the Churches of Scotland and England, and the

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Irving to Thomas Carlyle (14 March 1820), in *The Diary and Letters of Edward Irving*, ed. Barbara Waddington (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 83.

<sup>2</sup> Irving to William Dinwiddie (16 November 1821), in *Diary and Letters*, 118.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Elliott, *Edward Irving: Romantic Theology in Crisis* (PhD thesis: Murdoch University, 2010), 40.

mutual goodwill between the members of these churches was observed.<sup>4</sup> Mr. Laurie, instrumental in the search for and selection of Irving, praised the new minister:

as London requires greater talents for every vocation than the country, they wished to find a star of the first magnitude – one who had drank [sic] deep at the fountain of human knowledge, fraught with the learning of past ages – a man well skilled in the philosophy and science – one, in a word, who could grapple with the learned and subtile [sic] infidel in his own encampments, who could conquer him with his own weapons, overturning his fancied deities or his temples erected to the unknown God.<sup>5</sup>

Laurie spoke of ‘the genteel assembly that crowd the church’ after just two months; and he even joked that the cleaning lady had since struck for wages due to the extra work in keeping up with a burgeoning congregation.<sup>6</sup> It is evident then that Irving had already attracted considerable public attention by this point, but it was not until his first major publication, *For the Oracles of God*, in July 1823 that the press took formal attention of him.

The traditional account of Irving’s spectacular rise to fame comes to us from Margaret Oliphant’s biography of Irving, where she claims that an offhand remark by James Mackintosh to George Canning led to their attendance at Irving’s service the following Sunday, initiating a series of events establishing Irving for a time as the most popular preacher in London.<sup>7</sup> Whatever the case, it was clear that by mid-July Irving’s popularity was a phenomenon to be discussed in itself, as evidenced by the numerous newspaper and magazine articles touching on the subject. One of the earlier accounts, published in John and Leigh Hunt’s *Examiner* and reprinted in *The Morning Chronicle*, described the ‘experience’ of going to see Irving with all the exquisite little details:

we now request such of our readers as have not attended the Caledonian Church to repair at about a quarter past ten o’clock on a Sunday morning, to Cross-street, Hatton-garden, the door of the church of which, if he be a humble pedestrian, he will find it difficult to reach, and when he gets to it, he cannot enter without a ticket. If he occupies a carriage, he takes his turn behind other carriages, and is subject to the same routine. Having surmounted these difficulties, should his ticket be numbered, he enters

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<sup>4</sup> ‘Caledonian Church’, *The Morning Chronicle*, 16694 (22 October 1822), n.p.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Caledonian Church’, *Morning Chronicle*.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Margaret Oliphant, *The Life of Edward Irving, Minister of the National Scotch Church, London. Illustrated by his Journals and Correspondence*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1862), Vol. I, 158-159.

the pew so numbered, if not, he waits until after the prayer, or possibly all the time, which is however unavoidable. All this adjusted, exactly at eleven o'clock, he beholds a tall and somewhat slender man, apparently aged about 37 or 38, with rather handsome but certainly striking features, slightly partaking of the Siddonian mould mount the pulpit stairs.<sup>8</sup>

*The European Magazine* captured this early popularity rather more succinctly: "Have you heard Mr. Irving?" is a question in the circles of fashion, which has now quite supplanted that formerly trite one, "Were you at the Opera last night?"<sup>9</sup> *The Liberal* observed that if one were to find space in the crowded church, 'you see in the same undistinguished crowd Brougham and Mackintosh, Mr. Peel and Lord Liverpool, Lord Landsdown and Mr. Coleridge'.<sup>10</sup> In the second of his 'Spirits of the Age' articles in *The New Monthly Magazine*, William Hazlitt sought to analyse this 'prevailing and preposterous rage for novelty' in relation to Irving's success.<sup>11</sup> 'People go to hear him in crowds', Hazlitt observed, 'and come away with a mixture of delight and astonishment – they go again to see if the effect will continue, and send others to try to find out the puzzle'.<sup>12</sup> Commenting on 'the absurd fashion [...] of following a Scotch Presbyterian Parson', *John Bull* denounced Irving's popularity as 'one of the most flagrant and disgusting pieces of HUMBUG which has ever been foisted upon the people of the metropolis'.<sup>13</sup>

Irving's popularity during the summer of 1823 culminated in a hugely popular satirical pamphlet (going through over ten editions within two years) which directly repeated much of the criticism from the earlier reviews. In the *Trial of the Rev. Edward Irving*, the fictional Irving stood before the 'High Court of Common Sense' on several charges, including 'being ugly' and 'being a common quack'.<sup>14</sup> But the seventh charge was serious: 'For following a divisive course subversive of the discipline of the order to which he belongs,

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<sup>8</sup> 'The Rev. Edw. Irving, A. M. *Minister of the Caledonian New Church, Hatton Garden*', *The Examiner*, 807 (13 July 1823): 452.

<sup>9</sup> 'The Rev. Edward Irving, Preacher at the Caledonian Chapel, Cross-Street, Hatton-Garden', *The European Magazine, and London Review*, 84 (July 1823): 47.

<sup>10</sup> 'Dr. Chalmers and Mr. Irving', *The Liberal*, 4 (July 1823): 299.

<sup>11</sup> [William Hazlitt], 'The Spirits of the Age. – No. II.: Mr. Irving', *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal*, 10:37 (January 1824): 187.

<sup>12</sup> [Hazlitt], 'Spirits of the Age', 187.

<sup>13</sup> *John Bull*, 136 (21 July 1823): 228.

<sup>14</sup> *Trial of the Rev. Edward Irving, M. A. A Cento of Criticism*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: E. Brain, 1823), 1, 3-4.

and contrary to the principles of Christian fellowship and charity'.<sup>15</sup> In recognition of Irving's real-life celebrity, the court was filled to excess 'by an assemblage of persons of the first rank and distinction in the country', including the Earls Liverpool and Grey, Mackintosh, Canning, Peel, Huskisson, and Brougham, and the galleries were 'filled with elegantly dressed ladies'; literary figures connected with the periodical press were there, including William Cobbett, Hazlitt, and Josiah Conder, and one of the jurors was James Mill.<sup>16</sup> The witnesses on both sides were members of the press, and the author reproduced relevant sections from the numerous articles on Irving and his work appearing in the last few months, which were then pitted against each other to create the narrative of a trial. This format meant that much of the material was copied (often word for word) from the newspapers and reviews, however the pamphlet did gently criticise the fallible and somewhat shallow nature of the opinions expressed in the periodical press.<sup>17</sup> Irving's defence took the form of passages taken from *For the Oracles*, but in the end, he was found guilty of the seventh charge. Though the intended effect was obviously comical, when Irving would later speak of the 'British Inquisition', he did so from some experience, his character literally having been found guilty in the 'tribunal of public opinion'.

Despite the largely negative coverage in the press, Irving was certainly not without his public defenders. In a four-part series of letters to the editor of the conservative *Morning Post*, a 'Member of the Established Church of England' sought to defend Irving from the 'malevolent attempts of his enemies'.<sup>18</sup> Though Irving had come 'from his native land unbefriended and unpatronized', the author claimed that he had 'attained the highest pinnacle of celebrity'.<sup>19</sup> The author did admit some minor flaws, particularly in Irving's

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<sup>15</sup> *Trial of Irving*, 4.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 1-3.

<sup>17</sup> For example: it was pointed out that *The Times* had denigrated Irving's understanding, but also Walter Scott's imagination and Lord Byron's poetic talent; and when the editor of the *Courier* was pushed to defend his statements, he admitted that he had simply obtained the information from an earlier article in *The Morning Chronicle*, *Ibid*, 12.

<sup>18</sup> A Member of the Established Church of England, 'Remarks on the Rev. Edward Irving, Minister of the Caledonian Church, Hatton Garden. Letter I', *The Morning Post*, 16448 (9 September 1823): n.p.

<sup>19</sup> 'Remarks on Irving', *Morning Post*.

gesticulation, however they suggested that many of the accusations hurled at Irving were made out of envy. 'Mr. IRVING has the misfortune to be dark, pale, and very tall', the author sarcastically observed, 'in the new code of criticism, it appears that these are crimes'.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, it was 'his lofty genius and unprecedented fame [which] were his real crimes'.<sup>21</sup> Following Irving's satirical 'trial', another letter to the editor appeared in the same newspaper coming to his defence. After hearing of this 'trial', the author claimed to have investigated Irving, and, having done so, wanted to 'reverse the judgment' that had been pronounced upon him.<sup>22</sup> It was asserted there that Irving addressed himself to 'a Scottish congregation', and therefore he should be judged according to what he was – 'a *Scottish Clergyman*'.<sup>23</sup>

Irving continued to be the subject of interest as he preached around the country. Following several sermons preached in Rodney Street, Liverpool in 1824 at the opening of a Scotch Church in the city, the *Liverpool Mercury* felt compelled to comment. Though the author of the article claimed that the paper did not usually address issues of 'pulpit oratory' as long as the speaker was humble and the doctrine was sound, it was stated that 'the celebrated Mr. Irving, who, in more senses than one, has, of late, made such a noise amongst us' with 'such very obtrusive pretensions' had fairly invited criticism.<sup>24</sup> Irving's 'action', partaking more of the actor than the preacher, was criticised, and it was regretted that the moral of his message was lost 'in the conflict of sound and fury'.<sup>25</sup> This preaching tour was discussed as far away as Inverness, where the local paper remarked that Irving 'appears to have attracted no small share of public notice' on his trip to Liverpool.<sup>26</sup> Reprinting the comments from another paper discussing Irving's motives for carrying out such a tour, it was

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<sup>20</sup> A Member of the Established Church of England, 'A Vindication of the Rev. Edward Irving. Letter IV', *The Morning Post*, 16457 (19 September 1823): n.p.

<sup>21</sup> 'A Vindication', *Morning Post*.

<sup>22</sup> 'The Rev. Edward Irving', *The Morning Post*, 16520 (2 December 1823): n.p.

<sup>23</sup> 'Edward Irving', *Morning Post*.

<sup>24</sup> 'The Reverend Edward Irving', *Liverpool Mercury, or Commercial, Literary, and Political Herald*, 707 (10 December 1824): n.p.

<sup>25</sup> 'Edward Irving', *Liverpool Mercury*.

<sup>26</sup> 'The Rev. Edward Irving', *The Inverness Courier, and General Advertiser for the Counties of Inverness, Ross, Moray, Nairn, Cromarty, Sutherland and Caithness*, 368 (16 December 1824): 4.

suggested that 'this singularly gifted man has left behind him more who acknowledge his rare and surprising abilities, than who deny him the possession of any talents whatever'.<sup>27</sup>

Many predicted that Irving's popularity would not last long, and though ultimately fashionable society did move on to other novelties, he never fell out of the public eye. Though Hazlitt described Irving as 'a burning and a shining light' rather than 'one of the fixed',<sup>28</sup> his critical essay was republished in his 1825 collection of contemporary portraits, *The Spirits of the Age*, which placed Irving alongside such figures as Bentham, Coleridge, and Canning among others worthy of criticism. In a review of Irving's *Babylon and Infidelity* in 1826, it was still said of Irving, 'Few divines of the present day are more popular than the author of these volumes. His fame has spread in every direction, and his name is familiar among Christians of all denominations, from the wilds of Caledonia to the western shores of Cornwall'.<sup>29</sup> The Caledonian Chapel continued to attract an audience, and the press kept the public abreast of news and developments concerning Irving. For example, the building of the new National Scotch Church, which the *Manchester Courier* termed 'the Rev. Edward Irving's temple of vanity',<sup>30</sup> afforded *John Bull* the opportunity for another squint-based joke.<sup>31</sup> When Irving's new church was finally opened in Regent Square in 1827, the turnout was even larger than expected. The story in *The Times* for the following day reported on the carriages lined up and the crush that took place as the crowd forced the doors open to the 1,700-seat church, requiring the police to be brought in to restore order.<sup>32</sup> By 1828, Irving was being discussed as far away as Calcutta, India, where his ordination charge to Hugh Maclean was examined in the *Oriental Observer*.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> 'Edward Irving', *Inverness Courier*, 4

<sup>28</sup> [Hazlitt], 'Spirits of the Age', 187.

<sup>29</sup> 'Review – *Babylon and Infidelity foredoomed of God*', *The Imperial Magazine*, 8:93 (September 1826): 853.

<sup>30</sup> 'London and Provincial', *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 69 (22 April 1826): 2.

<sup>31</sup> *John Bull* commented on the committee tasked with deciding between a Greek or Gothic style for the new church, before claiming that the preference should 'be given to the Eye-onick'; 22 (31 May 1824): 181.

<sup>32</sup> 'Scotch National Church', *The Times*, 13277 (12 May 1827): 3.

<sup>33</sup> 'Ordination Charge. By *The Reverend Edward Irving of London*', *Oriental Observer*, 64 (4 May 1828): 509.

Irving's preaching tours in Scotland in 1828 and 1829 ensured that he stayed within the public spotlight, as tens of thousands gathered to hear him preach and the London media covered his movements. Reprinting an account from the *Dumfries Courier*, *The Standard* related to its London audience the large crowds which had gone to hear Irving, though it was claimed that the public, as ever, was divided in its opinion of him.<sup>34</sup> It is clear that Irving could still find supporters at this stage, as testified by an article in the *Caledonian Mercury* in June of the same year. The writer noted the 'almost unanimous hostility' against Irving in the press, and offered to present the other side of the story.<sup>35</sup> Following an account of Irving's life and career, the author concluded that it 'was a gross outrage on common sense' to characterise Irving as a 'quack and imposter'.<sup>36</sup> The disaster at the church in Kirkcaldy that same month also reflected continued popularity; the news itself of this tragedy was transmitted around the country. The tour in 1829 proceeded along much the same lines, attracting similar audiences and press coverage. Irving was asked to dine with the Commissioner of the General Assembly, where he was seated next to Sir Walter Scott. In a letter to the editor of the *Caledonian Mercury* in June of that year, the writer had gone to see Irving preach at Hope Park Chapel and had been outraged at his profanity and indelicacy.<sup>37</sup> A few days later, another letter appeared in the same newspaper as a response to the previous one seeking to vindicate Irving from the accusations.<sup>38</sup> From Edinburgh, Irving travelled to Dumfries, where he preached in the open air to a crowd of 6-7,000, and in Holywood the crowd was estimated by an Annan surveyor to have been even larger, at around 13,000.<sup>39</sup>

It was around this time that Irving began to run into serious trouble with the Church of Scotland over his Christological views, and the newspapers, especially the English ones, commented on the developments in this

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<sup>34</sup> 'The Rev. Edward Irving', *The Standard*, 323 (30 May 1828): n.p.

<sup>35</sup> 'The Reverend Edward Irving', *Caledonian Mercury*, 16662 (9 June 1828): n.p.

<sup>36</sup> 'Edward Irving', *Caledonian Mercury* (9 June 1828).

<sup>37</sup> 'The Rev. Edward Irving', *Caledonian Mercury*, 16814 (4 June 1829): n.p.

<sup>38</sup> 'Rev. Edward Irving', *Caledonian Mercury*, 16817 (11 June 1829): n.p.

<sup>39</sup> Tim Grass, *The Lord's Watchman: A Life of Edward Irving (1792-1834)* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 200.

controversy continuously. *The Lancaster Gazette and General Advertiser* printed an account (reproduced elsewhere as well) of the hearing before the London Presbytery where Irving formally withdrew from the voluntary body. Claiming that '[s]uch a proceeding had not taken place for the last one hundred years', the article noted the large crowd drawn to the church as well as the public interest which the event had excited.<sup>40</sup> The decision made by the General Assembly the following June – to exclude Irving from preaching in all churches in Scotland due to his unorthodox views – was similarly advertised in the newspapers around the country. A letter to the editor of *The Belfast News-Letter*, signed by 'An Orthodox Presbyterian', drew attention to this decision by the General Assembly and called for the Synod of Ulster to pass a similar resolution should Irving decide to return to Ireland to preach as he had done in 1830.<sup>41</sup>

Though clearly Irving never really disappeared from the public eye during this period, the manifestations of the 'unknown tongues' late in 1831 created another flurry of press coverage and interest in his views and actions. In an article from *The Morning Post* which was reproduced around the country, several statements made in the tongues along with their interpretations were reprinted for the notice of the wider public. Though the manifestations reported on here took place during Irving's early morning weekday services, the writer observed that 'the body of the church was filled with respectable people of both sexes even before the appointed hour', despite the bleak weather at half-past six on Monday morning.<sup>42</sup> Reporting on these 'screams of hysterical women' and 'rhapsodies of frantic men', *The Times* warned people to stay away from Irving's church so as to avoid the contagion which, it was feared, would bring religion into disrepute.<sup>43</sup>

The two trials Irving faced towards the end of his career – before the Presbyteries of London (1832) and Annan (1833) – were covered extensively

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<sup>40</sup> 'Scotch Presbytery. Withdrawal of the Rev. Mr. Irving', *The Lancaster Gazette and General Advertiser, for Lancashire, Westmorland, &c.*, 1533 (30 October 1830): n.p.

<sup>41</sup> An Orthodox Presbyterian, 'To the General Synod of Ulster', *The Belfast News-Letter*, 9810 (21 June 1831): n.p.

<sup>42</sup> 'Mr. Irving', *The Morning Post*, 18995 (27 October 1831): n.p.

<sup>43</sup> 'The Rev. Mr. Irving', *The Times*, 14682 (29 October 1831): 5.

in the newspapers and spawned full published accounts. At the first of these, *The Times* reported that ‘immense numbers of persons were assembled in front of the chapel, in spite of torrents of rain which fell, anxious to get in, amongst whom were a great many very fashionably-dressed ladies’.<sup>44</sup> This trial seemed to be something of a spectacle, with *The Times* remarking continually on the disruption caused by the cheers or jeers of the audience. At one point, Irving was reported to have addressed himself directly to the audience, a move which the moderator pointed out was irregular.<sup>45</sup> And as the crowd grew particularly raucous after an exclamation by Irving, it became impossible for the court to maintain order.<sup>46</sup> Finally, Irving’s reputation was held against him, as, in addition to his own delusion, he was said to be dragging thousands of his followers from the truth, due to ‘his great influence, his known talents, [and] his amiable disposition’.<sup>47</sup>

The publication of these trials is a testament in itself to the public’s continued fascination with Irving’s dramatic career. The account of Irving’s 1833 trial in Annan (published in Dumfries as well as London) provides even further evidence of the demand for news on Irving, as the editor (of the Dumfries edition) included supplementary documents, including letters back and forth between Irving and the Presbytery, so the reader could follow along with the circumstances of the trial. The account was published, it was said, ‘to give more general circulation to the particulars of the trial’ due to the fact that ‘Mr Irving’s deposition has brought his character and doctrines into very general discussion’.<sup>48</sup> The editor clearly disagreed with Irving and claimed that, as the General Assembly and the Presbytery of Annan had unanimously

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<sup>44</sup> ‘The Rev. Edward Irving’, *The Times*, 14842 (3 May 1832): 3.

<sup>45</sup> *The Trial of the Rev. Edward Irving, M. A. Before the London Presbytery; Containing the Whole of the Evidence; Exact Copies of the Documents; Verbatim Report of the Speeches and Opinions of the Presbyters, &c.; Being the Only Authentic and Complete Record of the Proceedings, Taken in Short-Hand* (London: W. Harding, 1832), 69.

<sup>46</sup> *Trial before the London Presbytery*, 71.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 81.

<sup>48</sup> *Trial of Mr Edward Irving, Late Minister of the National Scotch Church, Regent Square, London; Before the Presbytery of Annan, on 13<sup>th</sup> March, 1833; With an Appendix, Containing Copies of some of his Letters, and Other Documents, a Refutation of his Errors, and an Account of the Supposed Supernatural Manifestations Exhibited by the “Gifted” of his Congregation; Also some Notices of Similar Manifestations in the French Prophets, and Others* (Dumfries: Journal Office, 1833), iii.

ruled against him, every 'calm-thinking and judicious' person should oppose him, though this was obviously not the case.<sup>49</sup> It was acknowledged that Irving had 'made a considerable impression on the audience' in attendance at the trial, but it was claimed that 'the faithful record of his speech' detached from his 'commanding figure and extraordinary elocution' would undermine him.<sup>50</sup> Additional texts appended to the publication, including an account of similar manifestations in seventeenth-century France and extracts from a work by Robert Baxter (who had famously renounced the 'tongues' after exhibiting them initially), were clearly calculated to demonstrate the delusion into which Irving had fallen according to the editor.

The death of Edward Irving was published around the country and even further. In a relatively sympathetic memorial of Irving, *The Friend of India* published the words of Thomas Chalmers, who remarked of his old assistant: 'He was the evangelical Christian grafted on the old Roman – with the lofty stern virtues of the one, he possessed the humble graces of the other'.<sup>51</sup> Just a few days after Irving's death, John Cumming, minister at the Scotch Church, Covent Garden, preached a funeral sermon for Irving to his London audience which exemplifies what would become the standard interpretation of Irving's life and career (at least among those who were somewhat sympathetic). Cumming stated that Irving had 'set out on the Christian ministry like some war-ship, with streaming pennants, and with majestic way: but the storms beat, and the waves arose, and prudence was driven from the helm' before he finally 'foundered amid rocks and shoals'.<sup>52</sup> Though Irving had been betrayed by his lofty intellect according to Cumming, the fact of his popularity was seen to be a significant cause contributing to his demise. 'He who is gone', Cumming observed, 'had often and again among his audience, the crowns and the coronets of the world – the wise, and the rich, and the illustrious; and the matter

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<sup>49</sup> *Trial before the Presbytery of Annan*, iii.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, iii-iv.

<sup>51</sup> 'Scotland', *The Friend of India*, 22 (28 May 1835): 175.

<sup>52</sup> John Cumming, 'The Moral Influence we Exert after Death', in *The British Pulpit; A Collection of Three Hundred and Fifty Original Sermons, by the Most Eminent Divines of the Present Day* (London: G. Wightman, 1839), Vol. II, 545.

of wonder is, not that he should have fallen, but that he did not fall much sooner'.<sup>53</sup>

In the early 1840s, it seems there were still vivid memories of Irving's widespread popularity. A writer for *Fraser's Magazine* in 1842 recalled the phenomenon of Irving's popularity as we have seen it being discussed throughout his lifetime:

What a "rush" there was to Hatton Garden [...] Dowagers and duchesses, dukes and earls, clergy and laity, poets and politicians, Dissenters and Methodists, Church people high and Church people low, freethinkers, unbelievers, atheists, Socinians, and Quakers, were to be seen in countless masses "rushing" to the scene of action even hours before service commenced, in order to gain a sight of "the apocalyptic angel".<sup>54</sup>

The purpose of the article however was to draw attention to the ephemeral nature of this popularity, as the remainder of the piece examined other instances of briefly popular phenomena, including homeopathy and hydropathy as well as certain fashionable garments and accessories. Nevertheless, this article provides evidence for the fact that Irving's popularity remained a topic of discussion even years after his death.

### Oratorical Qualities

Regardless of the final opinion expressed in accounts of Irving's popularity, many commentators picked up on the same few features of his character and oratory, namely his physical features and perceived Scottish identity, his theatricality and phraseology, and his denunciations and personal attacks.

It was impossible for Londoners to miss Irving's striking physical features. Hazlitt attributed a considerable portion of Irving's popularity to his looks and uncommon stature. He claimed that 'his sable locks, his clear iron-grey complexion, and firm-set features, turn the raw, uncouth Scotchman into a noble Italian picture', and not a few reviewers, including Hazlitt, reflected on what effect this might have had on the women in Irving's congregation.<sup>55</sup> Once

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<sup>53</sup> Cumming, 'The Moral Influence', 546.

<sup>54</sup> 'Rushings; Or, British Popular Vagaries', *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country*, 26:152 (August 1842): 213.

<sup>55</sup> [Hazlitt], 'Spirits of the Age', 189.

the curiosity had died down, Hazlitt asserted that Irving's 'defect of vision' became a new object of interest, 'leading to the idle question whether it is an advantage to the preacher or not'.<sup>56</sup> A writer for the *John Bull* rather crudely commented on this aspect by referring to Irving as 'DOCTOR SQUINTUM'.<sup>57</sup> But perhaps the most crucial attribute to Irving's success according to Hazlitt was simply his size. 'Take a cubit from his stature', Hazlitt declared, 'and his whole manner resolves itself into an impertinence. But with that addition, he *overcrowds* the town, browbeats their prejudices, and bullies them out of their senses, and is not afraid of being contradicted by any one less than himself'.<sup>58</sup> Whether they were taken to be harmful or helpful to his success, Irving's physical characteristics were discussed in nearly all the major newspapers and magazines, prompting a joke from the reviewer for *The Literary Chronicle* that because of this, 'a Bow-Street officer would recognize him in church or market'.<sup>59</sup>

Beyond his physical features, the perception of Irving's Scottish identity also prompted discussion. As James Mulvihill has observed, this would have been filtered through literary representations of Scotland and its 'primitive' people, epitomised by the work of Walter Scott which was near the height of its fame during this period.<sup>60</sup> The writer for *The Liberal* exemplified this perception of Irving as somehow more primitive when they claimed that he 'puts us in mind of the first man, Adam, if Adam had but been a Scotchman, and had had coal black hair'.<sup>61</sup> Another review in the same paper described Irving as 'half-saint, half-savage' as well as a 'brawny bravo of the Caledonian Kirk'.<sup>62</sup> There is also evidence of overt resentment by English writers at the popularity of a Scottish minister in London. In the same article, the author mocked the idea that Irving had 'come up from the banks of the Esk with huge,

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<sup>56</sup> [Hazlitt], 'Spirits of the Age', 189.

