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Revolution and Restoration

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Source: *Archivium Hibernicum*, Vol. 59 (2005), pp. 290-305

Published by: Catholic Historical Society of Ireland

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40285210>

Accessed: 30-01-2019 13:49 UTC

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George Chalmers and the Reformation: writing Scottish history in the age of Counter-Revolution and Restoration

George Chalmers had a successful career as a public servant, most notably in the Office for Trade when it was under the direction of the first earl of Liverpool. His writings on political and economic topics reflect this identity, as earlier writings on American colonial history reflect that of the returned Loyalist.¹ The former gained him some contemporary attention, as one whose name stood 'deservedly . . . high in the rank of political ability and industry',² the latter were of more enduring worth. However, it is as a writer on Scottish history that he is chiefly remembered. Perhaps, now that the antiquarian parentage of academic historiography is celebrated, no condescension is implied in the description of Chalmers as an antiquary. It is better though to acknowledge that he represents a stage in the evolution of history writing, when, to a considerable degree, a union of antiquarian and historical study already existed. Chalmers clearly regarded himself – and was long regarded by others – as an interpreter of the past, and no mere recorder of its relics. The introduction to the late nineteenth-century edition of the work most likely to be used in justifying the description of Chalmers as an antiquary, his *Caledonia*, expressed respect for the integrity of 'a well-defined system of Scottish history', contained in its earlier sections. Here was 'an original view of the history of the country', which remained controversial.³ Chalmers, in his own preface, distinguished his work from that of 'tourists and . . . antiquaries', as novel in its interpretative treatment of the objects of their interest. He also indicated his grander purpose of rescuing the nation's history from the doleful consequences of Enlightenment historians' distaste for the medieval past.⁴ It was not the antiquaries, but the historians of the Scottish Enlightenment, repeatedly criticised for their preference for producing literature rather than scholarship founded on research, who by way of reaction, stimulated Chalmers' labours. Hume and others received but general criticism, which was meted out also to William Robertson,⁵ though he, by virtue of his field of interest, was also subject to more particular criticisms with

1 Grace A. Cockroft, *The public life of George Chalmers* (New York, 1939), chaps. 1–3. 2 *Critical Review*, xii (Sept. 1795), p. 155. 3 See the 'Introductory Note' to George Chalmers, *Caledonia: or, a historical and topographical of North Britain . . .* (Paisley, 1887–1902), i, first roman pagination, v. 4 *Ibid.*, i, 2nd roman pagination, vi–vii. 5 See, for example, George Chalmers, *An estimate of the comparative strength of Great Britain . . .*, (new [3rd] edn, London, 1794), p. xcvi; and Cockroft, *Chalmers*, p. 202.

considerable frequency. In short, by virtue of his areas of interest and methodology, Chalmers has a place as an eminent Scottish representative of *l'école moderne* of the early nineteenth century.

The early nineteenth century, despite its historiographical innovations, continued to distinguish history from antiquarianism with reference to the former's character as agreeable literature possessed of a serious, pre-eminently moral, purpose. With this view too, Chalmers is to be identified as a historian. His strong inclination towards biography appears to reflect his belief that this was the 'most pleasing' form of writing about the past, though he appreciated too its attraction for the moralist.⁶ It is particularly appropriate in speaking of Chalmers to point out that history writing's moral purpose very frequently subsumes its political purposes. The distaste felt by the sentimental novelist, Henry Mackenzie, for the 'supercilious and abusive manner' in which Chalmers treated figures of whom he disapproved politically, speaks chiefly of the former's failure to notice the termination of the Enlightenment's cult of politeness and the real moral outrage which Radicalism and failure to oppose it provoked in the 1790s.⁷ If Chalmers' hostility to the emergent Radicalism of the 1790s is clear enough, more precise definition of his politics is much less so. He has been described as 'a devotee of the new Toryism'⁸ and, more precisely, a Pittite.⁹ For Douglas Duncan, on the other hand, it was decidedly the old Toryism, including the cultural values of the Jacobites, of which Chalmers was a devotee,¹⁰ while his biographer identified him as a Whig.¹¹ Much of this apparent confusion has little to do with Chalmers and much to do with the difficulties faced by historians attempting to relate the political phenomena of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century to the ideological and party systems of the preceding and succeeding periods.¹² Such an interest in British political development might be profitably complemented with a concern to establish the distinctive characteristics of the period and, particularly in the study of ideological history, a less insular approach. Chalmers is best related to those thinkers, throughout Europe, who may conveniently be labelled as Counter-Revolutionary or Restorationist. This term may appear inappropriate in referring to Britain, which, after all, preserved itself from the forces of the Revolution successfully. However, if some parts of Europe resisted the Revolution more successfully than others, there was nowhere that it was not thought necessary to oppose its effects constructively. Everywhere, there were those who controverted the beliefs and values which