<sup>57</sup> *John Bull*, 136 (21 July 1823): 228.

<sup>58</sup> [Hazlitt], 'Spirits of the Age', 191.

<sup>59</sup> *The Literary Chronicle* (2 August 1823): 483.

<sup>60</sup> James Mulvihill, 'The Reverend Edward Irving and London Pulpit Popularity', *Nineteenth Century Contexts*, 14:2 (1990): 186.

<sup>61</sup> 'Dr. Chalmers and Mr. Irving', *Liberal*, 200-201.

<sup>62</sup> 'Mr. Irving, The Quack Preacher', *The Liberal*, 4 (July 1823): 314, 315.

hasty strides to *introduce God Almighty in London*'.<sup>63</sup> In the context of the recent spate of government-funded church building, the conservative *Quarterly Review* claimed that members of the Church of England 'might have felt a blameless regret' that the crowds flocked to Hatton Garden rather than 'to one of our splendid new [Anglican] churches, at Marylebone, Pancras, or Chelsea'.<sup>64</sup>

More significant, however, are the reactions which focused on the peculiarity of Irving's preaching style, including his phraseology and gesticulations. A sentiment repeated by many of the reviewers was the similarity between Irving's pulpit manner and that of Thomas Chalmers's, with several claiming that Irving was nothing more than a clever copy who could only become famous in London by escaping from under Chalmers's shadow in Glasgow.<sup>65</sup> Irving had been clear about his seventeenth-century models for phraseology and style, but many reviewers shared the same sentiment as the writer for *The Examiner*, who suggested that this style perhaps worked better in the pulpit than in print.<sup>66</sup> The *Quarterly* was less ambiguous; it was claimed there that Irving offended against all the rules of pulpit eloquence.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, the reviewer noted confusion and contradiction in Irving's language, claiming that his dialect was 'neither Scotch nor English, neither ancient nor modern; it is sometimes so forced and strained as to be unintelligible, strange words used in still more strange senses; sometimes it is familiar even to vulgarity: one moment inflated to the highest poetry, the next sinking to the language of the streets'.<sup>68</sup> This apparent contradiction was summed up by *The Liberal*:

We are a little *mystified* when a man with one hand brings all the nice distinctions and air-drawn speculations of modern unbelievers, and arms the other with "fire hot from Hell," – when St. Paul and Jeremy Bentham, the Evangelists and the Sorrows of Werter, Seneca, Shakespear [sic], the author of Caleb Williams and the Political Justice [William Godwin], are

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<sup>63</sup> 'Quack Preacher', *Liberal*, 314 (emphasis in original).

<sup>64</sup> 'Pulpit Eloquence', *The Quarterly Review*, 29:58 (July 1823): 307.

<sup>65</sup> See 'The Rev. Mr. Irving's Orations', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 14:79 (August 1823): 153; and 'Mr. Irving', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 14:79 (August 1823): 192.

<sup>66</sup> Q, 'The Rev. Edw. Irving, A. M.', *The Examiner*, 807 (13 July 1823): n.p.

<sup>67</sup> 'Pulpit Eloquence', *Quarterly*, 307.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 312

mingled together in the same passage, and quoted in the same breath, however eloquent that breath may be.<sup>69</sup>

Hazlitt made a similar remark in his review, however he posited this as one of Irving's attractions: 'To hear a person spout Shakespeare on the stage is nothing – the charm is nearly worn out – but to hear any one spout Shakespeare (and that not in a sneaking under-tone, but at the top of his voice, and with the full breadth of his chest) from a Calvinistic pulpit, is new and wonderful'.<sup>70</sup>

The writer for *The Literary Chronicle* dwelt on Irving's denunciations, and the confident and assured tone he adopted in delivering these, as a significant contribution to his popularity. They claimed that he had 'reasoned correctly, that as the poor crowded to chapels in proportion as their sins were denounced, the rich would do the same, and that he had only to attack the vices and follies of the fashionable world to become popular'.<sup>71</sup> He did not however 'confine himself to attacking the higher classes in the abstract; he singles out individual characters', thus taking 'advantage of that weakness of human nature, the love of scandal'.<sup>72</sup> This in turn had a knock-on effect further attracting people of all classes according to this article:

His chapel is every Sunday a gallery of beauty and fashion; and, while some of the nobility and gentry are prompted by curiosity to see and hear a preacher become popular by the boldness of his denunciations, no inconsiderable portion of his auditors are collected in the hopes of seeing some royal duke or princess, some minister of state, the famed Lady A—, or the beauteous Miss B—. <sup>73</sup>

Hazlitt largely agreed with this assessment: 'He has found out the secret of attracting by repelling. All those whom he attacks are curious to hear what he says of them: they go again, to show that they do not mind it. It is no less interesting to the by-standers, who like to witness this sort of *onslaught*'.<sup>74</sup> To 'stand up in a strait-laced old fashioned pulpit', he asserted further, 'and bandy dialectics with modern philosophers or give a *cross-buttock* to a cabinet-

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<sup>69</sup> 'Dr. Chalmers and Mr. Irving', *Liberal*, 307-308.

<sup>70</sup> [Hazlitt], 'Spirits of the Age', 187.

<sup>71</sup> *The Literary Chronicle*, 483.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> [Hazlitt], 'Spirits of the Age', 189.

minister, there is something in a sight like this also, that is a cure for sore eyes'.<sup>75</sup> Hazlitt related an anecdote regarding 'a lady of quality' who told Irving that she and her daughters had been to all the most fashionable places, but they had been entertained nowhere so much as at his service.<sup>76</sup>

Even late in 1831 when the 'tongues' were in the news, Irving's oratory could still find surprising praise. In a sketch of Irving from an upcoming lecture series on modern poetry (printed in *The Manchester Times and Gazette*), John Mackay Wilson proclaimed that despite his folly and fanaticism, 'Irving is the most powerful, the most effective orator I ever heard, either in the pulpit, or out of the pulpit'.<sup>77</sup> 'Again and again', Wilson continued, 'while reason, the bible, and common sense, told me he was merely giving vent to the effervescence of a diseased imagination, I have felt the flesh creep on my bones, and the hair on my head move'.<sup>78</sup> Wilson concluded that 'the rough accent, the fierce manner, the wild language, and the wilder looking man' combined to form a powerful orator though individually these characteristics would have seemed ridiculous.<sup>79</sup> Cumming's praise of Irving's oratory in his funeral sermon was sincere and exalted: 'No man ever possessed a mind of higher range, and a greater power of fervent and impressive oratory. None, with the exception of his illustrious father in Christ, Dr. Chalmers, was so able to arrest the attention, and gain the hearts, and mould the doings, of his audience'.<sup>80</sup>

### Religious Criticism

The influence that Irving achieved during the first few years of his London ministry extended beyond the superficial debate over the nature of his popularity and obvious comments on his physical appearance and Scottish accent. As he continued to publish, the magazines continued to review his

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<sup>75</sup> [Hazlitt], 'Spirits of the Age', 189.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, 188.

<sup>77</sup> 'Sketch of the Rev. Edward Irving', *The Manchester Times and Gazette*, 159 (29 October 1831): n.p.

<sup>78</sup> 'Sketch of Irving', *Manchester Times*.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>80</sup> Cumming, 'The Moral Influence', 546.

works, and an examination of these reviews provides evidence of clear engagement with the ideas he was expounding, regardless of the final conclusions the authors drew on Irving and his thought. Even where the reviewers disagreed with Irving, sometimes vehemently, the nature of the issues he raised directed the discussion; and as the reviewers were required to investigate the subjects themselves using Irving's own language, his views were ultimately presented to a wider reading public.

There is little doubt that Irving's popularity contributed to the dissemination of his message. As one reviewer put it in 1826:

Residing in London, [Irving's] chapel is much frequented by strangers, who, for business or pleasure, pay occasional visits to the metropolis. On returning to their habitations, his person, his manner, his language, his action, *as well as the subject matter of his discourses*, furnish topics of conversation, and elicit a due proportion of censure and applause, just as his sentiments happen to deviate from their preconceived opinions and creeds, or to accord with them.<sup>81</sup>

It has already been shown just how extensive Irving's popularity (or notoriety) was around the country, and as his career progressed, certain views – including attacks on the religious world and prophetic interpretation – became inextricably linked with him in the eyes of the public. As magazines and newspapers across the ideological spectrum published anecdotes of his sermons, reviews of his books, and occasionally his own contributions, Irving's views permeated the reading public's consciousness.

According to most reviewers of *For the Oracles*, what was most novel about Irving's work was his treatment of matters of literary taste that was seen to be improper coming from one preaching the Word of God. As has been noted, in his discussion of God's final judgment Irving was responding to two recent poems occasioned by the death of George III, *A Vision of Judgment* by Robert Southey and a parody of Southey's poem by Byron. Irving also criticised the immorality and sensuality which he claimed was prevailing in literary society due to the writings of such poets as Byron and Thomas Moore.<sup>82</sup> And in another section, Irving praised the poetry of Wordsworth and

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<sup>81</sup> 'Review', *Imperial Magazine*, 853-854 (emphasis added).

<sup>82</sup> Edward Irving, *For the Oracles, Four Orations. For Judgment to Come, an Argument, in Nine Parts*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: T' Hamilton, 1824), 477-478.

defended him against his critics.<sup>83</sup> Irving had made clear his desire to address literary society, but for many of his reviewers, he overstepped the bounds of what was acceptable in a theological treatise. *The Quarterly Review* objected to Irving's discussion of matters of literary taste, as a difference in opinion on these between him and his congregation could open the door to uncertainty regarding points of theological doctrine.<sup>84</sup> Several of the other reviews agreed on this point, with a writer for *Blackwood's* taking the opportunity to attack their rival, claiming that Irving's treatment of poetry suggested he had read nothing but the *Edinburgh Review*.<sup>85</sup> In another article for *Blackwood's*, the reviewer sarcastically opined that Irving's criticism of Southey and Byron was the best part of the book, and that he might have success if he abandoned the biblical exegesis altogether and reviewed Byron's *Don Juan* instead.<sup>86</sup>

But perhaps the most significant point in *For the Oracles* picked up on by reviewers was Irving's attack on people in high places, including the 'imaginative men' and the clergy. 'The writer holds no terms with the enemies of Revelation', stated the Evangelical *Christian Observer*, 'he advances with the port of a man who is ready to measure weapons with them in any field which they may choose, and in full confidence of victory'.<sup>87</sup> Henry Southern, writing for the Benthamite *Westminster Review*, admired Irving's sincerity and zeal, as well as the moral courage he exhibited to stand up to 'the gay, the fashionable, and the selfish' by whom he was surrounded.<sup>88</sup> Southern remarked:

With ministers of state among his auditors, he hesitates not to speak of the excellence of civil liberty, and to refer with evident exultation to the times in our own history when it assumed even an aspect of republicanism. In the presence of literary men of all ranks (whose power either as friends or as enemies, is, at this day, incalculable), he has denounced the allurements of literature, when they would seduce from the paths of religious duty.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Irving, *For the Oracles*, 540-541.

<sup>84</sup> 'Pulpit Eloquence', *Quarterly*, 309.

<sup>85</sup> Mr. Irving', *Blackwood's*, 192.

<sup>86</sup> 'Irving's Orations', *Blackwood's*, 162.

<sup>87</sup> 'Review – Irving's Orations, &c.', *The Christian Observer, Conducted by Members of the Established Church*, 23:8 (August 1823): 491.

<sup>88</sup> [Henry Southern], 'Irving's Orations', *Westminster Review*, 1:1 (January 1824): 30.

<sup>89</sup> [Southern], 'Irving's Orations', 30-31.

Nevertheless, he entreated Irving to refrain from personal attacks which, in his opinion, could produce no beneficial effect.<sup>90</sup> Most reviewers however were much more critical of Irving's condemnation of the clergy. The writer for the *British Review* regretted that these attacks provided the justification for people to blame their teachers rather than themselves.<sup>91</sup>

Extensive responses to Irving's works can be found in the pages of *The Eclectic Review*, which published substantive articles on each of his major publications. The magazine was edited during this time by Josiah Conder, a Congregationalist poet, hymn-writer, and village preacher, who personally penned at least four of the articles on Irving. Like Irving, Conder was firmly convinced that religion and politics were inseparably connected, however they differed entirely in the nature of their politics. As David M. Thompson has illustrated, Conder consistently advocated for religious freedom and the end of church establishment.<sup>92</sup> Upon taking over the editorship of the *Eclectic* in 1814, he adopted a policy of maintaining, rather than concealing, conscientious differences of opinion on religious and political questions,<sup>93</sup> a polemical stance which can be seen in all of the reviews of Irving's works which appeared in the periodical's pages. Taking offense at Irving's criticism of the London religious world in *For the Oracles*, the *Eclectic* admonished him for the petulant, profane, and abusive tone which he displayed in disparaging the Evangelical preachers, claiming that in so doing, Irving was 'siding with the world'.<sup>94</sup> Prompted by Irving's statements, the reviewer disagreed with his characterisation of the religious world: 'We deprecate as warmly as he, finical creeds, scholastic dogmas, cold, barren systems, and meagre orthodoxy. But such is not, we are happy to think, the prevailing character of the day'.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> [Southern], 'Irving's *Orations*', 42.

<sup>91</sup> 'Irving's *Orations*', *The British Review, and London Critical Journal*, 21:42 (November 1823): 275.

<sup>92</sup> David M. Thompson, 'Finding Successors to 'the Poet of the Sanctuary': Josiah Conder in Context', in *Dissenting Praise: Religious Dissent and the Hymn in England and Wales*, eds. Isabel Rivers and David L. Wykes (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2011), 127. DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199545247.001.0001.

<sup>93</sup> Thompson, 'Finding Successors', 130.

<sup>94</sup> 'Irving's *Orations*', *The Eclectic Review*, 20 (September 1823): 207-208.

<sup>95</sup> 'Irving's *Orations*', *Eclectic Review*, 209.

Irving's sermon and subsequent publication on the missionary enterprise produced an understandable reaction from the foreign secretary of the London Missionary Society, William Orme, who responded with a pamphlet taking up Irving's 'challenge'.<sup>96</sup> Orme claimed that Irving misunderstood the supporters of missionary work when they spoke of 'prudence', and further that he misunderstood the very nature of the office of missionary.<sup>97</sup> Irving was accused of misrepresenting the views which he denounced so vehemently regarding the distinction between apostolic times and the present (concerning the continued relevance of Christ's instructions to his apostles), and Orme claimed to disagree with this distinction as decidedly as Irving.<sup>98</sup> Nevertheless, Orme argued that the apostles and prophets *were* eternal, in the form of the writings that they left behind, rather than in any successors who might actively fill their office, and in any case, he pointed out that it was difficult enough to fill the already-existing offices of the church, much less any additional ones.<sup>99</sup> Orme exposed what he saw to be Irving's hypocrisy in enjoying "the fat and convenient things" of the Metropolis of England' even as he disparaged modern missionaries,<sup>100</sup> and he also took significant issue with the rhetoric and tone of Irving's discourse. He regretted Irving's use of 'exaggerated representations of the views of your brethren, the most violent invective against their folly, and the application of the most odious epithets'.<sup>101</sup> 'When a Christian Minister adopts the sneers of the world', Orme lamented, 'and uses the language of taunting and reproach about his brethren, our feelings are not those of indignation and wrath, but of unfeigned sorrow. This is not the voice of Jacob, but the voice of Esau. Woe to the world, because of such stumbling-blocks'.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> William Orme wrote, 'In that book you have thrown down your glove [...]', *An Expostulatory Letter to the Rev. Edward Irving, A. M. Occasioned by his Orations for Missionaries after the Apostolical School* (London: B. J. Holdsworth, 1825), 1.

<sup>97</sup> Orme, *Expostulatory Letter*, 7-8.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*, 10-11.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*, 14, 15.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, 50-51.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*, 22.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*, 48-49.

A more positive response to Irving's discourse on missionaries came in a published letter from Edward Thomas Vaughan, secretary of the Leicester and Leicestershire Church Missionary Society, to Edward Bickersteth, principal secretary of the CMS. In his letter, Vaughan raised his own doubts regarding the lawfulness and expediency of missions, and in the postscript he explicitly acknowledged his debt to Irving's missionary sermon in the development of his thought on this subject. Vaughan credited Irving's missionary orations 'for directing my mind into a more diligent and anxious rumination of the Missionary enterprize than I had ever entertained before', despite his involvement with the CMS for more than twelve years, and he praised Irving's 'apparent integrity, fortitude, and discerning zeal', though he claimed it was the only work by Irving he had read.<sup>103</sup> Significantly, Vaughan appreciated Irving's central message in his discourse: 'How justly and how forcibly does he lift up his voice against this money-craving age! "Missionaries, Missionaries! Money, Money!" as if a cry would create men, and money buy conversions'.<sup>104</sup> In his own analysis of the missionary enterprise, Vaughan criticised the common tendency to measure success by the number of souls saved, and he pointed to recent addresses delivered to the CMS as evidence that they ultimately denied God's grace in their prosecution of the missionary work.<sup>105</sup>

Despite the overt praise for Irving and similarity on several points, Vaughan disagreed with him over the interpretation of certain crucial passages in Matthew and Luke, and he characterised Irving's idealistic missionary as 'an aerial, or an Utopian being'.<sup>106</sup> But more importantly, they differed over the fundamental nature of the missionary and the other church officers; while Irving had argued that the missionary's role was none other than that of the apostle of old, Vaughan claimed that they were in fact fulfilling the office of

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<sup>103</sup> Edward Thomas Vaughan, *A Letter to the Rev. Edward Bickersteth, Principal Secretary of the Church Missionary Society, on the Lawfulness, Expediency, Conduct and Expectation of Missions* (Leicester: T. Combe, 1825), 19.

<sup>104</sup> Vaughan, *Letter to Edward Bickersteth*, 19-20.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid*, 20.

evangelist.<sup>107</sup> This seemingly minor technical point can help to explain Irving's motivation. We have seen that Irving perceived a minister to be carrying out precisely the same function for the Christian dispensation as the Old Testament prophet had for the Jewish one, and consequently he presented himself as such with all the rhetorical trappings. Against this, Vaughan (just like Orme) believed that the offices of apostle and prophet were no longer to be filled by living men but existed 'as dead witnesses speaking in the written word'.<sup>108</sup> From this we can infer that many of Irving's contemporaries were not willing or able to follow him in his interpretation of the minister as prophet.

In his review of Irving's *For Missionaries* in the *Eclectic Review*, Conder noted Irving's criticism of the expediency which he claimed to be prevalent in the religious world, and, significantly, Conder expressed the desire to further press this topic on all those involved in the missionary cause.<sup>109</sup> He took up Irving's discussion regarding the over-emphasis on monetary support for the missionary enterprise, and he conceded an important point: 'What money can do towards the evangelization of the world, has been, we think, over-rated; and expenditure has almost been confounded with success'.<sup>110</sup> In so doing, he used Irving's own words, repeating such phrases as 'Mammon getting the victory' and 'money as the universal cry'.<sup>111</sup> Despite this reserved sympathy for Irving's message, ultimately Conder could not agree with his deprecation of the evangelising missionary or the enterprise itself.<sup>112</sup>

When Irving turned his hand to prophetic exegesis in the mid-1820s, the press was therefore provoked to discuss the subject. A review of *Babylon and Infidelity* appeared in the short-lived *Inspector and Literary Review*, where the author carefully summarised Irving's argument, due to its 'extraordinary pretensions', in order to bring it to the attention of the clergy of the established

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<sup>107</sup> Vaughan, *Letter to Edward Bickersteth*, 20.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>109</sup> [Josiah Conder], 'Irving's Missionary Orations', *The Eclectic Review*, 24 (October 1825): 344-346.

<sup>110</sup> [Conder], 'Irving's Missionary Orations', 345.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*, 349.

church.<sup>113</sup> Conder, writing in the *Eclectic*, also took the opportunity afforded by Irving's book to survey the current state of prophetic studies, including works by J. H. Frere, William Cuninghame, S. R. Maitland, James Haldane Stewart, and James Douglas. While he acknowledged that Irving's book contained 'splendid passages of declamatory and hortatory eloquence', Conder noted that Irving's prophetic scheme was simply borrowed from Frere (in his defence, Irving had freely acknowledged this himself).<sup>114</sup> In a revealing analogy, Irving was said to have sounded a faithful alarm, though there was a crack in his trumpet which gave a harshness to the sound, due to improper and impious phraseology and unsound interpretations, and this harshness would unfortunately detract from the message for those who were in most need of it.<sup>115</sup> In the end, however, Conder criticised these 'Prophets of the Nineteenth Century', as he compared the fashion of prophetic interpretation to astrology; and while he admitted that 'there was no room for self-complacent gratulation' in relation to the present state of society, he denied that 'the prevalence of infidelity' was a distinguishing factor of the times.<sup>116</sup>

Irving's prophetic speculations attracted responses from other millenarian exegetes, including among others Cuninghame, but it is significant that his continued fame brought this topic to the attention of the wider reading public. Following Irving's series of lectures on the prophecies in Edinburgh during the spring of 1828, the *Caledonian Mercury* published a sympathetic article with the aim of enlightening the public on 'this interesting and difficult subject', in addition to 'removing certain unworthy prejudices'.<sup>117</sup> The anonymous author claimed that many of Irving's views were 'deserving of the most serious and sober meditation', and could not 'be disposed of by an infidel's grin or a witling's scoff', providing strong support for the view that

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<sup>113</sup> 'Reviews – Irving's Babylon Foredoomed', *Inspector and Literary Review*, 1:1/6 (May 1826): 253.

<sup>114</sup> [Josiah Conder], 'Irving and others on the Prophecies', *The Eclectic Review*, 27 (March 1827): 191, 195.

<sup>115</sup> [Conder], 'Irving and others' (March 1827), 194.

<sup>116</sup> [Josiah Conder], 'Irving and others on the Prophecies', *The Eclectic Review*, 27 (April 1827): 321, 328, 331, 336.

<sup>117</sup> 'The Reverend Edward Irving', *Caledonian Mercury*, 16662 (9 June 1828): n.p.

Irving's ideas had to be engaged with seriously.<sup>118</sup> As late as 1830, *Babylon and Infidelity* was included in a review of books on the biblical prophecies in an American magazine, the *Christian Examiner and General Review*, though the author again took the liberty to present their own views on the subject, arguing against a literal, historicist interpretation of the apocalypse, rather than engaging directly with the opinions of the authors under review.<sup>119</sup> Even where this was the case, the sheer ubiquity of prophetic speculation, undoubtedly bolstered by Irving's popularity, imposed itself on the reading public through these channels prompting some to engage with it who might not have done so otherwise.

### Social and Political Criticism

Of all Irving's writings, the most sustained and conscious example of his social criticism was contained in *The Last Days* (1828), and like most of his works, it had a mixed reception. It seems that some reviewers were capable of separating Irving's politics from his religion, but in the end they were forced to either agree or disagree with his characterisation of society.

*The Christian Remembrancer* was almost entirely hostile, claiming that Irving seemed 'to riot in the maddest orgies of declamation'.<sup>120</sup> 'His oration wears the aspect of a violent Philippic', the anonymous reviewer continued, 'in which he has summoned his imagination to accumulate upon the devoted head of his victim every possible crimination, without regard to truth, hoping to gain a verdict by the *multiplicity* rather than the *establishment* of his charges, and appealing to the *passions* rather than to the *reason* of his hearers'.<sup>121</sup> The author completely disagreed with Irving's claim that the present time constituted 'the last days' and demanded proof for Irving's 'vehement' and 'bitter' accusations.<sup>122</sup> In a telling passage providing a hint at the possible ways

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<sup>118</sup> 'Edward Irving', *Caledonian Mercury* (9 June 1828).

<sup>119</sup> 'The Apocalypse', *Christian Examiner and General Review*, 8:2 (May 1830).

<sup>120</sup> 'Irving's Discourses on the Last Days', *The Christian Remembrancer, or, The Churchman's Biblical, Ecclesiastical & Literary Miscellany*, 11:2 (February 1829): 70.

<sup>121</sup> 'Irving's Discourses', *Christian Remembrancer*, 70.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid*, 74-75.

in which Irving's work might have been read, the writer admitted, 'we are unable to decide whether his *religious*, or his *political* creed, be most exceptionable'.<sup>123</sup> As several other reviews and reactions show, it seems like Irving's readers were able to separate the religion from the politics and focus on the aspect which interested them more.