6 [George Chalmers], 'The life of Allan Ramsay' in *The poems of Allan Ramsay* (rev. and enl. edn, London, 1800), i, v. 7 *Scottish Register*, i (Jan.–Mar. 1794), p. 341. For Mackenzie's authorship of this review of Chalmers' biography of Thomas Ruddiman, see William Robertson (deputy to the Lord Clerk Register) to Chalmers, 19 Sept. 1794 (British Library [hereafter B.L.], Chalmers Correspondence, Add. MS 22,900, f. 258). 8 William Ferguson, *The identity of the Scottish nation: an historic quest* (Edinburgh, 1998), p. 276. 9 Colin Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's past: Scottish whig historians and the creation of an Anglo-British identity, 1689–c. 1830* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 253. 10 Douglas Duncan, *Thomas Ruddiman: a study in Scottish scholarship in the early eighteenth century* (Edinburgh, 1965), pp 6–9. 11 Cockroft, *Chalmers*, pp 47, 57–8 and 187–8. 12 For a brief and useful discussion of the most relevant historiography, see James J. Sack, *From Jacobite to Conservative: reaction and orthodoxy in Britain, c. 1760–1832* (Cambridge, 1993), pp 46–50.

they saw manifested in the Revolutionary politics of their age and sought a future shaped by a purified adherence to the principles which had been held to have sustained the social and political order of Christendom. Nor, to expand the term also temporally, did this response need to await the dissolution of the Napoleonic Empire. It is a purpose of the present study to indicate some of the content of this Restorationist ideology in Britain in general and Scotland in particular, pointing out such of its strengths and weaknesses as are apparent in Chalmers' writings.

In the modern writing of Scottish history of the Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary periods, consciousness of the paradigm of this Continent-wide movement has been very little in evidence. The phenomena it might cast light on have been discussed under other headings. 'Romanticism' has done service, but its over-extension and ambiguity in relation to areas of life commonly of interest to historians, such as politics, make it difficult for them to import it as a tool. A manifestation of national consciousness has been spoken of, but as such, has been little esteemed. It did reinvent an indigenous culture, but in a '[t]amed, provincialized, and fading' form, 'used to buttress the *status quo*'.¹³ A selective approach to the phenomena thus described, making use of the notion of 'Highlandism', goes further and encourages ridicule.¹⁴ Where authentically Restorationist impulses can readily be observed, as in the study of Scott, there has been a preference for seeing, albeit with justification, 'the last great figure of the Scottish Enlightenment', who 'internalised its theory of historical change' – or, in other words, a mere conservative.¹⁵ Whether the rubric for interpretation adopted be that of a revival of national consciousness or Restorationism, the weakness and failure of what is spoken of, when comparison is made between Scotland and other parts of Europe, will be an inevitable conclusion. However, the reasons that can be offered for this are likely to be revealing and interesting. A preference for the use of the concept of Restorationism is helpful in this respect, in that religion was of central importance in the matter.

It is vain to ask if Restorationism was a political or religious movement: in its adherents' refusal to make such a distinction lay an authentic continuation of the *ancien régime*, albeit displaying a difference in being more explicitly and aggressively articulated. Indeed, without its religious underpinning, Restorationism lacked any substantial justification for its enthusiasm for monarchy and social hierarchy. The union was a necessary one. However, the politics of the early nineteenth century made irresistible demands for modification in the realisation of monarchical and aristocratic restoration, while the proponents of theocratic programmes could escape the brutalities of politics – and divergence took place. Catholics could draw distinctions between what their political theology required and what their church might, in practice, tolerate: Gregory XVI denounced the

¹³ Bruce Lenman, *Integration, Enlightenment, and industrialization: Scotland 1746–1832*, (London, 1981), p. 135. ¹⁴ T. M. Devine, *The Scottish nation 1700–2000* (London, 2000), chap. 11. ¹⁵ Neil Davidson, *The origins of Scottish nationhood* (London, 2000), p. 163.

tenets of the Liberal Catholics, but not the new Belgian constitution. The Oxford Movement's adherents could even deny that they had ever possessed a political mind and redefine themselves as simply the bearers of a transforming ecclesiology.¹⁶ Thus, important as Restorationism may have been in its political dimension, its importance in religious history may properly be judged greater. Further, its ostensibly inherent orientation towards Catholic, rather than Protestant, Christianity must be acknowledged. Burke's pro-Catholic sentiments, the history of the Oxford Movement, or the often unsentimental, unromantic interest in Jacobitism as an assertion of the principles of monarchical government, all provide obvious exemplification of this orientation, without bothering to consider the phenomena of the European mainland.

This by no means precludes recognition of patterns of Restorationist thought in the most impeccably Protestant environments. The mind of that rather more celebrated Chalmers, Thomas, whether challenging the secularisation of the British state or finding answers to the problems of the urban poor in the restoration of what has been aptly called the 'parish state,' shows the utility of the approach in Scottish Protestantism's history.¹⁷ The story can be continued into the Disruption, which might well be depicted as the inevitable consequence of the uncompromising assertion, in the 1840s, of theocratic claims, by a party that fundamentally, though tacitly, held the Church to be 'a society called out of the world and set over against it'.¹⁸ The Free Church's claims that it went out of the Establishment in defence of the Kirk's independence and 'on the establishment principle' were accurate enough; but it should not be passed over without considering that the Disruption Fathers would have been inclined to elaborate these slogans with reference to the theories of church-state relations propounded in the eras of the Reformation and the Covenant.

Nevertheless, it remains true that most of what probably comes first to mind as expressions of Restorationist thought in Scotland, not merely failed to make contact with Scots 'where it mattered to them most, . . . in the vital issues of religious belief, worship and church government',¹⁹ but displayed an antipathetical attitude to Scotland's dominant religious identity. In noting the protest – and the reply to it – lodged by one of early nineteenth-century Scotland's most distinguished literary figures, Thomas M'Crie, against Scott's treatment of the Covenanters in *Old mortality*, Bruce Lenman adverted to the presence in the ultra-conservatism of the period of two 'radically antagonistic views as to precisely

¹⁶ Peter Nockles, 'Church and king: Tractarian politics reappraised' in P. Vaiss (ed.), *From Oxford to the people: reconsidering Newman and the Oxford Movement* (Leominster, Hereford, 1996), pp 93–123. Nockles draws attention to the appropriateness of the comparison between the political thought of Newman and Froude and that of the pre-eminent French theocratic Restorationists, de Maistre and de Bonald. See especially p. 98. ¹⁷ Owen Chadwick, 'Chalmers and the State' and Mary F. Turgol, 'Chalmers and Poor Relief: an incidental sideline?' in A. C. Cheyne (ed.), *The practical and the pious: essays on Thomas Chalmers* (Edinburgh, 1985), pp 65–83 and 115–29. ¹⁸ Ian D. L. Clark, 'From protest to reaction: the Moderate regime in the Church of Scotland, 1752–1805' in N. T. Phillipson and Rosalind Mitchison (ed.), *Scotland in the age of improvement* (2nd edn, Edinburgh, 1996), p. 207. ¹⁹ Devine, *Scottish nation*, p. 199.

what kind of heritage needed to be conserved'.²⁰ However, Lenman's context, that of an historiographical dispute, hardly draws attention to the political liveliness of the matter. Together with what has been said above about the nature of the Evangelical party and of the Disruption, the Anglican perception of the role of Dissent in the creation of Radicalism needs to be taken into account. It was not merely battles of long ago that were being spoken of. A politically assertive, reinvigorated Presbyterianism could appear profoundly threatening to upholders of the established order in a Britain engaged in a zealous defence of its *ancien régime*, the thought patterns of which remained dominant for many. The story of the Great Rebellion, ignited by the Scottish Puritans, retained its mythical character as a perennial explanation of and guide to political behaviour. In other words, it might be said that the potency of the desire for a restoration of the Scottish past was, ironically, much diminished by the contemporary vitality of that past.