A much more positive review appeared in *The Gentleman's Magazine* in December 1828, where the reviewer had nothing but praise for Irving's characterisation of society. In extravagant language, the author claimed 'that the flights of Mr. Irving are the soarings of an eagle; that genius, though eccentric as a meteor, accompanies his progress with a blaze of light', and even that Demosthenes himself might have been proud of certain passages.<sup>124</sup> Irving's book was read by this reviewer as a political work which had exposed 'the latent radicalism which has made the country a powder-mill, and society a heap of combustible materials of which every man may be considered as a particle, ready to ignite with his fellow-particles'.<sup>125</sup> An indication of Irving's continuing fame was also given here, as the author declared society to be obliged to Irving for his exposure of these issues due to the strong influence which was attached to his name.<sup>126</sup>

Another sympathetic review was published in the *Monthly Magazine* in March of the following year, where Irving's social insights were again the main area of agreement. The author did not engage directly with Irving's scriptural interpretations, but rather asserted that the book contained 'matter of great pith and substance' independent of his exegetical theory.<sup>127</sup> This reviewer evidently agreed with Irving's characterisation of the middle classes, 'where', as they seconded, 'if there is more decorum, there is more sordid, grubbing, demoralizing conduct – more vices degrading human qualities, than in any other, high or low', and Irving was praised for the courage to expound these

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<sup>123</sup> 'Irving's *Discourses*', *Christian Remembrancer*, 80 (emphasis in original).

<sup>124</sup> 'Review. – Irving's "Last Days"', *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 98 (December 1828): 605.

<sup>125</sup> 'Review', *Gentleman's Magazine*, 605.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>127</sup> 'Review of *The Last Days, by the Rev. Edward Irving, 1828*', *Monthly Magazine, or, British Register*, 7:39 (March 1829): 310.

views, especially considering the social composition of his congregation.<sup>128</sup> In a passage which illustrates the ways in which Irving could be read, the reviewer gave the following recommendation:

Whatever be the bent or the prejudice of the reader – whether he thinks Mr. Irving a fanatic or a quack – whether he be indisposed to theological reading, or leans to a party, or is bound up with one, or starts free of all – let him, for the sake of the sound stuff, which we assure him he will find, take up this volume of sermons – it will abundantly repay him, if he can be repaid by independence and boldness of conception, by sagacity and depth of remark, by generous and even liberal sentiments, by touches of great moral beauty, by flashes of lofty eloquence, and floods of vigorous writing.<sup>129</sup>

The previous two reviews of *The Last Days* show that to certain audiences Irving could be read solely for the political or social topics he addressed. As debates would rage over Catholic emancipation and parliamentary reform, Irving's negative characterisation of society seemed to have found some sympathetic audiences.

The most substantive of these was Conder's review of Irving's *Last Days*, appearing in January 1829. There Irving's work actually prompted the author to present his own account of the state of society to counteract what he regarded to be Irving's gross misrepresentation. Unlike the others, Conder took issue specifically with Irving's scriptural interpretation, as he rejected Irving's claim that the passage from 2 Timothy referred to the present times, and suggested further that the passage could be applied to almost any era of human history.<sup>130</sup> The most significant aspect of this review though lies in the fact that it was Irving's overly negative characterisation of society that served as a stimulus for the author to put forward his own analysis of the present times. It was true that changes in agriculture, manufacturing, and commerce had contributed to a rise in pauperism, Conder conceded, and this pauperism had combined with popular ignorance and infidelity to create political danger, a lapse in morality, and impediments to the influence of religion.<sup>131</sup> But there were plenty of signs indicating a brighter future for the reviewer, who cited the

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<sup>128</sup> 'Review', *Monthly Magazine*, 310.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> [Josiah Conder], 'Irving's *Last Days*', *The Eclectic Review*, 1 (January 1829): 3.

<sup>131</sup> [Conder], 'Irving's *Last Days*', 21-22.

success of missions around the world, the spread of evangelical truth, and even the increasing proportion of the world's population subject to Protestant governments as evidence of the improving condition of society.<sup>132</sup> Though the conclusions drawn here are significant, what is perhaps more important is the fact that Irving's social criticism (couched in apocalyptic speculation) challenged others to offer alternative views of society and the future.

By 1829, Irving was not just being reviewed and discussed in the periodical press, he was also actively engaging with the debates in the pages of *The Morning Watch*. Growing out of the Albury conferences and edited by a future apostle of the Catholic Apostolic Church, John Tudor, *The Morning Watch* was a quarterly journal dedicated to the study of the biblical prophecies which ran from March 1829 to June 1833. Though Grass asserts that Irving's views should not be equated with the magazine, they were central to it, and he contributed a significant number of articles during its run.<sup>133</sup> As Mark Patterson has pointed out, the *Morning Watch* directed 'blistering and unrelenting criticism' at the wider church and particularly the Evangelicals; in this way it helped to magnify Irving's message.<sup>134</sup>

A review of Irving's *Last Days* appeared in the very first issue of the *Morning Watch* in March 1829. The author there stated that their primary purpose in reviewing this work was to refute the opinions that had been expressed in previous reviews, especially that in the *Eclectic Review* which was examined above. Understandably, the author in the *Morning Watch* believed Irving was correct in his criticism of the characteristics found in the religious world, and they claimed that the violent reaction from the religious world – 'more like that of spoiled children on losing their toys, than men of sense and dignity and right feelings' – proved this to be so.<sup>135</sup> Furthermore, the reviewer used the response from the *Eclectic* as proof of 'the covetousness of the religious world'.<sup>136</sup> After reproducing a passage from the *Eclectic*, the

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<sup>132</sup> [Conder], 'Irving's *Last Days*', 24-28.

<sup>133</sup> Grass, *The Lord's Watchman*, 171.

<sup>134</sup> Mark Rayburn Patterson, *Designing the Last Days: Edward Irving, the Albury Circle, and the Theology of the Morning Watch* (PhD thesis: King's College, London, 2001), 122.

<sup>135</sup> 'Review of Irving on "The Last Days"', *The Morning Watch*, 1:1 (March 1829): 127.

<sup>136</sup> 'Review', *Morning Watch*, 126.

writer for the *Morning Watch* declared, 'Here religion and money are considered as convertible terms; pauperism, and her decline; wealth, and her advance'.<sup>137</sup>

On multiple occasions, *The Morning Post* used Irving's words to make timely polemical points on political debates over Catholic emancipation and the abolition of slavery. Praising Irving for having 'the courage to stand up in the pulpit and expose the ignorance, hypocrisy, and infidelity of the present day', the writer of one article employed Irving's argument on the ultimate kingship of Christ to justify the exclusion of Catholics from public office.<sup>138</sup> Several months later, the same newspaper repeated a passage from *The Last Days*, wherein Irving had argued against the Evangelical effort to abolish slavery. Irving had supported his position by claiming that lordship and servitude were ordained by God, and *The Morning Post* concluded that slavery could be useful for teaching Christian subjection to the will of God.<sup>139</sup> In a response to this from the opposite end of the political spectrum, *The Leicester Chronicle*, borrowing from the *Globe*, attacked this view of Christianity as represented by Irving, which seemed to delight in slavery, and the point was used to illustrate the 'muddle' that is produced 'when politics and mysticism are mixed up'.<sup>140</sup> In another significant interpretation of Irving's political views, the same author pointed out that Irving's Christianity had 'a particular enmity to political economy (not only to a particular system, but to the study altogether) – that is, to the study of the means by which the poor can be clothed and the hungry fed'.<sup>141</sup>

### The 'Inspired' Prophet

As we have seen, not only were Irving's books read and reviewed, but his ideas were transmitted whether they were agreed to or not. His attempts at

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<sup>137</sup> 'Review', *Morning Watch*, 126.

<sup>138</sup> 'Popery', *The Morning Post*, 18159 (24 February 1829): n.p.

<sup>139</sup> 'The Rev. Edward Irving and Slavery', *The Morning Post*, 18382 (11 November 1829): n.p.

<sup>140</sup> 'Rev. Edward Irving', *The Leicester Chronicle*, 983 (14 November 1829): n.p.

<sup>141</sup> 'Edward Irving', *Leicester Chronicle*.

public prophecy – in the form of the *Pastoral Letter*, *Apology*, and *Letter to the King* – were noticed in the press as well, and in this final section it will be shown how an image of Irving as an ‘inspired’ prophet was explicitly discussed by his contemporaries.

Commenting on the *Pastoral Letter*, a reviewer for *The Baptist Magazine* approved of Irving’s reproof of the ‘worldliness and infidelity’ among the ‘the children of the Scottish Church’, and they suggested that other ministers should follow Irving’s example as there were surely sins in their own denominations as well.<sup>142</sup> Due to the nature of the text, the *Pastoral Letter* seems also to have reignited an English indignation at being preached to by a Scottish minister which had been evident from the earliest days of Irving’s London popularity. Criticising the *Pastoral Letter* for its sectarian spirit and lack of conciliation, the writer for *The Evangelical Magazine* also testified to the influence Irving was exerting on the Presbytery of London, regretting that this seemed to be leading to ‘a state of distance and hostility’.<sup>143</sup> But more importantly, the somewhat precarious nature of Irving’s position in London was raised yet again, as it was pointed out that the Presbyterians themselves were Dissenters by law in England.<sup>144</sup>

This sentiment was repeated more forcefully in Josiah Conder’s review of Irving’s *Letter to the King*, in which he strongly criticised Irving’s statements regarding the Dissenters and their relation to the Test and Corporation Acts.<sup>145</sup> Having discarded ‘the Gospel for the prophecies, and the prophecies for politics’, Conder claimed that Irving was ‘following what he imagines to be ‘light from heaven’’, however he stated that the King would be too well-informed to believe Irving’s assertions.<sup>146</sup> In response to Irving’s claim to be an ordained minister in the church, Conder declared boldly, ‘No, Mr. Irving, you are not a Minister of *the* Church. The Church by your own shewing, is the Episcopal

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<sup>142</sup> ‘Review’, *The Baptist Magazine* (July 1828): 309.

<sup>143</sup> ‘Review of Religious Publications’, *The Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle*, 6 (January 1828): 147-148.

<sup>144</sup> ‘Review’, *Evangelical Magazine* (January 1828), 147-148.

<sup>145</sup> [Josiah Conder], ‘Irving’s *Letter to the King*’, *The Eclectic Review*, 29 (June 1828): 571-572.

<sup>146</sup> [Conder], ‘Irving’s *Letter to the King*’, 570.

Church of England, of which the King's most excellent Majesty is the visible Head [...] You are a Dissenter, preaching in a licensed chapel, indebted to the Toleration Act for your liberty of prophesying'.<sup>147</sup> This sentiment strikes at the heart of Irving's status as a Church of Scotland minister in the British metropolis, an issue which, as we have seen, was being discussed from the earliest days of his popularity in London.

The reviewer of the same text for the Dissenting *Evangelical Magazine* understandably argued that the Dissenters deserved toleration, and Irving was consequently portrayed as being behind the times: 'The predictive, lordly, and fanatical spirit which pervades every page of this reckless production, reminds us of some of the worst specimens of the Commonwealth'.<sup>148</sup> Elsewhere, it was claimed that the opinions Irving expressed were 'only fit for the middle ages; they have no warrant in the free and tolerant spirit of the British constitution'.<sup>149</sup> 'It is too late in the day', concluded the *Evangelical*, 'for Mr. Irving to attempt to stay the resistless current of public opinion. By other and milder measures must churchmen, in our day, expect to retain their hold of a nation's affections'.<sup>150</sup> In another review of Irving's *Letter to the King*, the Radical *Examiner* dismissed him entirely by placing him in the company of 'Learned Pigs, Literary Canary-birds, Fire-eaters, and other shilling-marvels'.<sup>151</sup> In the end, the attention paid to Irving was justified as he was seen to be an extreme case of those fanatics 'who, in the name of God, would make earth a hell'.<sup>152</sup>

But even more important than Irving's views and the language he used to express them was the way in which he went about doing so. As early as August 1823, a largely positive review of Irving's *For the Oracles* in the *London Magazine* captured his self-portrayal as a prophet. 'He considers himself', the reviewer wrote, 'in some degree, like John the Baptist, sent to call the great

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<sup>147</sup> [Conder], 'Irving's *Letter to the King*', 574.

<sup>148</sup> 'Review of Religious Publications', *The Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle*, 6 (June 1828): 245.

<sup>149</sup> 'Review', *Evangelical Magazine* (June 1828), 246.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> 'The Rev. Edward Irving's *Letter to the King*', *The Examiner*, 1065 (29 June 1828): 418.

<sup>152</sup> 'Irving's *Letter to the King*', *Examiner* (29 June 1828), 418.

people of a great city to repentance'.<sup>153</sup> His discourses were said to have encouraged this idea, and his lofty look, stern voice, severe character, and strong language were all listed as contributing to the impression.<sup>154</sup> Varying the metaphor, Henry Southern from the *Westminster* likened Irving's criticism of the political and literary elites to the apostle Paul's fearless preaching to 'the heathens and sceptics of Athens'.<sup>155</sup> In its review of *The Last Days*, the *Monthly Magazine* perfectly encapsulated Irving's prophetic mission:

Worldliness is the game he delights to hunt down – and he detects it especially among religionists and the clergy; and without mercy lays bare profession and ostentation wherever he finds them – assumption, pretension, thirst for gain, and selfishness – and a rich harvest he gathers, in the city and the court – the church and the chapel.<sup>156</sup>

We have seen in the previous chapter that Irving consciously cultivated this character of the prophet for nineteenth-century Britain, and it is clear that this was being picked up on by some of the reviewers and commentators.

Irving's attacks were impossible to miss, but reviewers were also quick to recognise the air of authority which he assumed in his criticism of society. In its review of *For the Oracles*, the *Eclectic* noted, to the detriment of the work, 'the assumption of almost inspired authority in his denunciations and anathemas, which nothing short of inspiration can justify'.<sup>157</sup> This sentiment was repeated in *The Christian Observer*, where it was remarked that 'the more prevailing tone [in *For the Oracles*] is that of authority, and superiority, and self-confidence; of a spirit which brooks not submission and almost claims infallibility, and which looks down from too high an elevation upon the world beneath him'.<sup>158</sup> In a review of *Babylon and Infidelity* in *The Baptist Magazine*, the writer overlooked objections to Irving's prophetic theory but protested at the manner in which he expressed his speculations, noting 'the tone of arrogance and supercilious contempt of others, which pervades the entire

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<sup>153</sup> 'Orations, &c. by the Rev. Edward Irving', *London Magazine*, 8 (August 1823): 187.

<sup>154</sup> 'Orations', *London Magazine*, 187.

<sup>155</sup> [Southern], 'Irving's Orations', 31.

<sup>156</sup> 'Review', *Monthly Magazine*, 310.

<sup>157</sup> 'Irving's Orations', *Eclectic Review*, 210.

<sup>158</sup> 'Rev. of – Irving's Orations, &c.', *The Christian Observer, Conducted by Members of the Established Church*, 23:9 (September 1823): 581.

production'.<sup>159</sup> 'Mr. I. assumes, throughout these volumes', the reviewer observed, 'the demeanour and authority of one commissioned from above, and scatters abroad his denunciations, and announces his predictions, *as if he were, indeed, a prophet*'.<sup>160</sup> A slightly more sympathetic reviewer complained that Irving 'occasionally half seats himself in the prophetic chair, and delivers his conclusions in the suburbs of infallibility'.<sup>161</sup> Conder asserted that in *Babylon and Infidelity*, Irving 'not only professes to have deciphered the scroll of prophecy, but would seem to have seized upon the Apocalyptic trumpet, and to have merged the feelings of a man in the stern commission of a destroying angel'.<sup>162</sup> And in his review of *The Last Days*, Conder casually (and sarcastically) referred to Irving as 'the inspired Prophet'.<sup>163</sup>

Perhaps the clearest example of the recognition (and criticism) of Irving's self-assumed prophetic role is found in the review of Irving's apology for the Church of Scotland in *The Evangelical Magazine*. Summing up the published version of Irving's sermon preached on the fast day held for the Church of Scotland in London, the author wrote:

It breathes all the authority of an inspired prophet; it employs the style of address peculiar to the Scottish covenanters in the days of the SECOND CHARLES; it pours forth the anguish of a mind that sees nothing but moral desolation surrounding it; it abounds in the language of censure, threatening, and awful denunciation; it speaks of the Kirk of Scotland in terms which indicate its utter ruin and apostacy.<sup>164</sup>

Again in the *Evangelical*, this time in its review of *The Last Days*, Irving was accused of harbouring loftier pretensions than even the Archbishop of Canterbury.<sup>165</sup> 'Who made Mr. I. a judge over his brethren?' the reviewer remarked, 'Without the credentials of an apostle, he assumes more than all the authority of one; yea more, he interferes with the prerogatives of Omniscience'.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> 'Review', *The Baptist Magazine* (July 1826): 319.

<sup>160</sup> 'Review', *Baptist Magazine* (July 1826), 319 (emphasis added).

<sup>161</sup> 'Review', *Imperial Magazine*, 854.

<sup>162</sup> [Conder], 'Irving and others' (March 1827), 191.

<sup>163</sup> [Conder], 'Irving's *Last Days*', 1.

<sup>164</sup> 'Review', *Evangelical Magazine* (January 1828), 149.

<sup>165</sup> 'Review of Religious Publications', *The Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle*, 6 (Supplement for the year 1828): 569.

<sup>166</sup> 'Review', *Evangelical Magazine* (1828), 571.

Even within the pages of *The Morning Watch*, there seems to have been a lack of enthusiasm for Irving's attempt to read the signs of the times as a self-styled prophet. Though it was conceded 'that an inaptitude to read the signs of the present day arises entirely from the low state of faith into which the church has fallen', the writer for the *Morning Watch* stated that '[t]he signs of the times is the very last point to which we should wish to direct the attention of any student of prophecy'.<sup>167</sup> Had it not been for the previous unacceptable reviews (to the minds of the Albury group) in the *Eclectic* and *Evangelical Magazine*, it was admitted that Irving's *Last Days* would not even have been reviewed in the first number of the new periodical.<sup>168</sup> This was because, according to the reviewer, a work intended to explicate the signs of the times is liable to be misunderstood by the ignorant and misrepresented by those who are both ignorant and dishonest, in addition to the fact that individuals who had previously tried to warn of the impending last days have often been treated as the boy who cried 'wolf'.<sup>169</sup> The article in the *Morning Watch* stated what was, according to Paterson, the standard view of the Albury group regarding proof respecting the end of the Christian dispensation: that it must be derived from chronology, 'the accomplishment of predictions', and finally the signs of the times.<sup>170</sup> As each of these are disputable on their own, reliance on any one of them while neglecting the other two 'can only lead to error'.<sup>171</sup> Crucially for the reviewer, it was claimed that Irving's work on the signs of the times (*The Last Days*) should not be treated in isolation, as he had actually provided proofs from chronology and the discursive prophecies in some of his other works.<sup>172</sup> Therefore, according to the *Morning Watch*, 'the present work is to be regarded merely as a supplement to his former works, necessary indeed to complete a perfect view of the whole subject, but in itself immaterial, or at least deriving its greatest value from its relative position to them'.<sup>173</sup> The conclusion drawn here

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<sup>167</sup> 'Review', *Morning Watch*, 116.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid*, 116-117.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid*, 116.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid*, 123.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid*.

by someone who would have shared many of Irving's millenarian views is significant: reading the signs of the times and putting these before society in the manner of the Old Testament prophet was not sufficient; it was only in reference to his earlier scriptural exegesis that this pursuit had value.

The assumption of inspired authority and prophetic denunciations contributed to a public image of Irving as a doomsayer and destroyer which began to border on the ridiculous. In his 1824 review, Hazlitt had claimed that Irving kept the public in awe by levelling 'their resorts of business, their places of amusement, at a blow – cities, churches, palaces, ranks and professions, arts and elegances – and leaves nothing standing but himself, a mighty landmark in a degenerate age'.<sup>174</sup> After making war on all arts, sciences, institutions, and improvements, Hazlitt asserted that '[h]e literally sends a challenge to all London in the name of the KING of HEAVEN to evacuate its streets, to disperse its population, to lay aside its employments, to burn its wealth, to renounce its vanities and pomp; and for what? – that he may enter in crowned with *glory*'.<sup>175</sup> In an argument against the Calvinist doctrine of eternal punishment in *The Examiner* for March 1829, the writer imagined an hypothetical scenario in which Irving was a mile high instead of his usual 6'3": 'Heavens! how he would stalk along, the terror of unbelievers, a monster of self-styled godliness: – how he would lay about him right and left, what havoc he would make among Catholics and Unitarians, trampling them into the earth or throwing them into the sea, so that not a single trace of them would be left'.<sup>176</sup> The author argued to the contrary however, that it was 'the sense of the disproportion between the sphere of his power and the strength of his will, that swells him up with mortified vanity and spiritual pride, that kindles his rage and impatience nearly to phrenzy, and vents itself in the most shocking denunciations against the present and future welfare of all those who differ from him in the slightest manner'.<sup>177</sup> What is most significant here is that the article is not primarily about Irving, rather, it can be assumed, that he was just

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<sup>174</sup> [Hazlitt], 'Spirits of the Age', 189-190.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid*, 190.

<sup>176</sup> 'The Reverend Edward Irving', *The Examiner*, 1104 (29 March 1829): n.p.

<sup>177</sup> 'Edward Irving', *Examiner* (29 March 1829).

being used as an extravagant example which would have been familiar to all readers.

In the early 1830s, when the ‘tongues’ were a topic of intense public discussion and Irving’s troubles with the Church were consistently in the news, this image descended even further to the level of caricature. This is represented by several satirical poems published in *Bell’s Life in London* in 1832-3 which will further show just how familiar Irving’s prophetic language and style were to the reading public of the time. It will be recalled that during the summer of 1832 Irving preached in the streets of London on numerous occasions after he was expelled from the National Scotch Church. Following one of these sermons in May of that year, in which he had directly addressed a crowd of Jewish people as they were going to worship, an ‘Admonitory Ode’ was published in *Bell’s Life in London*, said to be from the pen of the banker and financier Nathan Rothschild, warning Irving not to preach to the Jews.<sup>178</sup> In a response published a week later, ‘Irving’ pointed out that he had only been trying to save ‘Rothschild’ and the Jews, while employing some of his characteristic language in his denunciation:

Oh Rothschild! I again aver  
Thou art a Mammon worshipper  
[...]  
But I proclaim, thou man of cash,  
Although you now may deem it trash,  
That Settling Day will come!<sup>179</sup>

Setting aside the tropes which would be considered anti-Semitic today, these articles demonstrate just how far the familiarity with Irving’s style and ‘message’ had permeated the public consciousness of the time. In one final example published shortly after Irving’s trial in Annan, ‘Irving’ angrily denounced the Presbytery of Annan as ‘persecutors of the earth’ and expressed his preference for using ‘[t]he argument *ad fistem*’ on the presbyters.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> ‘Admonitory Ode from Mr. Rothschild to the Rev. Edward Irving’, *Bell’s Life in London and Sporting Chronicle*, 362 (10 June 1832): n.p.

<sup>179</sup> ‘Ode of Rejoinder from the Rev. Edward Irving to N. M. Rothschild’, *Bell’s Life in London and Sporting Chronicle*, 363 (17 June 1832): n.p.

<sup>180</sup> ‘The Groans of the Rev. Edward Irving’, *Bell’s Life in London and Sporting Chronicle*, 551 (31 March 1833): n.p.

After his death, an image of Irving as a tragic figure developed among those mainstream observers who were largely sympathetic but could not follow his eccentricities. In his funeral sermon for Irving, John Cumming expressed this view in poetic language: 'Like the eagle, he soared too near the sun, and was struck blind'.<sup>181</sup> Over a decade later, a memorial was published in the *English Presbyterian Messenger* written by the Rev. James Hamilton, for whom Irving was nothing short of a doomed prophet. Hamilton claimed that Irving had 'squandered his brave thoughts and burning words on the most ordinary occasions, and in the midst of the littlest men'; this was not his fault however, but rather the world's, for not being 'the thing of wonder, and nobility, and delight, which his creative eye beheld it'.<sup>182</sup> As will be seen, this view was reminiscent of Carlyle's eulogy, as Hamilton asserted that Irving's 'noble nature was frustrated at last [...] his burning and shining light felt the lurid obscuration of bewildering fog'.<sup>183</sup> But he retained high praise for Irving, as he wrote, 'It is our deliberate conviction then, that few have – in these last times – more marvellously united the pastor and the prophet'.<sup>184</sup> Hamilton continued:

If to speak what a man believes to be truth, in the name of the Lord, without fear or favour, make a man a prophet – if to rear a fence of stately protection round any assaulted doctrine, expounding it, so as to make it divinely self-commanding, or attiring it in such glories of noble thought and feeling, as to draw towards it the reverential regards of passers-by – if this be – in any Bible sense – to prophecy, he was a prophet indeed.<sup>185</sup>

His conclusion provides the best evidence yet of the public perception of Irving's self-assumed prophetic role: 'His presence was like Elijah's in the land of Israel, a protest against prevailing sins; and like every protest in Jehovah's name, it carried a sanction and diffused an awe. And here lay his moral greatness. He[re] was the thing which truly made him a "hero"'.<sup>186</sup> This heartfelt reminiscence of Irving was reprinted across Scotland, including as far away as John o'Groat, suggesting a belated sympathy for Irving despite the

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<sup>181</sup> Cumming, 'The Moral Influence', 546.

<sup>182</sup> James Hamilton, 'Sketch of Edward Irving', reprinted in *John O'Groat Journal, and Weekly Advertiser for Caithness, Sutherland, Ross, Orkney, and Zetland*, 451 (4 July 1845): 4.

<sup>183</sup> Hamilton, 'Sketch of Edward Irving', 4.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*

numerous vicious attacks during his lifetime. In a note preceding the inclusion of Hamilton's article, the editor for the *Dumfries and Galloway Standard and Advertiser* admitted an admiration for Irving notwithstanding his 'aberrations' and lamented the fact that 'some of his works, untainted by his errors, and capable of expanding the mind by the most sublime conceptions, have already sunk into comparative neglect'.<sup>187</sup>

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From the initial stir caused by Irving's early preaching in London and first major publication, he remained in the papers and the public eye throughout the remainder of his life. His physical features and pulpit oratory were extensively discussed, and even the fact of his popularity itself provoked fierce debate during his first few years in London. His major publications solicited reviews in the magazines and several direct responses, wherein his religious criticism was commented upon as well as his social and political views. Furthermore, some of the crucial factors which contributed to his self-portrayal as a prophet, including his idealistic conception of the minister as a New Testament prophet and his pre-millenarian views founded on his reading of the signs of the times, were observed to be somewhat unique by his contemporaries, and his situation as a Scottish preacher in London placed him in the position of a relative outsider. But most importantly, these commentators picked up on (and often criticised) the air of prophetic inspiration with which he denounced society, and this ultimately contributed to a familiar image of Irving as a violent doomsayer. In the final chapter, I will argue that in addition to his views and prophetic rhetoric, this public perception of Irving must be taken into account to understand the development of the 'Victorian prophet', especially considering Thomas Carlyle's public comments on Irving in the late 1820s and early 1830s.

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<sup>187</sup> 'The Late Rev. Edward Irving', *Dumfries and Galloway Standard and Advertiser*, 23 (2 July 1845): 1.



## The Making of the 'Victorian Prophet'

Edward Irving's influence extended further, albeit in a diluted and somewhat altered form, than the tight-knit group of millenarian speculators, his general popularity, and the more-or-less hostile literary reviewers for the periodical press. It will be recalled from the first chapter that the 'constitutional crisis' of 1828-32 spawned a host of competing interpretations of the changes affecting British society, and we have seen how prominently Irving communicated his message during this period. It is argued here that the texts by Robert Southey, John Sterling, and John Stuart Mill already examined should be read in some ways as reactions to Irving's prophetic message as they sought to establish competing claims to authority. And it was within this context that Carlyle, in 'Signs of the Times' (seen as the foundational text of the Victorian prophetic genre) and other early essays, sought to reinterpret the significance of Irving's life and career as he worked out his own prophetic position in relation to Irving. Given this, it is significant that Carlyle's later diagnosis of the age (taken primarily from *Past and Present* and *Latter-Day Pamphlets*) and the language and rhetoric he used to express it shared many similarities with Irving, though they differed fundamentally on the cure, as Irving attempted to bring Britain back to God while Carlyle sought salvation beyond orthodox Christianity. Despite their differences, it seems that Carlyle and Irving shared a very similar style which was passed on, through the influence of Carlyle, to the later Victorian prophets, an example of which can be seen briefly in the work of John Ruskin.

### Competing 'Readings' of the Times

As we have seen in the previous chapter, Irving remained in the public eye long after his initial popularity in London. His texts as a 'public prophet', especially his *Letter to the King* wherein he vehemently opposed the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, received scathing criticism, particularly due to

his assumption of 'inspired' authority. In the following years, he publicly weighed in on Catholic emancipation and petitioned the government on a set of 'godly' reforms; when parliamentary reform passed in 1832, Irving was preaching in the streets of London and had become a familiar caricature. As will be shown below, Southey, Sterling, and Mill were aware of Irving and his work to varying degrees, and in this way, they can be interpreted as competing with him in their attempts to understand the changes taking place in their society.

It will be recalled that Robert Southey's *Colloquies* of 1829 was understood as his intervention in the debate over Catholic emancipation. Considering this, his choice of Thomas More for his narrator's interlocutor was no accident; as a Catholic who was beheaded under Henry VIII for refusing to acquiesce in the king's assumed authority over the Church, he brought a peculiar perspective to the nineteenth-century debate over Catholic emancipation and ultimately Britain's identity as a Protestant nation. When More first appeared to Montesinos, he made it clear that it was due to his experience during the dawn of the Protestant Reformation that he had wisdom to bring to the nineteenth century. As he proclaimed, 'By comparing the great operating causes in the age of the Reformation, and in this age of revolutions, going back to the former age, looking at things as I then beheld them, perceiving wherein I judged rightly, and wherein I erred, and tracing the progress of those causes which are now developing their whole tremendous power, you will derive instruction'.<sup>1</sup> This quotation also hints at the notion that there were causal links between the Reformation and the upheavals of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a view which is provided more evidence throughout their conversation.

When Montesinos argued for the beneficial effects of the Reformation, More justified the position he took in life:

I resisted opinions which in their sure consequences led to anarchy in all things, tending not only to overthrow the foundations of authority both in church and state, and thus to the destruction of all government and order, but to subvert the moral law, and dethrone conscience from its seat in the

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Southey, *Sir Thomas More: Or Colloquies on the Progress and Prospects of Society*, (London: John Murray, 1829), Vol. I, 19.

heart of man. The evil which I apprehended came to pass. That I did not with the same perspicuity foresee the eventual good, was because it was less certain, and more remote.<sup>2</sup>

Though he acknowledged that 'the Protestants brought back a corrupted faith to its primitive purity', the problem for More was that the Reformation 'lowered the standard of devotion, lessened the influence of religion not among the poor and ignorant alone, but among all classes; and prepared the way for the uncontrolled dominion of that worldly spirit which it is the tendency of the commercial system to produce and foster'.<sup>3</sup> While the principle of monasticism was at least recognised, More argued, 'Mammon can never acquire that undisputed and acknowledged supremacy which he seems to have obtained in commercial countries, and in no country more decidedly than in this'.<sup>4</sup> In reference to a group of Indian warriors whose deity supposedly was named 'All-Steel', More bitterly observed, 'Commercial nations, if they acknowledged the deity whom they serve, might call him All-Gold'.<sup>5</sup> Thus the Protestant Reformation had weakened faith which allowed for the usurpation of Christianity by commercial greed. Unsurprisingly considering their friendship, this view is very similar to that which we have seen presented in Coleridge's *Lay Sermon* of 1817, in which he argued that religion no longer served as an effective counter to check the commercial spirit.

This deterioration of faith was the cause for More of Britain's social problems in the nineteenth century. 'It is certain', he declared, 'that all the evils in society arise from want of faith in God, and of obedience to his laws; and it is not less certain that by the prevalence of a lively and efficient belief, they would all be cured'.<sup>6</sup> Religion was 'the basis upon which civil government rests,.. that from religion power derives its authority, laws their efficacy, and both their seal and sanction'.<sup>7</sup> Thus it was both 'for the security of the state' and 'for the welfare of the people' that he argued for the necessity of an

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<sup>2</sup> Southey, *Colloquies*, Vol. II, 40.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, Vol. I, 154.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 158.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 169.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 228.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, Vol. II, 47.

established religion and church.<sup>8</sup> This point was brought up in a discussion between the two regarding the threats the Church of England faced. Montesinos claimed that the establishment was in danger from ‘the combined forces of Popery, Dissent, and Unbelief, fighting under a political flag’.<sup>9</sup> He argued that Dissenters were political as well as religious schismatics, who actively work against the country.<sup>10</sup> As the two traced the history of Dissent in England, they agreed that Protestantism had been seriously injured thereby, especially from the English Puritans.<sup>11</sup> Montesinos accounted for the recent success of the Methodists in the cities and manufacturing districts by blaming government inaction in not providing religious instruction for a growing and changing population.<sup>12</sup> As for the Catholic priests, he felt comfortable ‘condemning them as a body’ for the condition of Ireland, when they, more than anyone else, could have brought improvement to the Irish people instead of encouraging political insubordination.<sup>13</sup> Unbelief, or infidelity, More suggested, became more sinister in Protestant countries, where it declares itself openly, while in Catholic countries it pays lip-service at least to the establishment.<sup>14</sup> Where before it only signified disbelief in religion, it had come to mean hatred of religion and worked alongside Dissent and Popery to bring down the established Church.<sup>15</sup> According to Montesinos, these three phenomena had joined forces, each pursuing their own designs, to bring about Catholic emancipation, which he declared would lead unquestionably to the destruction of the Anglican Church.<sup>16</sup>

Throughout the *Colloquies*, Thomas More was used by Southey as a prophetic figure, granted not with supernatural knowledge *per se*, but with a privileged perspective. When More first appeared to Montesinos, he admitted that he could not see the future; but, being dead, he had ‘a clearer and more

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<sup>8</sup> Southey, *Colloquies*, Vol. II, 47.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, 43.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 44-45.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 49.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 64.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, Vol. I, 290.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 260.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, Vol. II, 90.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 125-126.

comprehensive knowledge of the past' which enabled him 'to reason better from causes to consequences, and by what has been, to judge of what is likely to be'.<sup>17</sup> The conclusion regarding the present state of society to which More came was delivered in the language of an Old Testament prophet:

The root of all your evils is in the sinfulness of the nation. The principle of duty is weakened among you; that of moral obligation is loosened; that of religious obedience is destroyed. Look at the worldliness of all classes,.. the greediness of the rich,.. the misery of the poor,.. and the appalling depravity which is spreading among the lower classes through town and country;.. a depravity which proceeds unchecked because of the total want of discipline.<sup>18</sup>

More warned of destructive conflicts between impiety and religion, Popery and Protestantism, and the feudal system and democracy.<sup>19</sup> These would be manifested throughout Europe, but Britain faced a fourth danger, from the growth of its manufacturing system.<sup>20</sup> The role of Montesinos is best understood in his response to this, where he highlighted the signs for hope. He pointed out that old cruel laws were being repealed, the slave trade had ended, and missionaries were spreading the Gospel around the world; literature was being diffused to the lower classes who could benefit from its humanising effects; and the press, despite its problems, was holding public officials accountable, while the government and the higher classes concerned themselves with alleviating the condition of the poor.<sup>21</sup>

It will be noted that some of the views expressed and language used here are very similar to those being publicised at the very same time by Irving, but there is further evidence of Southey's familiarity with the recent phenomenon of apocalyptic speculation which Irving was bringing to the public consciousness. A discussion between Montesinos and More on the progressive improvement of society led inexorably to a question regarding the apocalypse. Montesinos expressed his scepticism of the entire Book of Revelations; More agreed with him for the most part, pointing out that the speedy fulfilment of the apocalyptic prophecies 'has been the ruling fancy of

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<sup>17</sup> Southey, *Colloquies*, Vol. II, 17-18.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 417.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 413-414.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 415.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 418-422.

the most dangerous of all madmen', including even among 'the blockheads of your own days, who beheld with complacency the crimes of the French Revolutionists, and the progress of Buonaparte towards the subjugation of Europe, as events tending to bring about the prophecies'.<sup>22</sup> This point is certainly significant as Southey still struggled with his earlier Radical (and pro-revolutionary) reputation. More continued in this vein:

But you who neither seek to deceive others nor yourself,.. you who are neither insane nor insincere,.. you surely do not expect that the Millennium is to be brought about by the triumph of what are called liberal opinions; nor by enabling the whole of the lower classes to read the incentives to vice, impiety and rebellion, which are prepared for them by an unlicensed press, nor by Sunday Schools, and Religious Tract Societies; nor by the portentous bibliolatry of the age!<sup>23</sup>

More's condemnation here was directed exclusively at the liberal and Evangelical post-millenarians who looked forward to the steady improvement of society (Carlyle would express similar sentiments in his 'Signs of the Times'). Montesinos however could not acquiesce, and again he dismissed the apocalyptic visions, claiming that the coming of Antichrist was 'no longer a received opinion in these days'.<sup>24</sup> 'Your reasoning', he concluded, 'applies to the enthusiastic Millenarians who discover the number of the Beast, and calculate the year when a Vial is to be poured out, with as much precision as the day and hour of an eclipse'.<sup>25</sup> Of course, Edward Irving was not the only such millenarian calculating the dates of the end times, but as has been shown, he was significantly influential in popularising the phenomenon around the country during this period. By dismissing these enthusiasts, Southey was preparing the way for his own interpretation of the times.

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One of the primary concerns for John Sterling in his series of articles in the *Athenaeum* was also the state of religion in the country, and he seemed to

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<sup>22</sup> Southey, *Colloquies*, Vol. I, 34-35.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 35.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 36.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*.

suggest that the religious spirit of society had outgrown its old forms. In the first article, Sterling had Elbert visit the ruin of Netley Abbey in Hampshire, where he meditated among the broken remains of an overgrown institution. For Elbert, the ruined walls of the abbey still visible represented the outward forms and symbols of the various religious affiliations and sects, to which people were often assigned from childhood, while the ivy growing over it all was representative of the underlying faith supporting these forms and giving them their power.<sup>26</sup> His peaceful meditation in a monument to a bygone belief system is contrasted vividly with his experience in St. Paul's, the heart of Anglican England.

Elbert recognised immediately that the cathedral was a show of strength and power, but he claimed simply that 'there is nothing of religion' within it; it was, as he called it, 'of the earth, earthy'.<sup>27</sup> He continued: 'it is an exchange, a showroom, a promenade – any thing but a temple'.<sup>28</sup> When he climbed outside to take in all of London, his condemnation was sweeping:

I am now standing on a building, which proclaims to every eye in the capital of England the nominal supremacy of Christianity; yet nine in ten of its inhabitants never turn a thought towards the benevolence and piety of Christ, while the majority of the remainder, with all the phrases ready in their mouths, which make their speech a confused jargon of worldliness and religion, yet feel, it is to be feared, no whit of love to God or man, but angrily cling to their sect, and idolatrously bow to some lifeless creed.<sup>29</sup>

The other churches scattered around the city he referred to as 'mere husks and shadows of devotion [...] empty pretences, and solemn mockeries'.<sup>30</sup> Acknowledging what he recognised to be the true idol of the time, he declared, 'we see little but the wide-spread collection of vulgar desires and fierce passions, – the size of Mammon's temple, and the number of his

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<sup>26</sup> [John Sterling], 'Unpublished Fragments. (From the Travels of Theodore Elbert, a young Swede.) No. I. – A Meditation at Netley Abbey', *The Athenaeum. London Literary and Critical Journal*, 25 (18 April 1828): 393.

<sup>27</sup> [John Sterling], 'Unpublished Fragments (From the Travels of Theodore Elbert, a young Swede.) No. II. – London', *The Athenaeum. London Literary and Critical Journal*, 27 (30 April 1828): 423.

<sup>28</sup> [Sterling], 'London', 423.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

worshippers'.<sup>31</sup> Here we have a striking criticism of Britain to which Irving would have readily assented.

Religion had become nothing but lip-service according to Sterling's mouthpiece Elbert, and he posed a thought-provoking challenge to his society. It is worth quoting the passage in full:

Alas! if Jesus Christ were again to come on earth, as before, in humility and poverty, and were to lift up his voice in the streets of London, as in those of Jerusalem, he would scarce have less to reprove, and would scarce be more earnestly listened to. Would not the rich pass by the houseless wanderer with self-complacent scorn, or the rabble look with indifference or mockery on one whose garments were no gayer than their own, and who yet would tell them, in authoritative accents, of justice, and truth, and mercy? The professed successors of Christ's apostles would invoke the law against a low-born teacher; the doors of this temple would be closed against him, if he came without a fee; and all the sects of England would be ready to cry out, 'Away with him, away with him!' because he would establish no empty forms, consecrate no mere words, dictate no creed, and teach without a catechism.<sup>32</sup>

Thus, in the eyes of Sterling, worldliness and greed had completely replaced any hint of Christian feeling. As has been shown, this was precisely the same sentiment being expressed, with some variations, by Coleridge and Chalmers as well as Irving and later Carlyle.

Improvement was possible on Sterling's view, but first a reformation of the national consciousness was necessary. As Elbert looked over London, he reckoned that there were 'hundreds, at least, of expansive hearts and searching intellects, not indeed arrived at clear satisfaction, yet stirred by the prompting consciousness that there is a higher aim of being than the outward world or our senses and passions can furnish'.<sup>33</sup> But more hopeful yet, 'dwelling upon that dim eminence which rises in the distance', with a 'great and circular mind', was Coleridge, 'the brave, the charitable, the gentle, the pious, the mighty philosopher, the glorious poet'.<sup>34</sup> A change of institutions was indeed necessary, acknowledged Sterling, but this could only be brought about

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<sup>31</sup> [Sterling], 'London', 423.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 423-424.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 423.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*.

by 'an alteration in the mind of the country'.<sup>35</sup> And for this to happen, he argued that the people must listen to those with the wisdom and authority to teach:

To this reform of thought and feeling, it is not likely that England will arrive, until she has been taught by much sorrow, been disciplined into wisdom by suffering, and learnt to listen to the voices of the teachers, of such men as Wordsworth and Coleridge, and, in another way, Chalmers, who for years have been speaking to those that will not hear, and uttering truth to those that will not understand.<sup>36</sup>

As a youthful example of social criticism, Sterling here has positioned himself as a disciple to the 'prophets' Coleridge and, to a lesser extent, Chalmers (who were 'uttering truth to those that will not understand'), coincidentally two very influential figures in Irving's life.

At first glance, there are many similarities between John Sterling's 'Unpublished Fragments' and the kind of social criticism that was the hallmark of Irving's preaching and writing. In particular, Sterling's denunciation of the greed which ran rampant in British society, blamed on an emphasis on the physical over the spiritual, seems to reiterate many of Irving's claims, especially his reproof of the London Missionary Society in *For Missionaries*. As Sterling's criticism reached a climax in 'The State of Society in England', he bemoaned in exaggerated language:

Why does not a prophet arise among this great people, to lament over them, as did the Seers of Judah over their degraded country? To tell them of their lapses and their wanderings, and to exhibit, in mighty and terrible visions, the judgments which wait upon the ill-doings of nations? Yet, would the voice of an Isaiah be listened to on the Stock Exchange? or the pampered heart of aristocracy tremble at the accents of Ezekiel?<sup>37</sup>

It is clear by now that there was such a 'prophet' attempting to do just that, and significantly, Sterling was well-aware of Irving and his work by this point.

According to his own notes of his first meeting with Coleridge, Sterling would have been made aware of Irving if he had not been already. Sterling's first meeting with Coleridge was most likely sometime in 1827, and at that meeting Coleridge 'gave a long and interesting account of Irving's notions

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<sup>35</sup> [John Sterling], 'The State of Society in England. [Fragments from the Travels of Theodore Elbert, a young Swede.] No. III', *The Athenaeum. London Literary and Critical Journal*, 31 (28 May 1828): 487.

<sup>36</sup> [Sterling], 'State of Society', 487.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

about the second coming of our Lord, and of the book on the subject which he has lately translated from the Spanish of a Chilian [sic] Jesuit'.<sup>38</sup> Though Coleridge claimed to differ entirely from Irving on almost every opinion, he apparently praised Irving's introduction to the translation of Ben Ezra ('one of the purest and most beautiful pieces of English I have read for many years') and maintained that Irving was 'a noble creature'.<sup>39</sup> Sterling was either inspired by this Coleridgean recommendation (given his idolisation of the 'Sage of Highgate', this is certainly plausible) or had already been interested in Irving, because just a few years later in 1832, he wrote to a friend expressing his gratitude to Irving, especially his *Sermons, Lectures, and Occasional Discourses* of 1828. 'Although his unceasing vehemence makes me dizzy', Sterling wrote, 'his polemical violence repels me, and I see much rashness and presumption, and, as I think, some positive error, I yet feel throughout the love, faith, and hope, the life, though not always the light, of a richly gifted and regenerate man'.<sup>40</sup>

Despite Sterling's qualified sympathy for Irving and the striking similarity in the language used by both of them, there are of course obvious differences in what they were actually doing in their texts. Throughout his series of articles, Sterling employed certain literary devices to emphasise Elbert's disinterested perspective, thereby supporting the authority of the conclusions he drew. As an outsider (a Swede), he had all the justification he needed for commenting on English society. Among the hustle and bustle of the streets, Elbert remained aloof: 'We are in London, jostled, carried-on, distracted by a thousand objects, isolated in the most eager and crowded tumult of human beings to be found upon the earth; we will go along with it, but we will look at it, and think of it, as we go'.<sup>41</sup> Sterling might have been influenced in these articles by Southey's earlier *Letters from England* (1807), in which a fictional

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<sup>38</sup> Julius Charles Hare, ed., *Essays and Tales, by John Sterling, Collected and Edited, with a Memoir of his Life* (London: John W. Parker, 1848), Vol. I, xxii.

<sup>39</sup> Hare, *Essays and Tales*, xxiii.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, xlv-xlvi.

<sup>41</sup> [John Sterling], 'The Streets of London. (Fragments from the Travels of Theodore Elbert, a young Swede.)', *The Athenaeum and Literary Chronicle*, 43 (20 August 1828): 680.

Spanish visitor travelled the country criticising the habits of its inhabitants.<sup>42</sup> George P. Landow notes that this kind of criticism from the mouthpiece of an outsider, represented by Southey's Espriella, is more characteristic of eighteenth-century satire than the direct criticism which would come to be associated with the works of the Victorian prophets.<sup>43</sup> Whereas Irving frequently and directly referred to himself as a prophet, Sterling employed a fictional device, in the form of a foreign visitor, to rhetorically call for a prophet to condemn society, thus removing himself several degrees from the prophetic role.

A brief digression is necessary here to draw attention to Coleridge's own public views on Irving in two of his major works. It will be recalled that the two men were on close personal terms by at least early 1825, and in a postscript to a note on infant baptism in *Aids to Reflection* (1825), Coleridge described his friend Irving as '[a] mighty Wrestler in the cause of Spiritual Religion, and Gospel Morality, in whom more than any other Contemporary I seem to see the Spirit of LUTHER revived'.<sup>44</sup> Five years later in a section on the Church of Antichrist in *On the Constitution of Church and State*, Coleridge again discussed Irving and his views. By this time the friendship seems to have cooled somewhat, though not, as Peter Elliott argues, to the extent which has been previously supposed. In an extended postscript to a note on the apocalypse which stretched over several pages, Coleridge claimed to differ widely from Irving on his apocalyptic interpretations, however he extracted with 'great delight' a passage from Irving's *Sermons, Lectures, and Discourses* in which he had claimed that the Council of Trent ossified 'all those ulcers and blotchers [sic]' of the Catholic Church.<sup>45</sup> After quoting another passage,

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<sup>42</sup> There are striking similarities between Sterling's scene with Elbert atop St. Paul's and Robert Southey's in *Letters from England: By Don Manuel Alvarez Espriella. Translated from the Spanish* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees and Orme, 1807), Vol. II, 181.

<sup>43</sup> George P. Landow, *Elegant Jeremiahs: The Sage from Carlyle to Mailer* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 53-54.

<sup>44</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection in the Formation of a Manly Character on the Several Grounds of Prudence, Morality, and Religion: Illustrated by Select Passages from our Elder Divines, especially from Archbishop Leighton* (London: Taylor and Hessey, 1825), 372n.

<sup>45</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *On the Constitution of Church and State, according to the Idea of Each; with Aids toward a Right Judgment on the Late Catholic Bill*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Hurst, Chance, and Co., 1830), 180-181n.

Coleridge also concurred with Irving regarding the richness of the 'soil' of the Catholic Church at the time of Luther compared to the Protestant Church of the eighteenth century, and Coleridge agreed further that faith in the Protestant Church had ebbed lower even than that in the Catholic Church.<sup>46</sup> In his re-examination of the intellectual relationship between Irving and Coleridge, Peter Elliott argues, against the commonly-held view, that the influence went both ways. Elliott claims, based on his reading of Coleridge's marginalia, that Coleridge was slowly won over to Irving's way on thinking regarding the second coming, the millennium, and the visible church, and so Irving's theological influence on Coleridge was greater than that of Charles Lamb, Southey, or Wordsworth.<sup>47</sup>

On a personal note Coleridge confirmed Irving's public declaration of their friendship on several occasions (most notably in his dedication to Coleridge in *For Missionaries*) but stated frankly his thoughts on the controversial minister. 'I have no faith in his prophesyings', he wrote, 'small sympathy with his fulminations; and in certain peculiarities of his *theological* system, as distinct from his religious principles, I cannot see my way'.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, Coleridge held 'not the less firmly for these discrepancies in our moods and judgments that EDWARD IRVING possesses more of the spirit and purposes of the first Reformers, that he has more of the Head and Heart, the Life, the Unction, and the genial power of MARTIN LUTHER, than any man now alive; yea than any man of this and the last century'.<sup>49</sup> He continued in this slightly qualified praise:

I see in EDWARD IRVING a minister of Christ after the order of Paul; and if the points, in which I think him erroneous, or excessive and *out of bounds*, have been at any time a subject of serious regret with me, this regret has arisen principally or altogether from the apprehension of their narrowing the sphere of his influence, from the too great probability that they may furnish occasion or pretext for withholding or withdrawing many from those momentous truths, which the age especially needs, and for the enforcement of which he hath been so highly and especially gifted!<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Coleridge, *Church and State*, 181-182n.