The Great Rebellion was, though, but part of Europe's wars of religion, a resistance to a real, and not merely perceived, attempt at Counter-Reformation, albeit dissociated from Roman Catholicism, advanced by the Stuart monarchy.²¹ That the conflicts of the following two centuries in the British Isles were a true continuation of the great conflict of the sixteenth century, was a perception which came more readily to minds in the early nineteenth century, than it has done to later minds, more conscious of the merits of historical specificity. George Chalmers, therefore, perceived himself, those with whom he agreed and his opponents to stand in a stream of politico-religious debate which had its source in the religious change and division of the sixteenth century. When he wrote an introduction to his edition of the works of the poet Sir David Lindsay of the Mount, he felt obliged to assure his readers that he was no great admirer of this author and that he had undertaken his editorial task merely on account of the opportunity it offered to publish a discourse on the history of the Scots language. His dislike was for Lindsay's poetry, but also for his political notions, which, he told his readers, 'are very different from mine'.²² This was surely a remarkable statement about a man born in the fifteenth century. Its meaning was made clear in the short biography of Lindsay, which expressed no doubt about the extent of its subject's commitment to Protestantism and equated it with treason.²³ The Restorationist ideology which Chalmers articulated possessed a formidable historical depth, which, potentially at least, related it to the central themes of early modern intellectual conflict: and it actually related it to a series of historical themes, clustering around the history of the Stuart dynasty, which remained both emotive and politically relevant. The strength of Chalmers' position emerged also from his ability to direct his utilisation of such a large

²⁰ Lenman, *Integration, Enlightenment, and industrialization*, p. 147. ²¹ Jonathan Scott, *England's troubles: seventeenth-century English political instability in European context* (Cambridge, 2000), chap. 5. ²² George Chalmers (ed.), *The poetical works of Sir David Lyndsay of the Mount . . .* (2nd edn, London, 1806), i, v–vi. ²³ See, for example, the comments on Lindsay's sympathy with the Castillians, *ibid.*, i, pp 31–6.

body of historical material, by means of the moral, and particularly political, clarity in his rejection of the emergent Radicalism of the British Isles and its sources of inspiration.

There was a deeper weakness in Chalmers' ideology than the alienating effect among Scots of his 'strong dislike to the Scotch Reformation from Popery'.²⁴ Chalmers described his disapproval of Lindsay, it should be noticed, as a political one, as indeed, fundamentally, it was. He was by no means ill disposed to Catholicism. He made this clear in his early writings, on American colonial history.²⁵ Later, he was on friendly terms with Bishops Geddes and Hay and gave counsel in their concerns about the Scots College in Rome.²⁶ His sympathy assumed practical form in the assistance he gave the seminarians of the Scots College at Douay, driven out in 1793, and in his efforts in the following years to secure the return of the institution's property.²⁷ However, his attachment to the Anglicanism which he adopted early in life remained firm and his hostility to the Reformation on religious grounds was much tempered. His complaint against the religious stance he attributed to Lindsay was merely its extreme character.²⁸ Further, though sincere in his Anglicanism and not uninterested in religious topics, his mind cannot be described as having a deeply religious cast. Thus, though he wrote much about Christian history, this remained for him but part of the history of the earthly city. Chalmers' writings, therefore, display a recurrent weakness of Restorationist thought, in that it was insufficiently grounded in a religious conviction, which was necessary both as a convincing intellectual foundation and a means of gaining widespread interest. Had they been so grounded, even though this would hardly have decreased their capacity to alienate Presbyterian sentiment, they would have possessed a greater, more enduring importance in shaping an important, albeit not the nineteenth century's dominant, perception of the Scottish past.