<sup>47</sup> Peter Elliott, *Edward Irving: Romantic Theology in Crisis* (PhD thesis: Murdoch University, 2010), 170.

<sup>48</sup> Coleridge, *Church and State*, 182n.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

These passages make it clear that Coleridge subscribed to the view of Irving as a reformer for the church which had fallen into decay, and his only worry was that Irving's eccentricities would ultimately limit his potential. For a generation of younger thinkers, including Sterling and Mill, who looked up to Coleridge, this kind of praise for Irving must at least have prompted serious consideration.

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Mill identified the absence of moral authority, leading to a lack of received opinions, as evidence of society's transitional state. Though he admitted a belief in the unbounded potential for intelligence among the labouring classes, he acknowledged the brutal fact that only those whose circumstances permitted them 'to dedicate themselves to the investigation and study of physical, moral, and social truths, as their peculiar calling, can alone be expected to make the evidences of such truths a subject of profound meditation'.<sup>51</sup> This meant that '[t]he remainder of mankind must; and, except in periods of transition like the present, always do, take the far greater part of their opinions on all extensive subjects upon the authority of those who have studied them'.<sup>52</sup> In the moral and social sciences, Mill complained that there was no unanimity, 'and every dabbler, consequently, thinks his opinion as good as another's'; it was rather the person who *had* studied the subject systematically who was derided as a mere 'theorist', seemingly disqualifying their thought.<sup>53</sup> To rectify this state of affairs, Mill called for establishing all 'departments of human knowledge' along the same lines as the physical sciences, where a 'compact mass of authority' had been created through the successive work 'by a series of great men', which meant that 'no one dares to stand up against the scientific world, until he too has qualified himself to be

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<sup>51</sup> A. B. [John Stuart Mill], 'The Spirit of the Age, No. 2', *The Examiner*, 1199 (23 January 1831): 51.

<sup>52</sup> [Mill], 'No. 2', 51.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

named as a man of science: and no one does this without being forced, by irresistible evidence, to adopt the received opinion'.<sup>54</sup>

It was precisely this kind of systematic (and 'scientific') examination of the state of society which Mill offered in his collection of essays. As has been shown, Mill's argument was an appeal to history, but he suggested that he was following in the footsteps of 'the really profound and philosophic inquirers into history in France and Germany', rather than those 'in our own land of shallowness and *charlatanerie*'.<sup>55</sup> This resulted in an historicist reading of history, where he argued against those who ignorantly prided institutions of the day over those of more 'barbarous' ages. As he made this clear:

To find fault with our ancestors for not having annual parliaments, universal suffrage, and vote by ballot, would be like quarrelling with the Greeks and Romans for not using steam navigation, when we know it is so safe and expeditious; which would be, in short, simply finding fault with the third century before Christ for not being the eighteenth century after.<sup>56</sup>

He recognised that people in the middle ages had as good a government as their circumstances allowed.<sup>57</sup> When the Catholic clergy monopolised moral influence, he argued that this was because they were the fittest at the time to do so.<sup>58</sup> Passing the Reform Bill therefore, became simply a recognition of the fact that circumstances had changed, that British society was in the process of outgrowing its institutions, which consequently needed to adjust. Thus the sense of fatalism in reference to the excitement over reform: 'The revolution which had already taken place in the human mind, is rapidly shaping external things to its own forms and proportions'.<sup>59</sup>

In Mill's analysis of the age, the explosion of prophetic speculation represented by Irving and others became itself another symptom that he and his generation were living through a transitional era. 'Even the religious world', he wrote, 'teems with new interpretations of the Prophecies, foreboding mighty

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<sup>54</sup> [Mill], 'No. 2', 51.

<sup>55</sup> A. B. [John Stuart Mill], 'The Spirit of the Age, No. 3', *The Examiner*, 1201 (6 February 1831): 83.

<sup>56</sup> [Mill], 'No. 3', 83.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> A. B. [John Stuart Mill], 'The Spirit of the Age. No. V', *The Examiner*, 1216 (15 May 1831): 307.

<sup>59</sup> A. B. [John Stuart Mill], 'The Spirit of the Age. No. V. (concluded.)', *The Examiner*, 1218 (29 May 1831): 340.

changes near at hand'.<sup>60</sup> A letter to John Sterling in October 1831 provides evidence to suggest that he was likely thinking explicitly of Irving and the Albury circle in this instance. In what seems to have become something of a commonplace, Mill expressed his doubt regarding whether or not a treatise he was working on would ever see the light of day, concluding that 'no one can tell except Messrs. Drummond, M'Niel, Irving, & others, who possess the hidden key to the Interpretation of the Prophecies'.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, given Sterling's (albeit restrained) admiration of Irving, it is not unlikely that he was the topic of more substantive conversations between these two friends.

Though Mill apparently spent much more time thinking about Southey's *Colloquies* during this period, this brief allusion to the millenarian predictions of Irving and others offers an insight into Mill's interpretation of the needs of the age. For him, as for Carlyle, the solution lay not in future prognostications, but rather in a proper understanding of the present: 'It is only in the present that we can know the future; it is only through the present that it is in our power to influence that which is to come'.<sup>62</sup> 'A knowledge of our own age', therefore, 'is the fountain of prophecy – the only key to the history of posterity'.<sup>63</sup> In this series of articles, Mill was attempting to position himself above the fray as one who had studied the past and present and so was uniquely qualified to offer his opinion regarding the potential for political and social reform. An example of Mill's philosophically 'prophetic' reading of the times can be seen in his prediction regarding the ultimate fate of the monarchy and aristocracy, where he wrote: '[T]o the philosopher who contemplates the past and future fortunes of mankind as one series, and who counts a generation or two for no more in marking the changes of the moral, than an age or two in those of the physical world, the ultimate fate of such distinctions is already decided'.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> A. B. [John Stuart Mill], 'The Spirit of the Age. No. 1', *The Examiner*, 1197 (9 January 1831): 20.

<sup>61</sup> John Stuart Mill to John Sterling (20-22 October 1831), in *The Earlier Letters of John Stuart Mill: 1812-1848*, ed. Francis E. Mineka (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), 79.

<sup>62</sup> [Mill], 'No. 1', 20.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> A. B. [John Stuart Mill], 'The Spirit of the Age, No. 3, concluded', *The Examiner*, 1206 (13 March 1831): 163.

The impression we have from these several texts is one of competing voices attempting to explain the social and political changes taking place, but it is significant (though unsurprising considering his continuing publicity during this period) that the authors did so with at least some knowledge of Edward Irving and his work. For Coleridge, who was so influential to these authors and many others, Irving (despite his faults) was a minister 'after the order of Paul' and a Christian reformer in the spirit of Martin Luther. Sterling recognised him, with many reservations, as 'a richly gifted and regenerate man'. Southey and Mill might only have understood Irving as a pre-millenarian, nevertheless the prevalence of this phenomenon presented something of a challenge to their (widely divergent) interpretations of the times.

But each of these writers also employed various rhetorical techniques in an attempt to establish authority for their interpretation of society. As we have seen, Irving used the language and imagery of an Old Testament prophet to denounce infidelity and idolatry, though this seems to have been mostly criticised by his contemporaries. Sterling, somewhat sympathetic to Irving's views, utilised very similar language, though it came from the mouth of a fictional character in a series of anonymous articles. Southey employed two fictional characters which allowed him to explore both the optimism and the pessimism being expressed regarding the state of British society. As the furthest from Irving's entire worldview, Mill saw the phenomenon of millenarian speculation as itself indicative of the age, and he offered a sober account of the need to heed the advice and warnings from those who have made society a subject of extensive study, himself obviously included. It was in this context that Carlyle would reinterpret Irving's life and career as he fashioned himself into a Victorian prophet.

### Carlyle's (Re)interpretation of Irving

As we have seen, Carlyle and Irving shared many of the same experiences in their early life and education, and they became close friends during a formative time in their life, when, it seems, they were intellectually very similar.

Beginning with 'Signs of the Times', I argue that Carlyle reinterpreted the significance of Irving's career to establish his own reading of the times based on his understanding of the political, social, and ultimately spiritual state of the country.

Though the friendship between the two men has been acknowledged by many, Carlyle has largely shaped our understanding of it, being both more famous and longer lived. It will be necessary therefore to examine briefly the experiences which these two shared. As has been noted, the two became friends during a period when both worked as teachers at rival schools in Kirkcaldy, and Carlyle reflected very fondly on this time in his *Reminiscences*. Carlyle recalled their discussions as he would relate to Irving what he had read; 'Such colloquies', Carlyle wrote of these conversations, 'I have never had since'.<sup>65</sup> They journeyed together to hear Chalmers preach, they discussed the faults of the Edinburgh clergy, and Carlyle would listen to Irving's preaching as a licentiate. In Edinburgh, Carlyle recounted that Irving would entertain certain 'intellectualities he fell in with', and Carlyle would join them.<sup>66</sup> From the time Irving moved to Glasgow to assist Chalmers in late 1819, there are numerous letters to Carlyle urging him to make his voice heard in the only way possible, the press.<sup>67</sup> Others show Irving consoling and offering suggestions to Carlyle who was beset with difficulties making his way in the literary world.<sup>68</sup> Carlyle visited him there several times and even went on house calls with Irving as he acquainted himself with the parish according to Chalmers's plan. And finally, it was Irving who introduced Carlyle to Jane Welsh, his future wife.

By the time Irving had moved to London in 1822, he was making connections and enabling opportunities for Carlyle, and ultimately preparing the ground for him to make his own way to London, which he finally did in 1834, the same year Irving died.<sup>69</sup> As Irving quickly became a successful preacher

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<sup>65</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, ed. James Anthony Froude (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1881), Vol. I, 103-104.

<sup>66</sup> Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, Vol. I, 141-142.

<sup>67</sup> See Edward Irving to Thomas Carlyle (26 December 1819), in *The Diary and Letters of Edward Irving*, ed. Barbara Waddington (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 78.

<sup>68</sup> See Irving to Carlyle (14 December 1820), in *Diary and Letters*, 99; and Irving to Carlyle (7 February 1821), in *Ibid*, 102.

<sup>69</sup> See Irving to Carlyle (23 February 1823), in *Ibid*, 175-176.

in London, Carlyle recalled feelings of jealousy. He was able to meet with Irving briefly while the latter was on his honeymoon and the two talked of London life and Irving's first major publication, *For the Oracles*, including the criticism it had received in the press.<sup>70</sup> And in June 1824, Carlyle made his first visit to London, spending much of the time with Irving. He claimed to have attended Hatton Garden regularly to hear Irving preach, and he attended the ceremony celebrating the laying of the foundation stone for Irving's new church. While in London Carlyle met with a few members of the Montagu circle, including Lamb, Hazlitt, and Crabb Robinson, and he also attended several of Coleridge's 'Thursday Evenings' with Irving. Though there is evidence that Carlyle and Irving were already diverging considerably during this first visit, seen in their differing estimations of Coleridge and Frere, there were several substantive visits back and forth between the two over the next few years. During this time, Carlyle recalled being able to follow Irving's career 'by some occasional *clang* in all the newspapers'.<sup>71</sup> As late as 1828, there is evidence that Irving was still attempting to help his old friend by facilitating a venture by Carlyle to obtain a chair at the newly established London University.<sup>72</sup> Though one must not read too much into these biographical details on the development of Carlyle's thought, they cannot be ignored when, in 1829, he publicly reviewed the work of his old friend.

What must certainly be the most famous review of one of Irving's works is hardly remembered as such, in part due to the overshadowing fame of its author. Published anonymously in the *Edinburgh Review* under the title 'Signs of the Times', Carlyle's review has featured in numerous anthologies and been cited in countless works due to its mechanical imagery and ambiguity towards the consequences of increasing industrialisation as was examined in the first chapter. But despite this, or perhaps because of it, the work remains enigmatic. I argue that Carlyle's review article must be understood in the context of his public reinterpretation of Irving, which he would continue in

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<sup>70</sup> Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, Vol. I, 205-207.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, 290.

<sup>72</sup> See Edward Irving to Thomas Carlyle (23 January 1828), in *Diary and Letters*, 251.

'Characteristics' (1831) and, most substantially, his eulogy for Irving published in *Fraser's Magazine* (1835).

A close textual reading from a literary perspective has been conducted by Lawrence Poston, where 'Signs of the Times' is compared with several of Carlyle's earlier essays as well as the two works he was reviewing, Irving's *Last Days* and *The Rise, Progress, and Present State of Public Opinion* (also published in 1828) by William Alexander Mackinnon.<sup>73</sup> It is important to note though that these two books would not have been viewed equally by Carlyle: Irving was a lifelong friend, and though they differed on certain important points, ultimately Carlyle had much more in common with Irving than with Mackinnon. Poston describes Mackinnon's book as 'a paean to the rising middle class' which displayed a 'worship of mechanism', and it was Carlyle's innovation in 'Signs of the Times' to juxtapose this with Irving's millenarianism.<sup>74</sup> As Poston argues, Carlyle's intention in his essay was to call attention to the unexpected link between these two forms of dangerous wishful thinking, but in so doing, Carlyle wilfully misrepresented Mackinnon's book in order to pursue his own ends.<sup>75</sup> I argue that Carlyle did something similar with Irving's text, transforming it into a surrogate for Irving's whole scheme of millenarian prophetic interpretation, which allowed him to publicly criticise Irving's millenarianism while retaining much of the underlying criticism.

It is significant that there is no direct mention of Irving or his book in the text of the essay itself; there is however a cryptic passage which can be interpreted as a reference to Irving, and as such it betrays something of Carlyle's intention. In a poignant comment on the conspicuous trend of prophetic speculation, Carlyle wrote, 'For here the prophets are not one, but many; and each incites and confirms the other; so that the fatidical fury spreads wider and wider, till at last even Saul must join in it'.<sup>76</sup> The allusion was to a

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<sup>73</sup> There was actually a third book – *Anticipation, or an Hundred Years Hence* – in the list of publications which Carlyle was reviewing, but all attempts by scholars to locate this have been unsuccessful, leading to a suggestion (not unlikely) that the book was one of Carlyle's fabrications.

<sup>74</sup> Lawrence Poston, 'Millites and Millenarians: The Context of Carlyle's 'Signs of the Times'', *Victorian Studies*, 26:4 (Summer 1983): 388.

<sup>75</sup> Poston, 'Millites and Millenarians', 401, 388.

<sup>76</sup> [Thomas Carlyle], 'Signs of the Times', *The Edinburgh Review*, 49:98 (June 1829): 434.

verse in 1 Samuel which relates the story of King Saul who sought to kill David by sending several groups of men to accomplish this, but each time the messengers were taken in by Samuel and a group of prophets, until at last Saul himself came and was taken in by the prophets as well. On the surface it is not entirely clear if this was meant to be a general reference, but there is a hint in one of the earlier reviews of one of Irving's books. In Josiah Conder's review of *Babylon and Infidelity*, he had alluded to the very same story of Saul among the prophets in direct reference to Irving.<sup>77</sup> It is possible then that this sentiment was not unique, and therefore Carlyle's essay can be read as an early (public) acknowledgment that Irving had been taken in and subsequently lost his way, a view which Carlyle certainly held privately.

While invoking the 'chaos' of the crisis in the late 1820s, Carlyle brought up the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts and Catholic disabilities, about which Irving had so much to say, and he repeated the kind of proclamation which Irving would have made. 'The King has virtually abdicated', Carlyle satirically exclaimed, 'the Church is a widow without jointure; public principle is gone; private honesty is going; society, in short, is fast falling in pieces; and a time of unmixed evil is come on us'.<sup>78</sup> 'The rage of prophecy should be more than usually excited' at such a time Carlyle wrote, and consequently

the Millennarians [sic] have come forth on the right hand, and the Millites on the left. The Fifth-monarchy men prophesy from the Bible, and the Utilitarians from Bentham. The one announces that the last of the seals is to be opened, positively, in the year 1860; and the other assures us that 'the greatest happiness principle' is to make a heaven of earth, in a still shorter time.<sup>79</sup>

Carlyle's suggested response to these competing claims was to leave them to themselves, 'they will the sooner dissipate, and die away in space'.<sup>80</sup> He asserted that excessive speculation on the future was a symptom of disease in individuals as well as nations, and that the present should be sufficient for the happy and the wise.<sup>81</sup> 'Our grand business', he claimed, 'undoubtedly is,

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<sup>77</sup> [Josiah Conder], 'Irving and others on the Prophecies', *The Eclectic Review*, 27 (March 1827): 190.

<sup>78</sup> [Carlyle], 'Signs of the Times', 441.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 439.

not to see what lies dimly at a distance, but to *do* what lies clearly at hand'.<sup>82</sup> By presenting himself as a voice of calm reason amidst the chaos, he attempted to establish authority for his own interpretations of the times.

In his analysis of the 'interpretive context' of Carlyle's 'Signs of the Times', Wendell Harris has argued that it was Carlyle's rhetorical restraint in the essay which set it apart from contemporary articles on the various 'crises' of the late 1820s.<sup>83</sup> As Harris writes: 'Carlyle's restraint, and the limits he sets to what he evidently already sees as his prophetic office are especially remarkable in the midst of social and political alarm'.<sup>84</sup> While Harris acknowledges the facts of Irving's popularity, reputation, and friendship with Carlyle, he claims that Carlyle's 'inclusion of Irving's book among those he was "reviewing," as well as his abstention from actual comment on it, have interesting biographical implications, but this is a matter outside the meanings intended for his general audience'.<sup>85</sup> Like many scholars who are more interested in Carlyle than Irving, I would argue that Harris has accepted an oversimplified account of Irving's preaching and publications (he claims Irving's message 'was simply that the second coming was at hand')<sup>86</sup> and underappreciated the visibility of Irving as a 'public prophet' during this period. We have seen that in 1828-9, Irving was not only preaching on the nearness of the second coming but was actively engaging in 'political' debates over the relationship between church and state, and he was doing so explicitly using the rhetoric of an Old Testament prophet. His views on such topics were common knowledge in the newspapers, and his extreme denunciations were even the topic of caricature. Furthermore, Irving's *Last Days* received at least half a dozen reviews in the magazines, some of which claimed to have agreed with Irving's politics after separating out his religious views. It is within this context that Carlyle's choice of Irving's book, as well as his minimal reference

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<sup>82</sup> [Carlyle], 'Signs of the Times', 439.

<sup>83</sup> By 'interpretive context', Wendell V. Harris means 'the knowledge and attitudes the author could assume the anticipated audience shared and would use in interpreting the text', 'Interpretive Historicism: "Signs of the Times" and *Culture and Anarchy* in their Contexts', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 44:4 (March 1990): 441n.

<sup>84</sup> Harris, 'Interpretive Historicism', 450.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, 450n.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, 445.

to it, must be understood. In the text which is understood by Landow and others to have initiated the genre of Victorian prophetic writing, Carlyle was reviewing the work of another public prophet with whom he shared many similar views (at least on 'secularities').

As was shown in the first chapter, Carlyle complained of the mechanical thinking pervading all aspects of society, including literature, art, science, and philosophy, but most importantly, religion. This could be seen most strikingly for Carlyle in the religion of the day. 'This is not a Religious age', he stated simply; but he went further, proclaiming, 'Our true Deity is Mechanism'.<sup>87</sup> He lamented the fact that worship 'is not recognised among us, or is mechanically explained into Fear of pain, or Hope of pleasure'.<sup>88</sup> This was a particularly emphatic point on which he elaborated:

Religion in most countries, more or less in every country, is no longer what it was, and should be, – a thousand-voiced psalm from the heart of Man to his invisible Father, the fountain of all Goodness, Beauty, Truth, and revealed in every revelation of these; but for the most part, a wise prudential feeling grounded on mere calculation; a matter, as all others now are, of Expediency and Utility; whereby some smaller quantum of earthly enjoyment may be exchanged for a far larger quantum of celestial enjoyment.<sup>89</sup>

In reference to the state of religion of the present day as he saw it, Carlyle pointed out that Christianity did not 'arise and spread abroad among men' through the instrumentation of 'institutions, and establishments and well-arranged systems of mechanics', rather religion was seen to decay when subject to these influences.<sup>90</sup> It arose, he wrote, through a dynamic process 'in the mystic deeps of man's soul; and was spread abroad by 'the preaching of the word,' by simple, altogether natural and individual efforts; and flew, like hallowed fire, from heart to heart, till all were purified and illuminated by it; and its heavenly light shone, as it still shines, and (as sun or star) will ever shine, through the whole dark destinies of man'.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> [Carlyle], 'Signs of the Times', 453.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 455.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 450.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

In this vein, he criticised the religious societies which had been similarly attacked by Irving:

we have Religious machines, of all imaginable varieties; the Bible-society, professing a far higher and heavenly structure, is found, on inquiry, to be altogether an earthly contrivance: supported by collection of moneys, by fomenting of vanities, by puffing, intrigue and chicanery; a machine for converting the Heathen.<sup>92</sup>

It is clear just how similar this comment is to Irving's criticism, as exemplified in his exhortation to the London Missionary Society. Religion, according to Carlyle, had become a calculation of profit and loss, which he equated to 'a working for wages'.<sup>93</sup> Along with philosophy, religion had ceased to be a dynamic exploration of what was best for humanity; rather, as he claimed, the wise ones of the present, 'occupying themselves in counting-up and estimating men's motives, strive by curious checking and balancing, and other adjustments of Profit and Loss, to guide them to their true advantage'.<sup>94</sup> James Anthony Froude claims that Francis Jeffrey, being succeeded as editor of the *Edinburgh Review* by Henry Brougham, was looking to provoke Brougham with an article attacking utilitarianism, and so actively encouraged Carlyle to provide something inflammatory.<sup>95</sup> Interestingly, it seems Carlyle initially wanted to review Southey's *Colloquies* for his article, but was beaten to it by Macaulay. It is significant that Irving's book was not Carlyle's first choice, but in any case, by publishing 'Signs of the Times', which shared many more similarities with Irving than with Mackinnon, in the Whig *Edinburgh Review*, Carlyle was subtly reinventing the prophetic office.

Scholars have noted the striking similarities in the contempt for expediency and utility expressed by both Carlyle and Irving. In his *Reminiscences*, Carlyle recalled a pleasurable visit by Irving to Craigenputtoch in 1828, where the two conversed on a variety of topics, including Henry Drummond and the Albury conferences; of special mention was a point Irving made regarding the worldly and sensuous nature of Methodism, to which

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<sup>92</sup> [Carlyle], 'Signs of the Times', 443.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, 455.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, 449.

<sup>95</sup> James Anthony Froude, *Thomas Carlyle, A History of the First Forty Years of his Life, 1795-1835* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1882), Vol. II, 58.

Carlyle heartily agreed.<sup>96</sup> It is significant that, as Wolfgang Franke has pointed out, Irving's characterisation of Methodism would have applied to Evangelicalism as a whole,<sup>97</sup> an observation which reinforces the similarity between Irving's religious criticism and Carlyle's in 'Signs of the Times'. But Carlyle could not share in Irving's pre-millenarian worldview. The final thing Carlyle remembered from his first visit to London was following Irving to the house of a prophetic exegete – almost certainly James Hatley Frere – where Carlyle sat silently and afterward questioned Irving as to the fruitfulness of such endeavours.<sup>98</sup> In a letter to their mutual friend David Hope at the end of 1827, Carlyle wrote of Irving's millenarian turn: 'I have heard several times from the Caledonian Orator of late. He does *not* seem in the least millenarian in his letters: but the same old friendly man we have long known him to be. And yet his printed works are enough to strike one blank with amazement'.<sup>99</sup> As noted above, Poston has interpreted Carlyle's essay as a warning against all forms of millenarian thinking, but John M. Ulrich argues (*contra* Poston) that Carlyle put forward, in 'Signs of the Times', a post-millenarian vision of 'infinite progression, whereby the earthly moves closer and closer to the heavenly', though this millenarianism was both secular and figural.<sup>100</sup> In light of Carlyle's personal distinction between Irving and his printed works, it is possible that he sought in his review to separate out Irving's pre-millenarianism, which he interpreted as itself another sign of the times, while he agreed with much of his criticism of society.

A pair of letters from Carlyle to his brother John in 1830 can shed further light on Carlyle's interpretation of Irving during this time, and therefore his intention in 'Signs of the Times'. Writing to John, who was staying with the Irvings in London, Carlyle said that he had written to Irving 'explaining his share

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<sup>96</sup> Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, Vol. I, 296-298.

<sup>97</sup> Wolfgang Franke, 'Carlyle and Edward Irving: The Intellectual Basis of their Friendship', in *Thomas Carlyle 1981: Papers given at the International Thomas Carlyle Centenary Symposium*, ed. Horst W. Drescher (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Peter Lang, 1983), 56.

<sup>98</sup> Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, Vol. I, 282-283.

<sup>99</sup> Thomas Carlyle to David Hope (12 December 1827), in *The Carlyle Letters Online*, ed. Brent E. Kinsler (DOI: 10.1215/lt-18271212-TC-DH-01), accessed on 2 February 2019.

<sup>100</sup> John M. Ulrich, 'Thomas Carlyle, Edward Irving, and Millennialist Discourse', in *Literature and Belief*, eds. Paul E. Kerry and Jesse S. Crisler (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 2005), 77.

in that ‘Signs of the Times,’ and saying all manner of mystic things’.<sup>101</sup> The editors of the *Carlyle Letters* claim that this ‘share’ may have been in the suggestion of the title, considering, as we have seen, Irving’s publication of *The Signs of the Times* in the same year.<sup>102</sup> As Wolfgang Franke points out, ‘share’ would have been an odd word for Carlyle to use if Irving’s contribution to the article had been entirely negative.<sup>103</sup> Unfortunately Carlyle’s original letter to Irving has not been traced, leaving us to guess at what ‘manner of mystic things’ he said, but it may be possible to extrapolate from another letter to John later in the summer. As John was still in London with the Irvings, Carlyle wrote:

Make my kindest compliments to my old Friend your landlord; whose like, take him for all in all, I have not yet looked upon. Tell him that none more honestly desires his welfare. – O were I but joined to such a man! Would the Scotch Kirk but expel him, and his own better genius lead him far away from all Apocalypses and prophetic and theologic chimeras, utterly unworthy of such a head, to see the world as it here lies visible and is, that we might fight together, for God’s *true* cause, even to the death! With one such man I feel as if I could defy the Earth.<sup>104</sup>

Carlyle’s discussion of Irving’s ‘share’ in his famous essay and this continued high praise show that ‘Signs of the Times’ cannot be read as straightforward criticism of Irving.

In ‘Characteristics’ (1831), there is another subtle passage which can also be interpreted as a public statement by Carlyle on Irving. On Carlyle’s metaphysical reading of history, the old beliefs had been torn down, and the new had not yet been erected in their place. ‘The Godlike has vanished from the world’, he wrote in ‘Characteristics’, and it was the obligation of his generation to find something new which was worthy of worship.<sup>105</sup> This must necessarily lead to many dead-ends at first though. In this all-important quest according to Carlyle, Lord Byron mistook ‘earthborn passionate Desire for heaven’; Percy Bysshe Shelley filled ‘the earth with inarticulate wail; like the

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<sup>101</sup> Thomas Carlyle to John A. Carlyle (19 March 1830), in *Carlyle Letters*, (DOI: 10.1215/lt-18300319-TC-JAC-01), accessed on 14 May 2019.

<sup>102</sup> Carlyle to John Carlyle (19 March 1830), in footnotes.

<sup>103</sup> Franke, ‘Carlyle and Irving’, 66.

<sup>104</sup> Carlyle to John A. Carlyle (21 August 1830), in *Carlyle Letters* (DOI: 10.1215/lt-18300821-TC-JAC-01), accessed on 5 February 2019.

<sup>105</sup> [Thomas Carlyle], ‘Characteristics’, *The Edinburgh Review*, 54:108 (December 1831): 375.

infinite, inarticulate grief and weeping of forsaken infants'; and 'Friedrich Schlegel, stupefied in that fearful loneliness, as of a silenced battle-field, [flew] back to Catholicism; as a child might to its slain mother's bosom'.<sup>106</sup> But in England, there were strange signs of hope suggesting that the Godlike was to be recognised again. There, Carlyle claimed, this phenomenon was manifested 'by the shrieking of hysterical women, casting out of devils, and other 'gifts of the Holy Ghost''.<sup>107</sup> The allusion of course is to Irving and his congregation, but the significance must be fully appreciated. Though privately Carlyle seems to have been shocked by the 'tongues',<sup>108</sup> he used this phenomenon to make a polemical point in his essay. Compared to the Romantic giants Byron, Shelley, and Schlegel, Carlyle suggested that it was, in fact, Edward Irving who was groping in the right direction towards recognition of the Godlike. This interpretation is further evidenced in Carlyle's eulogy for his old friend.

Just a few weeks after Irving's death, Carlyle (by then in London) wrote to David Hope in Glasgow expressing concern about conflicting accounts of Irving's last hours, and he complained to Hope: 'It is a very mournful thing for me to find how *universally*, except among his own sect, the noble Edward is regarded here, even by tolerant, reasonable men, as little better than an empty quack!'<sup>109</sup> Carlyle enclosed the eulogy he had written for Irving in order to be reprinted elsewhere, though he stressed to Hope that it should remain completely anonymous. This work was published in *Fraser's Magazine* in January the following year (alongside another one<sup>110</sup>), and it can be seen as another attempt by Carlyle to make a public point regarding the significance of Irving's life and career. 'Reader, thou hast seen and heard the man', Carlyle wrote, 'as who has not, – with wise or unwise wonder'.<sup>111</sup> The 'unwise' wonder

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<sup>106</sup> [Carlyle], 'Characteristics', 375.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid*, 383.

<sup>108</sup> Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, Vol. I, 319-320.

<sup>109</sup> Thomas Carlyle to David Hope (24 December 1834), in *Carlyle Letters* (DOI: 10.1215/It-18341224-TC-DH-01), accessed on 5 February 2019.

<sup>110</sup> Carlyle was under the impression that this other memorial was written by Henry Drummond, but it is now generally believed to have been written by B. W. Proctor, Carlyle to Hope (24 December 1834), in footnotes.

<sup>111</sup> [Thomas Carlyle], 'Death of the Rev. Edward Irving', *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country*, 11:61 (January 1835): 102.

has been seen in the reactions from the newspapers and reviews, especially in Irving's later life, but the 'wise' wonder suggests that there was something to learn from Irving's example. In accounting for his eccentric life and career, Carlyle juxtaposed Irving with modern British society: 'One of the noblest natures – a man of antique heroic nature, in questionable modern garniture, which he could not wear'.<sup>112</sup> Irving was said to have been out of step with 'The Spirit of the Time', which had fought against him as an enemy.<sup>113</sup> Using language seemingly borrowed from Irving himself, Carlyle stated, 'Scotland sent him forth a Herculean man; our mad Babylon wore him and wasted him, with all her engines; and it took her twelve years'.<sup>114</sup> According to Carlyle, it was 'Fashion' and 'Popular Applause' which ultimately undermined Irving, and the eccentricities of his later years were explained by the fact that he had been 'forsaken by the world'.<sup>115</sup> Nevertheless, '[t]he voice of our "son of thunder," with its deep tone of wisdom (that belonged to all articulate speaking ages)', Carlyle wrote, was 'never inaudible amid wildest dissonances (that belonged to this inarticulate age, which slumbers and somnambulates, which cannot *speak*, but only screech and gibber)'.<sup>116</sup> By separating Irving's timeless wisdom from the dissonances of 'this inarticulate age', Carlyle thus turned the very fact of Irving's life into yet another attack on contemporary British society.

But Carlyle went further: in spite of his own religious views and the widespread criticism Irving had received from the public, Carlyle held up Irving's belief to shame what he considered to be an unbelieving society. As Carlyle struggled with orthodox Christianity, he (somewhat patronisingly) justified Irving's choice of vocation: 'In his simple Scottish circle, the highest form of manhood attainable or known was that of Christian; the highest Christian was the Teacher of such. Irving's lot was cast'.<sup>117</sup> But Christianity according to Carlyle was not what it once was; this was 'a time of Tithe Controversy, Encyclopedism, Catholic Rent, Philanthropism, and the

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<sup>112</sup> [Carlyle], 'Death of Edward Irving', 101.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

Revolution of Three Days'.<sup>118</sup> In the face of this, Irving adhered increasingly to his Bible, and when confronted with difficult questions regarding the nature of the apocalypse or the intervention of the Holy Spirit, he felt compelled to answer: 'A half-man could have passed on without answering; a whole man must answer'.<sup>119</sup> Though Carlyle clearly did not agree with Irving's responses to these questions, he admired Irving's sincerity nonetheless. 'Irving clave to his Belief', Carlyle asserted, 'as to his soul's soul; followed it whithersoever, through earth or air, it might lead him; toiling as never man toiled to spread it, to gain the world's ear for it, – in vain'.<sup>120</sup> This is precisely the lesson that Carlyle was trying to get across using the example of Irving:

Think (if thou be one of a thousand, and worthy to do it) that here once more was a genuine man sent into this our *ungenuine* phantasmagory of a world, which would go to ruin without such; that here once more, under thy own eyes, in this last decade, was enacted the old Tragedy (and has had its fifth-act now) of *The Messenger of Truth in the Age of Shams*.<sup>121</sup>

Despite Carlyle's personal beliefs, including his own attempt to get Irving to abandon the 'tongues', it was not Irving who was subjected to criticism here, but the nominal Christians who were able to superficially hold onto their beliefs by shrinking from the difficult questions. It was the age which was at fault, not the messenger.

Though Carlyle did not explicitly refer to Irving as a prophet in this text, the epithet which was applied to him – the Messenger of Truth in the Age of Shams – strongly implies this. As Ruth apRoberts observes, the word 'prophet' for Carlyle always carried 'the primary Old Testament meaning of someone "possessed" – either by God or the truth'.<sup>122</sup> But Carlyle was also presenting himself in this text as the prophetic interpreter of Irving's significance to an unbelieving age. Irving's life was held up as a mirror to Carlyle's audience, and in his act of interpretation it was society which was found to be at fault.

Decades later when Carlyle penned what would become his *Reminiscences* following the death of his wife Jane in 1866, it is evident that

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<sup>118</sup> [Carlyle], 'Death of Edward Irving', 102.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid*, 103.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid*, 102.

<sup>122</sup> Ruth apRoberts, 'Carlyle's Religion: The New Evangel', in *Literature and Belief*, 116.

he still saw himself as peculiarly qualified to interpret the life of his old friend Edward Irving. In the early 1860s, there had been something of a revival of interest in Irving, with Oliphant's biography published in 1862 and an edited collection of Irving's works in 1864, but Carlyle asserted that this revival was 'grounded on no really correct knowledge or insight'.<sup>123</sup> Though he thought that Oliphant's biography of Irving was not entirely accurate, Carlyle claimed that the final section, which was largely told through Irving's letters to his wife Isabella during his last trip to Scotland, provided the apocalyptic end to Irving's drama. Carlyle summed up this drama in the following way:

Rustic Annandale begins it, with its homely honesties, rough vernacularities, safe, innocently kind, ruggedly mother-like, cheery, wholesome, like its airy hills and clear-rushing streams; prurient corrupted London is the middle part, with its volcanic stupidities and bottomless confusions; and in the end is terrible, mysterious, godlike and awful; what Patmos could be more so?<sup>124</sup>

Though Carlyle might be forgiven for reflecting on the life of his old friend in this sentimental way, the language that he used to describe Irving is illuminating. 'It is as if the vials of Heaven's wrath were pouring down upon a man', Carlyle wrote; and 'Like an antique evangelist he walks his stony course'.<sup>125</sup>

But, as Tim Grass and others have rightly observed, Carlyle's reminiscence of Irving was more about their relationship than about Irving as he was in himself, and it is significant that in this work Carlyle provided something of his own spiritual autobiography. It will be recalled that it was in Irving's library where Carlyle first encountered Gibbon and Hume, which, by his own account, would affect him considerably, and it was Irving with whom Carlyle would share his reflections on this reading. It was also Irving to whom Carlyle would confess his early religious doubts. As Franke observes, Carlyle portrayed Irving in the *Reminiscences* as a 'confessor who helped him to work out his own salvation',<sup>126</sup> and, significantly, this dynamic seems to hold even in passages which superficially have nothing to do with Irving. Reflecting on

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<sup>123</sup> Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, Vol. I, 69.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 335.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> Franke, 'Carlyle and Irving', 47.

his time living at Hoddam Hill in 1825, Carlyle described his own experience of 'conversion' and reiterated his indebtedness to Goethe in this respect.<sup>127</sup> This time was portrayed in typically Carlylean language:

That year I found that I had conquered all my scepticisms, agonising doubtings, fearful wrestlings with the foul and vile and soul-murdering Mud-gods of my epoch; had escaped as from a worse than Tartarus, with all its Phlegethons and Stygian quagmires, and was emerging free in spirit into the eternal blue of ether, where, blessed be heaven! I have for the spiritual part, ever since lived.<sup>128</sup>

But these 'pious musings' had taken him 'beyond' orthodox Christianity, as he recollected: 'The sound of the kirk-bell once or twice on Sunday mornings, from Hoddam Kirk, [...] was strangely touching, like the departing voice of eighteen hundred years'.<sup>129</sup> It seems that in meaningful ways Carlyle worked out his religious beliefs in relation to Irving, and this was still the case decades later when his memoir of his old friend prompted him to reflect on his own spiritual development.

Carlyle's religion has been the subject of much debate since at least shortly after his death, when James Anthony Froude referred to him as a 'Calvinist without the theology'. Ruth apRoberts has recently summarised Carlyle's spiritual journey and religious beliefs, beginning with the religious literalism he had inherited from his family before this was seriously challenged by his reading of Gibbon and Hume.<sup>130</sup> Carlyle famously claimed to have found consolation and even hope in the works of the German Romantics, including among many Johann Gottfried Herder, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, and Goethe. With the help of these and other similar writers, Carlyle developed a view of Christianity as a 'myth' which had been true once but would eventually be superseded. As apRoberts argues, the closest thing to a definitive statement of these views was Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, in which he served as editor to a fictitious German philosopher – Diogenes Teufelsdröckh – who had

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<sup>127</sup> Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, Vol. I, 288.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid*, 287.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid*, 288-289.

<sup>130</sup> apRoberts, 'Carlyle's Religion', 103-104. For an account of the relationship between Carlyle's thought and the religion he had inherited from his parents see Ian Campbell, 'Carlyle and the Secession', in *Scottish Christianity in the Modern World*, eds. Stewart J. Brown and George Newlands (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000).

developed a 'philosophy of clothes', which held that humanity outgrew beliefs and institutions similarly to the way an individual outgrew their clothes.<sup>131</sup> Herein lies the basis of Carlyle's final interpretation of Irving's life and career. For Carlyle, Irving's guiding belief – 'that the Christian religion was to be a truth again, not a paltry form, and to rule the world', with Irving as 'the chosen instrument'<sup>132</sup> – was doomed to fail from the beginning, because Christianity could not become a truth again, at least not in its old form. The fact that these hopes had been cruelly blasted according to Carlyle, provided 'the key to all his subsequent procedures, extravagances, [and] aberrations'.<sup>133</sup>

Despite the deep intellectual sympathy shared by the two men, the gulf between Irving's biblical literalism and Carlyle's historicist interpretation of religion divided them. This is vividly illustrated by Carlyle's response to what was perhaps the most controversial aspect of Irving's career, his justification and support of the 'tongues'. When the Carlyles visited London in 1831, they stayed with the Irvings and witnessed first-hand a prayer meeting at the house where the tongues were spoken. Carlyle, determined to treat with his friend honestly, recalled the conversation he had with Irving where he expressed his views on the issue clearly:

the 13<sup>th</sup> of the *Corinthians* to which he always appealed, was surely too narrow a basis for so high a tower as he was building upon it, a high lean tower, or quasi-*mast*, piece added to piece, till it soared far above all human science and experience, and flatly contradicted all that, founded solely on a little text of *writing* in an ancient book! No sound judgment on such warranty could venture on such an enterprise. Authentic 'writings' of the Most High, were they found in old books only? They were in the stars and on the rocks, and in the brain and heart of every mortal; not dubious these to any person, as this 13<sup>th</sup> of *Corinthians* very greatly was.<sup>134</sup>

Though there is no evidence that this incident ended the friendship between Carlyle and Irving as some have claimed, Carlyle was clearly disappointed, but only because he wished to see Irving's energy more fruitfully applied (it will be recalled that only the year before Carlyle had written of Irving, 'With one such man I feel as if I could defy the Earth'). This sentiment is supported by the

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<sup>131</sup> apRoberts, 'Carlyle's Religion', 110-111.

<sup>132</sup> Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, Vol. I, 235-236.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid*, 236.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid*, 321-322.

remainder of Carlyle's reconstructed conversation, where he claimed '[t]hat it did not beseem him, Edward Irving, to be hanging on the rearward of mankind, struggling still to chain them to old notions not now well tenable, but to be foremost in the van, leading on by the light of the eternal stars across this hideous delirious wilderness where we all were, towards promised lands that lay ahead'.<sup>135</sup>

This might be taken as Carlyle's final word on Irving, and as such, it helps us understand the development of Carlyle's own career. Tom Lloyd claims that Carlyle 'defined his own development against the lives of others, whose essences he interpreted and, in some cases, distorted to suit his own needs'.<sup>136</sup> Though there is clear evidence in the *Reminiscences* of Carlyle's jealousy of Irving's relatively early success and the inherent authority his more conventional vocation brought him, Carlyle ultimately could not follow, so it seems that he interpreted Irving's life in a way which confirmed his own beliefs. While the two agreed that the old spiritual authorities had been torn down, they ultimately disagreed fundamentally over how to proceed from there. For Irving, the solution lay in restoring the old spiritual authority, the Christian clergy, while Carlyle believed that a new authority must be established. In this way, I argue that Carlyle's own interpretation of the 'failure' of Irving's career further (or finally) convinced him of the need to establish a new 'religion' with a new set of 'priests'. This period saw the creation of a self-conscious literary profession, and it is no coincidence that Carlyle was at the centre of this development.<sup>137</sup> Chris R. Vanden Bossche has interpreted Carlyle's career as a search for a new source of transcendental authority, and he argues that Carlyle began to represent literature as a possible replacement for religion after encountering the German Romantics around 1819.<sup>138</sup> Vanden Bossche claims that Carlyle

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<sup>135</sup> Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, Vol. I, 322.

<sup>136</sup> Tom Lloyd, 'Thomas Carlyle and Dynamical Symbolism: The Lesson of Edward Irving', *Victorian Newsletter*, 79 (Spring 1991): 9.

<sup>137</sup> The classic account of this is John Gross's *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters: A Study of the Idiosyncratic and the Humane in Modern Literature* (New York: Collier Books, 1969); for a recent interpretation see Richard Salmon, *The Formation of the Victorian Literary Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

<sup>138</sup> Chris R. Vanden Bossche, *Carlyle and the Search for Authority* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1991), 29.

worked out his calling and career through his articles on Schiller and Goethe in the 1820s, as he 'raised himself to the level of the translator and interpreter of the new prophets'.<sup>139</sup> In a diary entry from early 1831, Carlyle noted, 'The only sovereigns of the world in these days are the literary men (were there any such in Britain) – the prophets'.<sup>140</sup> Though he initially sought to be the interpreter of these new literary prophets, in his mature social criticism Carlyle would slip into the prophetic role himself.

### Carlyle as 'Victorian Prophet'

In his classic texts of social criticism – *Past and Present* (1843) and *Latter-Day Pamphlets* (1850) – Carlyle denounced the contemporary 'Mammon worship' and called for the recognition and reverence of true heroes. Through his reading of history, he conceived of an historical framework, running from the Reformation through to the French Revolution, wherein European society had gradually lost sight of God. In these texts, Carlyle went so far as to portray himself as an embattled prophet who was cursed for telling hard truths, and in shocking language he warned Britain of its fate should it continue along its doomed path. In light of social and political developments including the Chartist movement, famine in Ireland, agitation over the corn laws, and the European revolutions of 1848, Carlyle would continue to broadcast his prophetic message with increasing vehemence as British society, at least in his view, stubbornly refused to listen. The similarities to Irving are striking, but though the two shared very similar language and imagery, Carlyle's concerns and prognostications were profoundly secular. I argue ultimately that Carlyle's reinterpretation of Irving (outlined above) must be considered when accounting for his recreation of the prophet's role for industrial Britain.

Though Carlyle had initially presented himself in 'Signs of the Times' as the antidote to Irving's extreme millenarianism, it seems he had begun to fulfil a similar (Old Testament) prophetic role for mid-century Britain that Irving had

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<sup>139</sup> Vanden Bossche, *Search for Authority*, 31.

<sup>140</sup> Quoted in Froude, *Thomas Carlyle*, 95.

decades before. It is necessary to note here that there are other relevant aspects of Carlyle's thought which have been explored more extensively by scholars, including his reading of the German Romantics, his complicated relationship with the British Romantics, and even his inheritance from the Scottish school of Common Sense philosophy associated with Thomas Reid and Dugald Stewart.<sup>141</sup> While not discounting the importance of these other influences on Carlyle, my concern has been to shed light on how, in presenting his own reading of the signs of the times, he navigated the complex legacy of Edward Irving, a process which seems to have been both intensely personal and more immediate than his interaction with these other influences. It will be recalled that Carlyle experienced Irving's preaching on numerous occasions, and he read at least several of his major texts; it is possible therefore to get a sense of how he might have felt about Irving's language and rhetoric. Referring in the *Reminiscences* to Irving's use of 'the Miltonic or old English Puritan style' in speaking and writing, Carlyle acknowledged explicit influence on his own style.<sup>142</sup> But perhaps the clearest suggestion of an Irvingian influence on Carlyle's mature prophetic style can be extrapolated from his recollection of Irving's sermon for the London Missionary Society in 1824. It is necessary to reprint the passage in full:

On their grand anniversary these people had appointed to him the honour of addressing them, and were numerous assembled expecting some flourishes of eloquence and flatteries to their illustrious divinely-blessed Society, ingeniously done and especially with fit *brevity*, dinner itself waiting, I suppose, close to the rear. Irving emerged into his speaking place at the due moment, but instead of treating men and office-bearers to a short comfortable dose of honey and butter, opened into strict sharp enquiries, Rhadamanthine expositions of duty and ideal, issuing perhaps in actual criticism and admonition, gall and vinegar instead of honey; at any rate keeping the poor people locked up there for 'above two hours' instead of one hour or less, with dinner *hot* at the end of it.<sup>143</sup>

Knowing Carlyle's views on religious societies and public dinners, it is possible to perceive his sense of amusement at this episode. Irving's sermon was universally condemned, Carlyle continued sarcastically, '[f]or in fact, a man

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<sup>141</sup> For this last see Gavin Budge, 'Rethinking the Victorian Sage: Nineteenth-Century Prose and Scottish Common Sense Philosophy', *Literature Compass*, 2 (2005).

<sup>142</sup> Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, Vol. I, 119.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid*, 290-291.

suddenly holding up the naked inexorable Ideal in face of the clothed, and in England generally plump, comfortable, and pot-bellied Reality, is doing an unexpected and a questionable thing!’<sup>144</sup> As will be shown, this is precisely what Carlyle attempted to do in his own social criticism.

In *Past and Present*, Carlyle famously addressed ‘[t]he condition of England’ which he defined in the following way: ‘England is full of wealth, of multifarious produce, supply for human want in every kind; yet England is dying of inanition’.<sup>145</sup> He continued, ‘In Poor and Rich, instead of noble thrift and plenty, there is idle luxury alternating with mean scarcity and inability. We have sumptuous garnitures for our Life, but have forgotten to *live* in the middle of them’.<sup>146</sup> He characterised Britain’s prosperity as ‘an enchanted wealth’, which has made no one ‘better, beautifuller, stronger, [or] braver’.<sup>147</sup> Throughout the text, Carlyle characterised British society as being divided between ‘Dilettantism’, that is luxurious sentimentalism, and ‘Mammonism’, signifying the greedy pursuit of money above all else. It is significant though that these two principles are not equal on Carlyle’s schema. Dilettantism, which he referred to as ‘idle game-preserving Dilettantism’,<sup>148</sup> is understood to denote what Carlyle considered to be the Idle Aristocracy, therefore the remainder of society fell into the other category. Consequently, much of his criticism was focused on Mammonism and its effects on Britain.

In the section on the ‘Gospel of Mammonism’, Carlyle provided a classic analysis of the fundamental changes this greedy philosophy had worked on British society. In the words of one of his many personae, Gottfried Sauerteig, Carlyle explored what the true Heaven and Hell were for the Englishman. ‘[I]f you pierce through his Cants, his oft-repeated Hearsays, what he calls his Worships and so forth’, Sauerteig pronounced Hell to be, ‘The terror of “Not succeeding;” of not making money, fame, or some other figure in the world’.<sup>149</sup> The corresponding Heaven then (the ‘one thing [about which] we are entirely

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<sup>144</sup> Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, Vol. I, 291.