The remaining parts of this study are intended to support and amplify the points made above. They are concerned, firstly, to illustrate that, while it was activated by moral convictions about contemporary political developments, the ideological position espoused by such as Chalmers is less than well-understood by considering it as merely a response to contemporary political and military events – as merely Counter-Revolutionary. Rather, it was a re-articulation of important elements of a living tradition of ideological debate, which established the character of the *anciens régimes* of the British Isles. Since this was a tradition dominated by religious thought, it necessarily included or, it may even be said, was directed by understandings of the Reformation, on which indeed Chalmers wrote extensively. In this depth lay the strength of the position. It is necessary,

²⁴ *Scottish Register*, 1 (Jan.–Mar. 1794), p. 341. ²⁵ See especially his treatment of the history of Maryland in the *Political annals of the present united colonies* . . . (reprint, New York, 1968, of orig. edns, London [Book I], 1780 and New York [Book II], 1868), i, chaps 9 and 15. ²⁶ Christine Johnson, *Developments in the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland 1789–1829* (Edinburgh, 1983), pp 25 and 100–1. ²⁷ National Library of Scotland, Chalmers Papers, Add. MS 29.3.16. See especially Rev. John Farquharson to Chalmers, 21 July 1800, fols 38–9. See also Johnson, *Developments*, pp 94–5. ²⁸ Chalmers (ed.), *Lyndsay*, p. 41.

however, also to point to a failure, occasioned by shallowness, which is well evidenced in Chalmers' writings. Any effective Scottish contradiction of the threatening, Enlightenment-inspired ideologies of the day would certainly have required a positive evaluation of at least aspects of the Reformation and the Calvinist tradition – precisely as Calvinist, rather than as commended by Enlightenment notions of progress. Chalmers, in his Anglicanism, was quite incapable of such an evaluation. Yet his Anglicanism too was weak. The dominance of moral or, more specifically, political over religious thought in his mind led him to preoccupation with such elements in Calvinist thought as were appropriated by those, such as Paine, against whom he fought. The same dominance may be said to have little benefited the ideological tradition which he did espouse, the maintenance of which required a religious foundation.

The form and matter of George Chalmers' politics was moral conviction, shaped by the experience of the Revolutionary era. Thus, for example, his attack on Tom Paine was no dull political tract, but a lively and entertaining biographical onslaught on Paine's moral character. For, as he pointed out, the veracity and probity of a political writer has to be ascertained, if we are to 'be convinced, whether he mean to inform, or delude'.²⁹ Chalmers' commitment to moral assertion was pervasive and uncompromising. When, in 1794, he exposed an acquaintance, a prominent and respected Liverpool physician, as a pseudonymous anti-war polemicist,³⁰ the latter's friends protested that he had much damaged the reputation of one who was no Radical. Chalmers was unrepentant about his treatment of Dr Currie: even if he could be represented as well-meaning, he had, in fact, served a cause to be opposed for its 'villainy and wickedness'.³¹ When politics was extended into history, Chalmers exercised the moralising duties of the historian by centrally inculcating the doctrine, explicitly stated to the clerical historian, John Whitaker, that 'the spirit of reform or of sedition . . . [has] a natural tendency to corrupt the heart and degrade the morals'.³² The prospect of change was an incentive to unscrupulous ambition, which might always exploit the ignorance and stir 'the fanaticism of the vulgar'.³³ The task was an easy one. For there are always those among the latter, he pointed out, who are easily turned to abandon their natural duty to concern themselves with the advancement of their own interests and meddle in public affairs. When this diversion 'is carried into folly, by indulgence, and from folly is animated by incitement, into enthusiasm, the interest of the public is ruined, while the safety of the state is endangered'.³⁴

The temporal extension of Chalmers' politics, which allowed the entire early modern period to be encompassed, was hardly singular in his age, by virtue of

29 George Chalmers (Francis Oldys, pseud.), *The life of Thomas Pain [sic]: with a review of his writings . . .* (5th edn, London, 1792), p. viii. 30 Chalmers, *Strength of Great Britain*, pp i–ccxxviii. 31 Chalmers to Dr. William Wells, 15 March 1794 (B.L., Chalmers Correspondence, Add. MS 22,900, ff 243–51). 32 Whitaker records his approbation of the sentiment in a letter to Chalmers, 30 May 1792 (Chetham's Library, Manchester [hereafter Chetham's], Whitaker Correspondence, Mun. A.6.93, f. 43r). 33 George Chalmers, *The life of Mary, Queen of Scots . . .* (2nd edn, London, 1822), i, 30. 34 Chalmers, *Strength of Great Britain*, p. xcvi.