<sup>145</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present* (London: Chapman & Hall, Limited, 1843), 1.

<sup>146</sup> Carlyle, *Past and Present*, 4-5.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid*, 126.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid*, 125.

in earnest') was 'The making of money'.<sup>150</sup> For Carlyle, this situation had produced profound social changes:

True, it must be owned, we for the present, with our Mammon-Gospel, have come to strange conclusions. We call it a Society; and go about professing openly the total separation, isolation. Our life is not a mutual helpfulness; but rather, cloaked under due laws-of-war, named 'fair competition' and so forth, it is a mutual hostility. We have profoundly forgotten everywhere that *Cash-payment* is not the sole relation of human beings; we think, nothing doubting, that *it* absolves and liquidates all engagements of man.<sup>151</sup>

He illustrated this unnatural state of society with the example of an Irish widow in Edinburgh who, after being refused help by everyone, died of typhus and 'proved her sisterhood' with the rest of humanity by infecting and killing seventeen others.<sup>152</sup>

As these examples illustrate, Carlyle was critical of the entire system of *laissez-faire* capitalism which, in his view, was leading to nothing less than the dissolution of society, but the effects were even more dire for the lower classes. Though he acknowledged that life had always been hard for most, he suggested 'that in no time, since the beginnings of Society, was the lot of those same dumb millions of toilers so entirely unbearable as it is even in the days now passing over us'.<sup>153</sup> To be wretched was not merely to die, he continued, but 'to live miserable we know not why; to work sore and yet gain nothing; to be heart-worn, weary, yet isolated, unrelated, girt-in with a cold universal Laissez-faire: it is to die slowly all our life long, imprisoned in a deaf, dead, Infinite Injustice, as in the accursed iron belly of a Phalaris Bull'.<sup>154</sup> It was this insight which compelled Carlyle to make the comparison (controversial to modern readers) between the thralldom of Gurth, whose every need was attended to by his master Cedric the Saxon, and the 'Liberty to die by starvation' of the nineteenth-century worker.<sup>155</sup> As will be shown, Carlyle would push this line of reasoning to its extreme in *Latter-Day Pamphlets*.

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<sup>150</sup> Carlyle, *Past and Present*, 126.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 128-129.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 180-181.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

Following Carlyle's logic, Britain had arrived at such a situation because it had been let down by its leaders: 'If a country finds itself wretched, sure enough that country has been *misguided*'.<sup>156</sup> In place of the ancient guides for nations, the prophets and priests, Carlyle complained of the 'Journalists, Political Economists, Politicians, [and] Pamphleteers' who had usurped their place.<sup>157</sup> It was also this observation which underpinned his criticism of the landed aristocracy in Britain. As possessors of the land, Carlyle argued that the aristocracy owed to the country '[t]rue government and guidance; not no government and Laissez-faire; how much less, *misgovernment* and Corn-Law'.<sup>158</sup> What he was ultimately concerned with was the perennial problem of government: how to find and put into power those who are most capable of governing. And for Carlyle, this amounted to a society's ability to recognise its true heroes. In his lectures on heroes (published as *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* in 1841), he identified this issue as the key to properly understanding the state of European society in his time.<sup>159</sup> In *Past and Present*, he illustrated Britain's seeming inability to venerate its true heroes by pointing to the fact that it was George III who had been the 'head charioteer of the Destinies of England', while Robert Burns had been left to gauge ale, being completely useless in the government of the country.<sup>160</sup>

Similar to the way in which Irving and his circle interpreted the apocalyptic prophecies in reference to the French Revolution, Carlyle's social critique was founded on his historical reading of the tremendous societal changes symbolically represented by the violent and chaotic revolution.<sup>161</sup> In his first major historical work, Carlyle portrayed the French Revolution as nothing less than the phoenix-like 'Death-Birth of a World', heralding the death of Feudalism and the birth of Democracy.<sup>162</sup> According to his reading,

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<sup>156</sup> Carlyle, *Past and Present*, 24.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>159</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* [1841] (London: Chapman & Hall, Limited, 1890), 237.

<sup>160</sup> Carlyle, *Past and Present*, 75.

<sup>161</sup> For a full-length study of Carlyle as historian see John D. Rosenberg, *Carlyle and the Burden of History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).

<sup>162</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *The French Revolution: A History*, eds. K. J. Fielding and David Sorensen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), Vol. I, 223.

Feudalism had become rotten over the centuries due to the steady accumulation of falsehoods – ‘every scoundrel that had lived, and quacklike pretended to be doing, and been only eating and *misdoing*, in all provinces of life, as Shoebblack or as Sovereign Lord, each in his degree, from the time of Charlemagne and earlier’.<sup>163</sup> Thus, when the nobility of France are called to account for their treatment and leadership of the lower classes, all that is found is ‘EMPTINESS, – of pocket, of stomach, of head and of heart’.<sup>164</sup> And so, at the meeting of the States General on 4 May 1789, a death sentence was pronounced on shams, and it was ‘declared aloud, as with a Doom-trumpet, that *a Lie is unbelievable*’.<sup>165</sup> Significantly, as Nora Foster has pointed out, Carlyle’s *French Revolution* was hailed by John Stuart Mill as the work of a ‘social prophet’.<sup>166</sup>

In *On Heroes*, Carlyle claimed that ‘without the French Revolution, one would not know what to make of an age like this at all’, and it was to be hailed ‘as shipwrecked mariners might the sternest rock, in a world otherwise all of baseless sea and waves’.<sup>167</sup> ‘Aristocracy has become Phantasm-Aristocracy’, he wrote, ‘no longer able to *do* its work, not in the least conscious that it has any work longer to do. Unable, totally careless to *do* its work; careful only to clamour for the *wages* of doing its work, – nay for higher, and palpably undue wages, and Corn-Laws and *increase* of rents; the old rate of wages not being adequate now’.<sup>168</sup> Significantly, he even described it in prophetic language, as ‘[a] true Apocalypse, though a terrible one, to this false withered artificial time’.<sup>169</sup> With reference to the example of the French Aristocracy, Carlyle suggested that the handwriting was on the wall for the Idle Aristocracy of Britain.<sup>170</sup> And as warning of the punishment awaiting the British aristocracy for failing to do their duty he pointed to the blood-stained legacy of the French

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<sup>163</sup> Carlyle, *French Revolution*, Vol. I, 61.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid*, 237.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid*, 140.

<sup>166</sup> Nora Foster, “Free of Formulas”: Innovation, Prophecy, and Truth in Thomas Carlyle’s *The French Revolution*, *Carlyle Studies Annual*, 24 (2008): 101.

<sup>167</sup> Carlyle, *On Heroes*, 239.

<sup>168</sup> Carlyle, *Past and Present*, 120-121.

<sup>169</sup> Carlyle, *On Heroes*, 239.

<sup>170</sup> Carlyle, *Past and Present*, 154.

Revolution: 'Ten centuries will see it [the Revolution]. There were Tanneries at Meudon for human skins. And Hell, very truly Hell, had power over God's upper Earth for a season. The cruelest Portent that has risen into created space these ten centuries: let us hail it, with awestruck repentant hearts, as the voice once more of a God, though of one in wrath'.<sup>171</sup>

By the time of *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, Carlyle recognised universal democracy as 'an inevitable fact of the days'.<sup>172</sup> Following the revolutions of 1848 in countries across Europe, he claimed that the most important task of the present was to understand the fundamental nature of democracy.<sup>173</sup> Carlyle argued that democracies had never actually worked in practice, and furthermore, as '[t]he Universe itself is a Monarchy and Hierarchy', the principle went against 'the Everlasting Laws of Nature'.<sup>174</sup> In *Past and Present*, Carlyle (through another one of his personae – Diogenes Teufelsdröckh) defined democracy as the 'despair of finding any Heroes to govern you, and [being] contented putting-up with the want of them'.<sup>175</sup> Significantly, this view of democracy as deficient hero-worship was interpreted as a consequence of Atheism: 'he who discovers no God whatever, how shall he discover Heroes, the visible Temples of God?'<sup>176</sup> We have already seen Irving's strong views on democracy, and it is significant that during his visit to London in 1831 Carlyle recalled, in the *Reminiscences*, having 'several colloquies on that subject' with Irving, whom he found to be as 'brotherly as ever'.<sup>177</sup> Though they seemed to differ at the time (Irving 'found *Democracy* a thing forbidden, leading down to outer darkness' while Carlyle saw it as inevitable), looking back Carlyle acknowledged that he 'should now have more sympathy with his [Irving's convictions] than was then the case'.<sup>178</sup>

In his lecture on 'the Hero as King', Carlyle placed the French Revolution in a wider historical framework: he identified it as 'the third and final

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<sup>171</sup> Carlyle, *Past and Present*, 198.

<sup>172</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *Latter-Day Pamphlets* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1850), 7.

<sup>173</sup> Carlyle, *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, 8-9.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-19.

<sup>175</sup> Carlyle, *Past and Present*, 185.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>177</sup> Carlyle *Reminiscences*, Vol. I, 309-310.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*

act of Protestantism', with the Reformation itself as the first and English Puritanism as the second.<sup>179</sup> This historical framework was developed further in *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, where he characterised the times as the 'Age of Jesuitism'.<sup>180</sup> There Carlyle identified Ignatius of Loyola (the sixteenth-century founder of the Jesuit order) 'as the poison-fountain from which these rivers of bitterness that now submerge the world have flowed'; and the gospel he introduced Carlyle claimed to be: 'That poor human symbols were higher than the God Almighty's facts they symbolised; that formulas, with or without the facts symbolised by them, were sacred and salutary; that formulas, well persisted in, could still save us when the facts were all fled'.<sup>181</sup> Though Luther and Protestantism originally opposed this doctrine, by the Settlement of 1660 Britain had 'closed its Bible' according to Carlyle, and (as he put it in *Past and Present*) decided 'to govern henceforth without God, with only some decent Pretence of God'.<sup>182</sup> By 1789, this 'doctrine of devils' was held by Catholics and Protestants alike, and the only thing to oppose it was 'Jean Jacques and French Sansculottism'.<sup>183</sup> And in Britain, 'What we have to complain of is, that all men are become Jesuits! That no man speaks the truth to you or to himself, but that every man lies, – with blasphemous audacity, and does not know that he is lying, – before God and man, in regard to almost all manner of things'.<sup>184</sup> Finally at the climax of his description of Jesuitism, Carlyle fully embraced the prophetic lamentation: 'The heart of the world is corrupted to the core; a detestable devil's-poison circulates in the life-blood of mankind; taints with abominable deadly malady all that mankind do. Such a curse never fell on men before'.<sup>185</sup>

It is this understanding of history that informed Carlyle's famous criticism of nineteenth-century Britain. His diagnosis of the age shares many similarities to what we have seen from Southey, Sterling, and Mill, but Carlyle

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<sup>179</sup> Carlyle, *On Heroes*, 279.

<sup>180</sup> Carlyle, *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, 249.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 249-250.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 266; Carlyle, *Past and Present*, 143.

<sup>183</sup> Carlyle, *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, 250, 260-261.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 265.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*

came closest to Irving in the prophetic rhetoric he used to deliver his message. 'To speak in the ancient dialect', he wrote in *Past and Present*, 'we 'have forgotten God''.<sup>186</sup> Several passages from this text perfectly encapsulate Carlyle's self-portrayal as a prophet. Towards the beginning when speaking of the 'Condition of England', he addressed himself to the country at large:

The case is pressing, and one of the most complicated in the world. A God's-message never came to thicker-skinned people; never had a God's-message to pierce through thicker integuments, into heavier ears. It is Fact, speaking once more, in miraculous thunder-voice, from out of the centre of the world; – how unknown its language to the deaf and foolish many; how distinct, undeniable, terrible and yet beneficent, to the hearing few: Behold, ye shall grow wiser, or ye shall die!<sup>187</sup>

Further on, in a discussion of Britain's failure to worship its true heroes, Carlyle exhibited the anger of an indignant prophet:

Wretched, thick-eyed, gross-hearted mortals, why will ye worship lies [...] It is not your purses that suffer; your farm-rents, your commerces, your mill-revenues, loud as ye lament over these; no, it is not these alone, but a far deeper than these: it is your souls that lie dead, crushed down under despicable Nightmares, Atheisms, Brain-fumes; and are not souls at all, but mere succedanea for *salt* to keep your bodies and their appetites from putrefying!<sup>188</sup>

Addressing the nation again towards the end, he prophesied, 'Our England, our world cannot live as it is. It will connect itself with a God again, or go down with nameless throes and fire-consummation to the Devils'.<sup>189</sup> Reminiscent of Irving's direct appeals to the king and British people, much of Carlyle's *Latter-Day Pamphlets* was rhetorically addressed to the government and ruling classes, and he suggested that he was compelled to tell them hard truths: 'Your Lordship, this is too true, though irreverently spoken'.<sup>190</sup> Repeating his earlier message there, he proclaimed ominously, 'Britain [...] has other tasks appointed her in God's Universe than the making of money; and woe will betide her if she forget those other withal'.<sup>191</sup>

But perhaps the clearest example of Carlyle as Victorian prophet can be seen in 'Hudson's Statue' (No. VII in *Latter-Day Pamphlets*), where he

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<sup>186</sup> Carlyle, *Past and Present*, 117.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid*, 25.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid*, 190.

<sup>189</sup> Carlyle, *Past and Present*, 233.

<sup>190</sup> Carlyle, *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, 32.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid*, 129.

prophetically interpreted the significance of the unfinished statue of George Hudson, the famous railway fraudster. We have seen that hero-worship for Carlyle was the very essence of religion, so his examination of Hudson's statue was immediately transformed into religious criticism of the age. Carlyle lamented the fact that the statue had not been completed, because he claimed that it would have most accurately represented the 'worship' of the British people: 'Why was it not set up, that the whole world might see it; that our 'Religion' might be seen, mounted on some figure of a Locomotive, garnished with Scrip-rolls proper; and raised in some conspicuous place'.<sup>192</sup> Here Carlyle was fulfilling the age-old prophetic function of calling out idolatry. Just as Irving had done numerous times, including when he was preaching in the streets after being cast out of his church, Carlyle asked the difficult question: 'Whom or what do you in your very soul admire, and strive to imitate and emulate; is it God's servant or the Devil's?'<sup>193</sup> Carlyle criticised 'some epochs', his own obviously included, for having an imaginary religion, while their real worship was directed towards something else: 'They keep a set of gods or fetishes, reckoned respectable, to which they mumble prayers, [...] and all the while their real worship, or heart's love and admiration, which alone is worship, concentrates itself on quite other gods and fetishes, – on Hudsons and scrips, for instance'.<sup>194</sup> And in conscious imitation of the prophetic tradition he warned, 'Raise statues to the swollen Gambler as if he were great, sacrifice oblations to the King of Scrip, – unfortunate mortals, you will dearly pay for it yet'.<sup>195</sup> The language, imagery, and rhetoric in this 'pamphlet' are strikingly similar to that being used by Irving in his sermons following the economic shock of 1825-26, and, as will be shown in the final section, John Ruskin in his famous essay 'Traffic'.

Despite their similarities however, Carlyle and Irving differed fundamentally in their religious beliefs, and it was this divergence which would pave the way for the secular 'Victorian prophet'. Rejecting Irving's biblical

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<sup>192</sup> Carlyle, *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, 217.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid*, 237.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid*, 236.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid*, 244.

literalism, it seems that Carlyle felt he had transcended orthodox Christianity, as evident in his reflections on his time at Hoddam Hill. In the previous section, it was shown that Carlyle gently criticised Irving for ‘hanging on the rearward of mankind’ and holding onto notions which were no longer tenable instead of ‘leading on by the light of the eternal stars across this hideous delirious wilderness where we all were, towards promised lands that lay ahead’.<sup>196</sup> It is significant that around the same time as *Latter-Day Pamphlets* Carlyle made a very similar claim about Coleridge in his famous sketch of the ‘Sage of Highgate’ in *The Life of John Sterling* (1851). There Carlyle wrote of Coleridge, ‘He says once, he ‘had skirted the howling deserts of Infidelity;’ this was evident enough: but he had not had the courage, in defiance of pain and terror, to press resolutely across said deserts to the new firm lands of Faith beyond; he preferred to create logical fatamorganas for himself on this hither side, and laboriously solace himself with these’.<sup>197</sup> I argue that this sentiment, expressed almost identically in reference to both Irving and Coleridge, sheds light on how Carlyle saw his role in his mid-century works of social criticism: as a prophet of the new era who could guide British society across the ‘hideous delirious wilderness’ to the promised land on the other side. In *Latter-Day Pamphlets* (where, incidentally, he wrote of ‘the rotten carcass of Christianity’), Carlyle declared:

You perceive, my friends, we have actually got into the ‘New Era’ there has been such prophesying of: here we all are, arrived at last; – and it is by no means the land flowing with milk and honey we were led to expect! Very much the reverse. A terrible *new* country this: [...] a country of savage glaciers, granite mountains, of foul jungles, unhewed forests, quaking bogs; – which we shall have our own ados to make arable and habitable, I think!<sup>198</sup>

Explicitly presenting himself as a prophet of the new era and implicitly competing with the likes of Irving and Coleridge, Carlyle claimed to look down with pity from his prophetic vantage point ‘on millions of poor pious brothers

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<sup>196</sup> Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, Vol. I, 322.

<sup>197</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *The Life of John Sterling [1851]* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1871), 53.

<sup>198</sup> Carlyle, *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, 60, 40.

reduced to spiritual mummyhood, who curse me because I try to speak truth to them, and on a whole world canting and grimacing from birth to death'.<sup>199</sup>

Despite his use of religious language, it is clear that Carlyle's real concerns were decidedly secular. In *Past and Present*, he competed directly with the priests in identifying the real problems which were to be dealt with in the new age:

Could he [the priest] but find the point again, – take the old spectacles off his nose, and looking up discover, almost in contact with him, what the *real* Satanas [sic], and soul-devouring, world-devouring *Devil*, now is! Original Sin and suchlike are bad enough, I doubt not: but distilled Gin, dark Ignorance, Stupidity, dark Corn-Law, Bastille and Company, what are they! *Will* he discover our new real Satan; or go on droning through his old nose-spectacles about old extinct Satans; and never see the real one, till he *feel* him at his own throat and ours?<sup>200</sup>

In the same text, he identified the 'grand Problem of the Working Classes of England' to be 'the most momentous question'.<sup>201</sup> He warned that '[t]he Working Aristocracy [by which he meant the manufacturers, mill-owners, and anyone who commanded workers] must strike into a new path; must understand that money alone is *not* the representative either of man's success in the world, or of man's duties to man; and reform their own selves from top to bottom, if they wish England reformed'.<sup>202</sup> In what would become a famous phrase, he appealed to the 'Captains of Industry' to turn away from the mammon-worship characteristic of capitalist competition, and he likened those who amassed money to 'Choctaw Indians' who fought only to take scalps.<sup>203</sup> Nevertheless, Carlyle predicted that '[t]o be a noble Master, among noble Workers, will again be the first ambition with some few; to be a rich Master, only the second'.<sup>204</sup>

Consistently, the imagery and rhetoric were intensified in *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, but again the focus was secular. There he again identified the Captains of Industry 'as the beginning of a new real and not imaginary 'Aristocracy'' and the 'Organisation of Labour' as 'the universal vital Problem

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<sup>199</sup> Carlyle, *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, 253.

<sup>200</sup> Carlyle, *Past and Present*, 209.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid*, 220-221.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid*, 153.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid*, 235.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid*, 232.

of the world'.<sup>205</sup> Pauperism, seen as the fundamental symptom of everything wrong with British society, was characterised as 'the poisonous dripping from all the sins, and putrid untruths and godforgetting greedinesses and devil-serving cant and jesuitisms, that exist among us'.<sup>206</sup> In an imagined speech by Carlyle's ideal Prime Minister, he called for the end of self-government for those who had proven themselves incapable of properly exercising it. The beggars and the paupers, he claimed, have tried and failed, and now they were 'loading the chain' and thereby bringing others down with them.<sup>207</sup> He proposed a drastic solution: the creation of 'Industrial Regiments' where these unfortunate people would be commanded and led.<sup>208</sup>

For Carlyle scholars, *Latter-Day Pamphlets* often represents a turning point where his language and ideas finally became too offensive for comfort. Lowell T. Frye writes that this text provides 'a bitter denunciation of the present that offers little hope for the future' and reveals 'a man who has given up on reasoned social and political discourse'.<sup>209</sup> In this text it seems that Carlyle came the closest to Irving in his prophetic desperation, and it is fruitful to compare Carlyle in *Latter-Day Pamphlets* with Irving in 1832, when he cursed the church that had thrown him out and preached in the streets of London warning of the coming judgment of God. Noting the apocalyptic tone of the pamphlets, Frye claims that Carlyle's prose echoes 'the solemnity of the prophetic books in the Hebrew Bible' and that he has manufactured 'an authority that brooks no opposition'.<sup>210</sup> Though he had begun his career as a translator and editor in search of transcendental authority, by mid-century it seems Carlyle had lost hope, and in his desperation he became a prophet of political authoritarianism.

Though Carlyle scholars have often acknowledged the similarities between Irving and Carlyle, I would argue that Irving's influence (both positive

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<sup>205</sup> Carlyle, *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, 30-31.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid*, 135.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid*, 33-35.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid*, 35-37.

<sup>209</sup> Lowell T. Frye, "'This Offensive and Alarming Set of Pamphlets": Thomas Carlyle's *Latter-Day Pamphlets* and the Condition of England in 1850', *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 45:1 (Spring 2012): 115.

<sup>210</sup> Frye, 'Offensive and Alarming Set of Pamphlets', 117-118, 122-123.

and negative) has not been fully appreciated, in part because the extent to which Irving sought to fulfil a prophetic role in early nineteenth-century Britain had largely been unexamined. This incomplete understanding of Irving has in turn led to a distorted view of Carlyle and his prophetic office, seen for instance in Caroline McCracken-Flesher's analysis of Irving and Carlyle as 'the twinned prophets of an emerging age'.<sup>211</sup> Though there are certainly interesting parallels in the careers of these two men, as McCracken-Flesher highlights, I argue that they must be understood in their historical context. Carlyle remained relatively unknown throughout Irving's lifetime, and while he struggled to support himself through his literary work, Carlyle could follow his friend's career more or less consistently through reports in the newspapers. Carlyle heard Irving preach on more than a few occasions, and he read at least some of Irving's major texts. When Carlyle set out to provide his own interpretation of the social and political issues being fiercely debated, he therefore had to compete, both publicly and personally, with Irving. I argue ultimately that it was Carlyle's interpretation of Irving's 'failure' as a Christian prophet which contributed to (or at the very least confirmed) the direction he took in his own social criticism.

In this way, the 'secularisation' of the 'Victorian prophet' can be traced to the personal relationship between Edward Irving and Thomas Carlyle, two near-contemporaries who shared many of the same formative life experiences. It will be recalled that Irving and Carlyle both grew up within the same cultural and religious atmosphere of southwestern Scotland, and they shared very similar educational and early professional experiences. But their differing circumstances and beliefs can help explain the differences between Irving's prophetic rhetoric and the kind which has come to be associated with the Victorian prophet. In the late 1820s, Irving was a minister in an established church and had one of the largest congregations in London. His literal, historicist interpretation of the biblical prophecies, combined with an idealistic conception of the Christian ministry, encouraged him to view Britain as a latter-

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<sup>211</sup> Caroline McCracken-Flesher, 'Carlyle, Irving, and the Problematics of Prophecy', in *Literature and Belief*, 27.

day Israel with himself as one of Christ's appointed prophets, a view which seems to have provided him with the confidence to fulfil his (self-appointed) prophetic functions, including for instance addressing the king. Carlyle in the 1840s had long abandoned his orthodox faith and had tried, mostly without success, to replace it with literature and history. Having witnessed Irving's perceived lack of success and not having the transcendental authority to back himself up, Carlyle employed literary devices, including presenting himself as a reviewer, translator, editor, or historian as well as creating fictional characters to act as mouthpieces, to put forth similar views using similar language.

### The Later Victorian Prophet – John Ruskin

In this final section, I will briefly examine several lectures delivered by John Ruskin to hint at how the role of secular Victorian prophet established by Carlyle was carried into the later nineteenth century. Having shown the significance of Carlyle's reinterpretation of Irving to his own social criticism, I argue that the later work of Ruskin, who was himself explicitly influenced by Carlyle, illustrates the subtle yet unmistakable legacy of Irving on the genre of the Victorian prophet. Ruskin, like Carlyle and Irving before him, was concerned with the 'idolatry' of wealth in British society, and just like them he was unafraid to proclaim this in prophetic language.