the degree to which its politics remained unsecularised. The patterns of thought sustaining such a panoramic view were various. Two such complexes of perceptions and opinions are observable in Chalmers' writings. One may be safely be ascribed to the influence on him of Samuel Johnson, for whom he possessed an inordinate admiration and whose literary style he imitated.³⁵ Much more importantly, he adopted the view of Scottish history held by Johnson, the Non-Juror. In this, the nation's culture had been ravaged by the Reformation and continuing adherence to Calvinism, but yet, was worthy of respect by virtue of its late flowering among those who adhered to neo-Latin learning, episcopacy and Stuart loyalism.³⁶ In the period immediately following the Reformation, Chalmers saw in Scotland only the 'distorted picture of a king, without influence, of an aristocracy, without restraint, of a people, without protection, and of a clergy, without . . . just subordination to the higher powers'. He looked for explanation no further than the Reformation. 'Men's minds had . . . been corrupted' by its violence.³⁷ If this period was made repellent by the morally corrupting and degrading 'spirit of reform', Calvinism's enduring association with this spirit ensured that the seventeenth century could not be more pleasantly depicted. It was 'fanaticism . . . with her agitations, and her bloodshed, which obstructed improvement, by depressing genius, and perverting effort'. Though such a remark has the appearance of an Enlightenment commonplace, Chalmers' intent was specifically anti-Calvinist: for he had good also to say of the century. In his patriotic listing of its distinguished Scots, there were few who could not be described as either conspicuously faithful to the Stuarts or refugees from a Calvinist environment. As the list extended into the eighteenth century, it was rather heavily weighted with Jacobites.³⁸

Another pattern of thought, one of very considerable importance in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, probably influenced Chalmers more. It is succinctly presented in a tract by John Reeves and in a defence of it, produced by Chalmers. In part, the latter may be seen as an act of support for a colleague in the Office for Trade; but Reeves was also a significant figure in extra-parliamentary politics of the 1790s, being the founder and chairman of the immensely popular Association for the Preservation of Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers,³⁹ and Chalmers was clearly not unwilling to give him support in that capacity too. In 1795 Reeves published his *Thoughts on the English Government*, which was interpreted by his opponents as applying Jacobite doctrines in defence of the Hanoverian dynasty and reported to Parliament as a seditious libel, an offence of which he was, unsurprisingly, not convicted. Though Chalmers found it necessary to treat the attribution of

35 Cockroft, *Chalmers*, p. 190. 36 Murray G. H. Pittock, 'Johnson and Scotland' in Jonathan Clark and Howard Erskine-Hill (ed.), *Samuel Johnson in historical context* (Basingstoke, Hants., 2002), pp 184–96.
37 George Chalmers, *The life of Thomas Ruddiman* . . . (London and Edinburgh, 1794), pp 330–1 and 346.
38 [Chalmers], 'Ramsay', i, iv and xlv. 39 Harry T. Dickinson, 'Popular Loyalism in Britain in the 1790s' in Eckhart Hellmuth (ed.), *The transformation of political culture: England and Germany in the late eighteenth century* (Oxford, 1990), pp 503–33. See also Austin Mitchell, 'The Association Movement of 1792–3' in *Historical Journal*, iv, no. 20 (1961), pp 56–77 and Cockroft, *Chalmers*, p. 187.

Jacobite tenets as an accusation from which the author was to be defended and gave his opinion that his expression was sometimes unfortunate, he had much praise for him and his politics and defended the intellectual content of his work.⁴⁰ This, centrally, was an historically argued explanation of the imminent death of Whiggery, which had been and still was nothing much more than the respectable face of the religiously motivated and inspired conspiracy, the career of which began in the sixteenth century, under the guidance of foreign reformers. Thus, though Reeves pointed to the similarities of doctrine and tactics between the enemies of the Tudor and Stuart order in church and state and the enemies of King George's rule, this was no mere analogy. This analogy indicated historically provable identity.⁴¹ Reeves, together with his apologist, takes his place among the Revolutionary period's numerous British adherents of conspiracy theory, who, notwithstanding the celebrity of Burke, John Robison and the Abbé Barruel, were more concerned with Calvinists, and especially those who had turned Socinian, than with foreign *philosophes* and Freemasons.⁴²

It would be an error to pass over this assertion of continuity from the Reformation as the product of an uninformed and unreasonable hostility to Dissenters, which allowed them to be lumped together without advertence to the changes in their communions over the course of the eighteenth century and varying contemporary degrees of adherence or hostility to a seditious heterodoxy. Chalmers is not to be charged with prejudice, if substantial study and consideration before judgement precludes such a charge. He possessed a circle of clerical friends, with whom he corresponded very frequently and among whom were individuals very well acquainted with both orthodox Calvinism and the Socinian controversies of the late eighteenth century: and to them Chalmers looked for theological instruction.⁴³ Most notably there was the vicar of Fingringhoe in Essex, David Love, a fellow Scot and, like Chalmers, a Loyalist from Maryland. Love entertained no prejudices against orthodox Calvinist divinity and, at various times, recommended to his friend the writings of such Scottish expositors of it as of James Durham, Thomas Boston and the younger William Dunlop.⁴⁴ In the same period, he displayed a considerable willingness to listen to the upholders of both orthodoxy and Socinianism, as he guided his pupil through their disputes.⁴⁵ He also argued at length that the great majority of the Dissenting clergy were Socinian in neither their divinity nor their politics.⁴⁶ Clearly, he thought Chalmers in need of such persuasions and, indeed, Chalmers stood closer to the views of John Whitaker, another regular correspondent with a very extensive knowledge of Trinitarian debate, but with a

40 [George Chalmers], *A vindication of the privilege of the people . . .* (London, 1796). See especially pp 18, 26–30 and 33. 41 [John Reeves], *Thoughts on the English government . . .* (London, 1795–1800), i, pp 21–65. 42 Sack, *From Jacobite to Conservative*, pp 31–33. 43 Regrettably, the letters sent by Chalmers have not survived and his own interests and views can only be reconstructed from the words of his correspondents. 44 Love to Chalmers, 14 Sept. 1787, 13 Jan. 1789 and 16 Jan. 1792 (B.L., Chalmers Correspondence, Add. MS 22,900, ff 14, 47v and 165r). 45 See, for example, Love to Chalmers, 2 June 1787 and 2 March 1791 (B.L., Chalmers Correspondence, Add. MS 22,900, ff 6 and 138r). 46 Love to Chalmers, 10 July 1790 and 16 Jan. 1792 (B.L., Chalmers Correspondence, Add. MS 22,900, ff 109v–110 and 165v–167r).

much more partisan approach to it. Despite his rather remote residence, the rector of Ruan Lanihorne, on the banks of the Fal, succeeded in producing a very long and tedious work expressing his views, *The origin of Arianism disclosed*, the publication expenses of which were met by Chalmers.⁴⁷ Calvinist Trinitarian orthodoxy, Whitaker suggested, had always been a poorly rooted plant⁴⁸ and he drew no distinction between Socinians and Presbyterians or other Dissenters when speaking of contemporary politics.⁴⁹ Whether this perception was its cause or its effect, Whitaker's anxiety was real, as he spoke of the 'torrent of Arianism and Socinianism . . . breaking in upon' his native Manchester.⁵⁰