Raised along strict evangelical lines, Ruskin had attended Oxford with an eye toward ordination in the Church of England, but he experienced a famous 'un-conversion' in 1858. He first met Carlyle in 1850, and, as Robert Hewison has put it, 'was thus drawn into the beginnings of his social and economic criticism, where Carlyle remained an influence and a support'.<sup>212</sup> Though Ruskin is perhaps most well-known for his criticism of art and architecture, often writing on such topics as Gothic architecture, the works of J. M. W. Turner, and the Pre-Raphaelites, beginning with *The Stones of Venice*

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<sup>212</sup> Robert Hewison, 'John Ruskin', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2016): <https://doi-org.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/24291>.

in the early 1850s his criticism took on political characteristics as he drew contrasts between the Venetian and the British empires. In the late 1850s, Ruskin began writing and lecturing explicitly on political economy, with contributions including several controversial magazine articles in the early 1860s.

Ruskin delivered four lectures in the 1860s, published as *The Crown of Wild Olive*, which set out his 'prophetic' message. In opening his first lecture on 'Work' (before the Working Men's Institute at Camberwell), Ruskin told his audience that he was simply there to state 'a few plain facts' and ask 'a few plain questions', nevertheless he assured them that he was compelled to tell them hard truths.<sup>213</sup> '[F]orgive me what offence there may be in what I am going to say', he asked of those in the upper classes, 'It is not I who wish to say it. Bitter voices say it; voices of battle and famine through all the world, which must be heard some day, whoever keeps silence'.<sup>214</sup> Here Ruskin presented himself not as a mouthpiece for God, a capacity in which it seems Irving often thought of himself, but as a prophet for the inarticulate masses being compelled to speak on their behalf, and there is an inherent threat of punishment should his message not be heeded.

The content of Ruskin's message in this series of lectures was much the same as we have seen in Carlyle and the other social critics. In his lecture on 'Work', Ruskin criticised the unbridled pursuit of wealth. There he compared making money to scoring runs in cricket: 'There's no use in the runs, but to get more of them than other people is the game. And there's no use in the money, but to have more of it than other people is the game'.<sup>215</sup> '[T]hat great foul city of London there, – rattling, growling, smoking, stinking, – a ghastly heap of fermenting brickwork, pouring out poison at every pore' was compared to 'a huge billiard-table without the cloth, and with pockets as deep as the bottomless pit'.<sup>216</sup> Going back to the source of the injunction against Mammonism, Ruskin reiterated the verse from Matthew:

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<sup>213</sup> John Ruskin, *The Crown of Wild Olive. Four Lectures on Industry and War* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1873), 21

<sup>214</sup> Ruskin, *Crown of Wild Olive*, 23.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid*, 27.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

You cannot serve two masters; – you *must* serve one or the other. If your work is first with you, and your fee second, work is your master, and the lord of work, who is God. But if your fee is first with you, and your work second, fee is your master, and the lord of fee, who is the Devil; and not only the Devil, but the lowest of devils – the ‘least erected fiend that fell’.<sup>217</sup>

Here we have precisely the same message which had been repeated endlessly by Carlyle: to do one’s work out of duty is to serve God; to do so out of a desire for riches is to worship the idol of Mammon, ‘the least erected fiend that fell’. In a classic example of the sage’s act of reinterpretation as explained by Landow, Ruskin declared that Judas Iscariot was not any more wicked than the ordinary person, rather ‘[h]e was only a common money-lover, and, like all money-lovers, did not understand Christ; – could not make out the worth of Him, or meaning of Him’.<sup>218</sup> Though this is certainly more indirect than many of the denunciations made by Irving, the implication is no less serious: anyone who loves money cannot truly understand Christ, and in that way they are compared to one of the great biblical villains.

The next lecture in the series, ‘Traffic’, has been interpreted as a classic example of the Victorian prophetic genre.<sup>219</sup> Delivered at the town hall in Bradford on 21 April 1864, Ruskin had been asked to speak on the ideal architectural style of a new exchange building being constructed in the city, to which he famously proclaimed, ‘I am going to do nothing of the kind’; ‘I do not care about this Exchange’, he continued, ‘because you don’t’.<sup>220</sup> As Landow has argued in several places, the Victorian sage often sought to interpret seemingly trivial phenomena in order to unearth essential truths, and this is precisely what Ruskin was doing with the hypothetical architectural style of the Bradford Exchange.<sup>221</sup> He pointed out that churches and schools were almost always built in Gothic style, while mansions and mills were never Gothic,<sup>222</sup> a seemingly naïve observation which allowed him to make a critical point: ‘now

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<sup>217</sup> Ruskin, *Crown of Wild Olive*, 37.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid*, 38.

<sup>219</sup> For a recent close reading of this text see Jeremy Tambling, ‘Interrupted Traffic: Reading Traffic’, *The Modern Language Review*, 105:1 (January 2010): 53-68.

<sup>220</sup> Ruskin, *Crown of Wild Olive*, 62-63.

<sup>221</sup> See for instance George P. Landow, ‘Ruskin as Victorian Sage: The Example of ‘Traffic’’, in *New Approaches to Ruskin. Thirteen Essays*, ed. Robert Hewison (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 90.

<sup>222</sup> Ruskin, *Crown of Wild Olive*, 72.

you live under one school of architecture, and worship under another'.<sup>223</sup> For Ruskin this symbolised nothing less than the fact that religion had been divorced from everyday life. Good architecture, he argued, 'is essentially religious – the production of a faithful and virtuous, not of an infidel and corrupted people', and 'every great national architecture', he continued, 'has been the result and exponent of a great national religion'.<sup>224</sup> Ruskin thus transformed a discussion on secular architecture into one on fundamental religious beliefs, and the question he posed to his audience – 'do you mean to build as Christians or as infidels?'<sup>225</sup> – was meant to be uncomfortable.

This discussion led Ruskin to the climax of his discourse, the topic of Britain's religion. He identified three great religions in European history: the Greek ('the worship of the God of Wisdom and Power'), the Mediæval ('the worship of the God of Judgment and Consolation'), and the Renaissance ('the worship of the God of Pride and Beauty'); but Britain had a fourth.<sup>226</sup> 'Now', he proclaimed, 'we have indeed, a nominal religion, to which we pay tithes of property and sevenths of time; but we have also a practical and earnest religion, to which we devote nine-tenths of our property, and six-sevenths of our time'.<sup>227</sup> The nominal religion was a topic of much dispute, but Ruskin claimed that the practical religion was unanimous: 'I think you will admit that the ruling goddess may be best generally described as the 'Goddess of Getting-on' or 'Britannia of the Market''.<sup>228</sup> To this great Goddess of Getting-on were built and dedicated all the railroad mounds and stations, chimneys, harbour piers, and warehouses of Britain, and Ruskin satirically suggested a design for the Bradford Exchange as a temple to the goddess, including a statue with a leather 'purse, with thirty slits in it, for a piece of money to go in at, on each day of the month'.<sup>229</sup> He pointed out that 'this golden image, high by measureless cubits' had been 'forbidden to us, first of all idols, by our own

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<sup>223</sup> Ruskin, *Crown of Wild Olive*, 72.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid*, 76-78.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid*, 76.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid*, 79.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid*, 82-83.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid*, 83.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid*, 83, 86-87.

Master and faith'; and following the classic prophetic pattern, he concluded this discourse with an ominous warning: 'Continue to make that forbidden deity your principal one, and soon no more art, no more science, no more pleasure will be possible. Catastrophe will come; or, worse than catastrophe, slow mouldering and withering into Hades'.<sup>230</sup> Here Ruskin was following closely in the footsteps of Carlyle, who had seen in the proposed statue of George Hudson the quintessence of British idolatry, and Irving before him, particularly in his discourses following the economic crisis of the mid-1820s where he denounced British society for its Mammon-worship.

The final lecture included in this collection, on 'The Future of England', was delivered to the Royal Artillery Institution at Woolwich in December 1869. This text is strong evidence of Ruskin's debt to Carlyle in his thinking on these topics, and so it serves to conclude this thesis by illustrating the decisively secular turn which had been taken in the tradition of the Victorian prophet through Carlyle's mediation. Ruskin directed the attention of his audience to the 'great political crisis' which threatened British society, consisting of the struggle 'between the newly-rising power of democracy and the apparently departing power of feudalism' as well as 'another struggle, no less imminent, and far more dangerous, between wealth and pauperism'.<sup>231</sup> He reiterated the claims which are by now familiar: the people have been misgoverned; the masters have done none of the work and yet taken all the wages; and a class of paupers had been created which was 'peculiarly difficult to govern'.<sup>232</sup> Despite the fact that these were concerns which would be considered secular, Ruskin's warning, like Carlyle's before him, was no less serious: 'if they refuse to do this, and hesitate and equivocate, clutching through the confused catastrophe of all things only at what they can still keep stealthily for themselves, – their doom is nearer than even their adversaries hope, and it will be deeper than even their despisers dream'.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> Ruskin, *The Crown of Wild Olive*, 96-97.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid*, 147.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid*, 149-150.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid*, 172.

I do not claim that Irving directly inspired Ruskin and the later Victorian prophets; there were shared influences which could account for some of the similarities in language and style (as an obvious example, Irving, Carlyle, and Ruskin all drew directly from the Bible<sup>234</sup>). I do claim however that the form of the mature Victorian prophet as exhibited by Carlyle in the mid-nineteenth century was influenced by his reinterpretation of Irving's life and message, and this role of the secular prophet was then assumed by other writers later in the century, like Ruskin as we have seen here. In this way, the failure of Irving's prophetic career, in Carlyle's interpretation, provided the impetus for the creation of a new role for Britain during a transformational period, that of the 'Victorian prophet' as it has traditionally been understood.

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In the previous chapter, it was shown that while much of the press was negative or downright hostile to Irving, his criticism challenged many of the writers to engage with the issues he addressed themselves. Here we have seen that Irving was a part of the debate over the present and future state of British society as exemplified in the texts by Robert Southey and the group of younger-generation critics, including John Sterling, John Stuart Mill, and Thomas Carlyle. While Southey, Sterling, and Mill were aware of Irving to varying degrees, Carlyle's classic work of social criticism was a review of one of Irving's publications. By far the closest to Irving both personally and intellectually out of this group of authors, Carlyle portrayed Irving's religious views as themselves signs of the times while expressing very similar sentiments, especially in his criticism of expediency. Furthermore, Carlyle clearly recognised (and to some extent appreciated) Irving's attempt to revive the role of the Christian prophet, though he believed that this project was doomed to fail. I argue that this view contributed to the development of Carlyle's own self-portrayal as a prophet for the new era, seen in his mid-

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<sup>234</sup> Michael Wheeler has examined Ruskin's religious views and the influence of Christianity, and especially the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, on his writing in *Ruskin's God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

century texts on the condition of England. Once Carlyle had fashioned this new role, he influenced a new generation of Victorian prophets, including among them John Ruskin, who continued to point out the faults of industrial society.



## Conclusion

Building on the recent scholarship on Edward Irving, particularly that by Tim Grass, Peter Elliott, and Byung Sun Lee, I have argued in this thesis that the kind of prophetic language and rhetoric which has been associated with such secular sages as Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin, and Matthew Arnold can and should be interpreted as an indirect legacy of Irving, though heavily diluted and modified through the mediating influence of Carlyle. As we have seen, Irving self-consciously embodied the role of prophet to the British nation in the 1820s and early 1830s. He interpreted disasters such as the economic crisis of 1825-26 as divine retribution for the sins of all classes, and he publicly warned of the terrible judgments which would follow the dismantling of Britain's Protestant constitution and appealed directly to the rulers of the land. Irving's views on these and other similar topics were certainly buttressed by his millenarian and eschatological beliefs, but he went further than other prophetic exegetes to portray himself as a modern-day prophet. The controversies in his later career contributed to his sense of persecution, and he came to declaim the Church of Scotland as the Church of Antichrist. But Irving's influence extended beyond just the 'religious world' as his publications were frequently reviewed in the magazines, and events in his life were often discussed in the major newspapers. From early on, the periodical press picked up on his prophetic denunciations, though this particular aspect of his style was almost universally criticised. The comprehensive analysis of Irving's contemporary reception which I have provided here is a crucial addition to the scholarship on him, one which has allowed me to make a more substantial claim regarding his wider significance. When the works of social criticism by Robert Southey, John Sterling, and John Stuart Mill were published in the late 1820s and early '30s, they did so with some level of awareness of Irving's career, but none more so than Carlyle, who reinterpreted the significance of Irving's life and career to suit his own purposes. When Carlyle presented his own reading of the times at mid-century, he competed explicitly with the ministers and priests (and

implicitly with Irving) in identifying the 'real' problems of the new era, though his criticism shared many similarities with Irving's before him. Given Carlyle's canonical status as the first in a line of secular social critics, this thesis provides a new interpretation of the historical origins of the Victorian prophets. Considering Frank Turner's point about twentieth-century scholars' distorting fixation on these secular prophets, in the space that remains I would like to suggest a wider prophetic legacy for Irving within the 'religious world', evident in the Catholic Apostolic Church as well as the established churches of Scotland and England.

As might be expected considering his dramatic life and controversial career, Irving's longer legacy in the nineteenth century was not straightforward. The most direct (though by no means uncontroversial) example of this was the development and growth of the Catholic Apostolic Church during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The movement had its roots in the prophetic conferences hosted by Henry Drummond at his Albury Park estate in the late 1820s, and many of the early leaders were associated with Irving's congregation in London. It will be recalled that since the time of Irving's expulsion from the National Scotch Church in 1832, a group (now separated from the established Church) had been gathering around his ministry, but with his early death in 1834 this group would come to be led by men such as Drummond and John B. Cardale. What was known then as the 'Irvingite church' grew relatively rapidly: by July 1835, there were seven congregations in London alone, twenty-two in the rest of England, six in Scotland, and one each in Wales and Ireland; outreach had also begun in America, Europe, and even as far as India.<sup>1</sup> Though there has been dispute within the movement as to the importance of Irving's role in the group's founding,<sup>2</sup> I suggest here that one of the particular ways in which his legacy can be seen in the later group's approach is in their emphasis on orally-delivered testimonies to the clergy and

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<sup>1</sup> Tim Grass, *The Lord's Work: A History of the Catholic Apostolic Church* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2017), 29.

<sup>2</sup> Though the group was referred to as the Irvingites throughout the nineteenth century and Irving has often been credited as the founder, Columba Graham Flegg claims that he was no more than a catalyst for the movement, *'Gathered Under Apostles': A Study of the Catholic Apostolic Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 462.

rulers around Europe. The first of these testimonies was read to the seven Catholic Apostolic churches in London on Christmas Day 1835 before being delivered to the archbishops, bishops, and clergy of the Church of England in London and around the country. Spencer Perceval (another apostle and son of the assassinated Prime Minister) prepared a testimony which was read to William IV in a private interview as well as the Privy Council in January 1836, while Drummond testified to the archbishop of York. Around this time yet another testimony was drawn up and intended for the Pope, the Austrian emperor, and the French king. The 'Great Testimony', as this would later be known, was delivered by Drummond and Perceval to Cardinal Acton in May 1838 for Pope Gregory XVI, and to Prince Metternich by Drummond and Francis Woodhouse (another apostle) for the Austrian emperor; Grass notes that it is unclear as to whether it was finally presented to Louis Philippe of France.<sup>3</sup>

It is suggested by Grass that the intellectual origin of these testimonies may have been Irving's petition to the king in 1831, an idea which is supported by a brief examination of the Great Testimony. Grass has explicated the similar pattern shared by these testimonies: 'extensive consideration of contemporary evils in Church and state, exposition of biblical teaching concerning God's purpose for humanity and the Church, assertion that through the events culminating in the restoration of apostles God's purpose was being realized, and an urgent appeal to accept the work and so find shelter from coming judgment'.<sup>4</sup> The authors of the testimony warned of the fearful social, political, and spiritual dangers facing society,<sup>5</sup> and in a text meant to be read out to the most powerful European leaders they promised to explain these evils 'by tracing the sins of Kings and Priests during many generations'.<sup>6</sup> The rulers of Europe were held to be directly responsible for 'the convulsions and

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<sup>3</sup> Grass, *The Lord's Work*, 49-50.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 45.

<sup>5</sup> 'The Great Testimony. To the Patriarchs, Archbishops, Bishops, and Others in Places of Chief Rule over the Church of Christ throughout the Earth, and to the Emperors, Kings, Sovereign Princes, and Chief Governors over the Nations of the Baptized', abridged in Edward Miller, *The History and Doctrines of Irvingism, or of the so-called Catholic and Apostolic Church* (London: C. Kegan Paul & Co., 1878), Vol. I, 351-352.

<sup>6</sup> 'The Great Testimony', 359-360.

judgments overtaking their kingdoms', as they had forgotten or ignored the fact that they were divinely ordained,<sup>7</sup> and instead were advancing 'that great lie of Satan [...] that "the people are the source of legitimate power"'.<sup>8</sup> The French Revolution was heralded as only the type and omen of the universal convulsion 'which will throw down every civil and ecclesiastical fabric',<sup>9</sup> and the vision of hell on earth with which these latter-day apostles threatened the world was a direct attack on the liberalism which they saw to be sweeping society.<sup>10</sup>

Back in the established churches, Irving's legacy was much more varied. D. N. Hempton has claimed that Irving's version of extreme millenarianism was declining in the late 1820s, though 'pre-millennialism as a biblically-based, eschatological system' actually gained ground in the 1830s and '40s.<sup>11</sup> The resurgence of Catholic demands following emancipation led Evangelicals to become more anti-Catholic during this period, and Hempton argues pre-millenarianism supported this rising anti-Catholicism which can be seen especially clearly in the intense opposition to the Maynooth Bill of 1845, which effectively endowed the Catholic church in Ireland.<sup>12</sup> As Hempton points out, one particularly extreme example of this new Evangelicalism was Dr John Cumming (1807 – 1881) of the Scottish Presbyterian church at Crown Court in London, and I suggest that Cumming's thought and career can be interpreted within the context of Irving's legacy on mainstream religious life in the mid-nineteenth century. Cumming began attending Irving's congregation at Regent Square from 1826; in 1832 he was invited to minister to the congregation at Crown Court in Covent Garden where he remained for the rest of his career. An imposing, dark-haired figure in the pulpit, Rosemary Mitchell asserts that Cumming 'was popularly viewed as the inheritor of Irving's mantle'.<sup>13</sup> R. Buick Knox claims that Cumming had a 'magnetism' which drew

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<sup>7</sup> 'The Great Testimony', 428-429.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 425.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, 429.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 430.

<sup>11</sup> D. N. Hempton, 'Evangelicalism and Eschatology', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 31:2 (April 1980): 192.

<sup>12</sup> Hempton, 'Evangelicalism and Eschatology', 193.

<sup>13</sup> Rosemary Mitchell, 'John Cumming', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2008): <https://doi-org.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/6897>.

crowds to his 'clear and impassioned sermons', and during a period of three months in 1847 in which his church was being rebuilt, he held services in Exeter Hall which attracted up to 4,000 people and required police presence for crowd control.<sup>14</sup> Cumming was a prominent anti-Catholic controversialist, engaging in a series of public debates with a Catholic barrister, Daniel French, in April and May 1839, and he was active in the Maynooth debates of 1845 as well as the controversy over the (re)establishment of a Roman Catholic hierarchy in Britain in 1850. Cumming was also a pre-millenarian student of prophecy, and as such he calculated that the restoration of Jerusalem and the end of Papal power would take place in 1867.<sup>15</sup>

But there is also evidence that he presented himself as something of a public prophet. It will be recalled that Cumming preached a funeral sermon at his London church on the occasion of the death of Irving, where he claimed that Irving 'knew and felt too well the greatness of his genius; and this made him fancy he could penetrate the arcana of eternity in virtue of his intellectual prowess'.<sup>16</sup> Despite this criticism, some similarities between the two preachers can be seen in Cumming's sermon published on the occasion of Queen Victoria's coronation in 1838. There he invoked the existential challenges facing Britain – 'a breaking up of all existent things, and the construction of nothing in their stead'<sup>17</sup> – and reiterated the beneficial effects Protestantism had on the country, including contributing to the defeat of Napoleon, and he lamented Catholic emancipation in 1829, which he described as 'an awful stain [which] fell upon the brightest jewel in the crown of Britain'.<sup>18</sup> As Irving had done in his letter to the king, Cumming reminded the new queen that she held

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<sup>14</sup> R. Buick Knox, 'Dr John Cumming and Crown Court Church, London', *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, 22 (1984): 59.

<sup>15</sup> Like other students of prophecy, Cumming had the misfortune to live long enough to see his calculations proved incorrect, and his reputation was lowered significantly when the second coming did not occur in 1867, especially when it was discovered further that during this time he was in the process of negotiating a twenty-one year extension on the lease of his house.

<sup>16</sup> John Cumming, 'The Moral Influence we Exert after Death', in *The British Pulpit; A Collection of Three Hundred and Fifty Original Sermons, by the Most Eminent Divines of the Present Day* (London: G. Wightman, 1839), Vol. II, 546.

<sup>17</sup> John Cumming, *Our Queen's Responsibilities & Reward. A Sermon to her Majesty, on her Coronation, Thursday, June 28<sup>th</sup>, 1838* (London: Francis Baisler, 1838), 18-19.

<sup>18</sup> Cumming, *Our Queen's Responsibilities*, 6-9.

her power in trust for Christ, and he made a virtue of his prophetic boldness: 'I am one of a long race of apostolic presbyters who have been noted for uncompromising honesty. We have never learned to ask pardon for the utterance of truth'.<sup>19</sup>

Ralph Brown has recently argued for the existence of a 'radical' legacy for Irving within Victorian Anglican Evangelicalism, shown for example in the thought of Edward Bickersteth (1786 – 1850). After being very active in the Church Missionary Society during the 1820s, Bickersteth resigned from his missionary work in 1830 and took up the rectory at Watton in Hertfordshire, and in the mid-1830s he 'converted' from his post-millenarian views to a pre-millenarianism grounded in the imminent return of Christ. This was made evident by at least the 1835 edition of his *Practical Remarks on the Prophecies*, and Brown argues that it was Bickersteth who gave prophetic studies a new respectability following 'the Irving debacle',<sup>20</sup> As Gareth Atkins has observed, Bickersteth had attended the first Albury conference in 1826, but he did not return the following years, and he recorded being repelled at Irving's church by the 'charismatic excesses' he witnessed there.<sup>21</sup> Bickersteth grew uneasy over the resurgent Roman Catholicism, and he became active in the Reformation Society and the Protestant Association. He was also said to have 'converted' his friend Lord Ashley, the future Earl of Shaftesbury, to his pre-millenarian system. Ultimately Brown argues that Bickersteth and other Anglican Evangelicals 'combined an Irvingite fatalism regarding the inevitability of divine judgements with a strong element of optimism, towards both the prospects for Evangelical efforts in this lifetime and hopes for a glorious redemption in the future'.<sup>22</sup>

Following a fast day on 21 March 1832 called by the King in response to the ongoing cholera epidemic, Bickersteth saw the deadly epidemic as a divine punishment on the British nation, and he proceeded to point out the

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<sup>19</sup> Cumming, *Our Queen's Responsibilities*, 10, 20.

<sup>20</sup> Ralph Brown, 'Victorian Anglican Evangelicalism: The Radical Legacy of Edward Irving', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 58:4 (October 2007): 683.

<sup>21</sup> Gareth Atkins, 'Anglican Evangelical Theology, c. 1820-1850: The Case of Edward Bickersteth', *Journal of Religious History*, 38:1 (March 2014): 5, 8.

<sup>22</sup> Brown, 'Victorian Anglican Evangelicalism', 703.

'grievous and aggravated' sins of the country.<sup>23</sup> Fifteen years later, as famine gripped Ireland, Bickersteth responded to the Queen's appointment of a fast day (on 24 March 1847) with a similar pamphlet. The potato blight was seen by Bickersteth as direct evidence of God's judgment for the sins of the country, which included, among others, a 'general thirst after gain', infidelity, and the neglect (both temporally and spiritually) of the poor.<sup>24</sup> But most importantly, he claimed that England was guilty of neglecting Ireland, which had the effect of allowing Catholicism to hold sway there, and for him the Maynooth grant had been especially unfaithful on England's part.<sup>25</sup> As a pre-millenarian by this point, Bickersteth spoke of the 'last days' and 'the near and coming final judgment', and he concluded his pamphlet with a warning: 'If our present calamity do not lead us to general repentance, it will undoubtedly bring heavier and severer judgments. They are already impending over us'.<sup>26</sup>

While a strict literary genre of secular 'prophecy' might be defined around Carlyle's social criticism and his influence on later writers, the very brief examples sketched above indicate that the use of prophetic language and rhetoric was perhaps more widespread than has been fully acknowledged. I would like to suggest, as a topic for further research, the existence of a wider variety of 'Victorian prophets' (including orthodox Christians, and even Anglicans) as an indirect legacy of Edward Irving.

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<sup>23</sup> Edward Bickersteth, *National Fast of 1832. A Help for Duly Observing it*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: L. B. Seeley and Sons, 1832), 4.

<sup>24</sup> Edward Bickersteth, *The National Fast of 1847. A Help for Duly Observing it*, 6<sup>th</sup> 10,000 (London: Seeley, Burnside, and Seeley, 1847), 2-4.

<sup>25</sup> Bickersteth, *National Fast of 1847*, 5-6.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 10-11.



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