Chalmers' instructors disagreed about the relative merits of theological writers and in their capacity as observers of the political activity of Dissenters neither offered more than impressions and anecdotal accounts. It appears that it was the ability of moral considerations above others to determine his perceptions which accounts for the position Chalmers adopted. When he recognized the morally corrupting 'spirit of reform or of sedition' to be a constant of Calvinist and Dissenting history since the Reformation, doctrinal variation in it might be recognized; but this could do little to remove his perception of seditious continuity. The theological foundations of it were of relatively little concern to him. What mattered was the consequent engendering of popular fanaticism. 'And whether fanaticism be religious, political, or philosophical, it is equally ruinous to the nation, in proportion to the number, who are infected with its horrors.'⁵¹ Though he was well informed and well read on matters of religious debate and willing to take up firm, orthodox positions on them, he was ultimately unable to cast off an eighteenth-century religion which was much concerned with morality and little with dogma. When he began to discuss the contemporary Trinitarian controversy with Love, he was, at least, already inclined to the orthodox position. However, he also, rather startlingly, expressed the view that it could 'be of small consequence what opinion a man' took on the matter.⁵² This predominance of morality over more fundamental aspects of religion was little likely to be altered, as Chalmers grew more committed to the obligatorily moralising discipline of the historian. He had begun this course, away from the persona of the lawyer, when he wrote on American colonial affairs. The title page of his *Political annals of the present united colonies* indicated, with a quotation from Montesquieu, his intention to '*éclaircir l'histoire par les lois, et les lois par l'histoire*'. It is significant that in acquiring a knowledge of contemporary theological debate, he showed a decided inclination to authors who, in a characteristically High Church and indeed Non-Juror tradition, appealed to the

47 Whitaker to Chalmers, 14 and 25 March 1791 (Chetham's, Whitaker Correspondence, Mun. A.6.93, ff 3-4r and 6r). 48 John Whitaker, *The origin of Arianism disclosed* (London, 1791), p. 455. 49 Whitaker to Chalmers, 22 Oct. and 24 Nov. 1791 (Chetham's, Whitaker Correspondence, Mun. A.6.93, ff 20 and 24v-25r). 50 Whitaker to Chalmers, 22 Oct. 1791 (Chetham's, Whitaker Correspondence, Mun. A.6.93, f. 21v). 51 Chalmers, *Strength of Great Britain*, p. xcvi. 52 [Love to Chalmers, . . . Sept. 1787] (B.L., Chalmers Correspondence, Add. MS 22,900, ff 10-12).

authority of the primitive church, vouched for by the presence in it of the miraculous.⁵³ Though his tutor, Love, disapproved,⁵⁴ Chalmers preferred his divinity in this historical form, which, by virtue of a belief in the intimacy of the link between moral and doctrinal probity, gave ample opportunity for discourse on the former – and the vices of the heretic.

Chalmers' relative indifference to the doctrinal disputes of the Reformation era is consistently clear in his treatment of it. No doubt too, reticence about these conflicts was necessary to avoid embroilment in theological debates, the conduct of which, he might well have judged, would have been beyond his capacity. Yet the indifference was merely relative and he certainly possessed views about these matters. He did not dispute that the late medieval church had stood in need of reform, but distinguished between an indigenous, English reform programme, which was commended, and the effects of the influence of foreign reformers, which had encouraged 'a fanatic revolution'.⁵⁵ The distinction was an old one, frequently found among the Non-Jurors. Martin Bucer and Peter Martyr Vermigli were frequently spoken of, by virtue of their residence in England; but they were identified with Calvin,⁵⁶ who was the real object of hostility and whose influence on the Scottish Reformation was particularly deplored. Thus, the Non-Juror historian, Jeremy Collier was complained of for his maligning of Calvin, not least as 'a forward intermeddler in the settlement of religion in England'. In Scotland, foreign influence became plainer and of all the reformers John Knox was 'the most severely handled' by Collier.⁵⁷ Chalmers, however, unlike the Non-Jurors, showed no interest in using the distinction between native and foreign reform programmes as a basis for doctrinal assertions. Though he offered no particular criticism of late medieval Christianity, neither did he offer defences of its tenets. Its merit, as it was to be perceived from his historical writings, lay only in its status as the 'ancient establishment' challenged by the corrupting 'spirit of reform'.⁵⁸ Neither the magisterial reformers on the European mainland nor their followers in the British Isles were condemned for what he regarded as the properly religious content of their teachings. He even asserted that it was by 'solid reasonings' that Luther, scarcely less than Calvin an object of Non-Juror hostility, had 'undermined the papal power'.⁵⁹ Calvinist doctrine, though he opined that it was rendered questionable by the conduct of those who espoused it,⁶⁰ was condemned in no particular. The attack on Calvinism was to be conducted in biographical form.

Chalmers found a focus for his concern with the moral dimensions of 'the spirit of reform', when he began his long career as a Scottish historian, in the

53 C. D. A. Leighton, 'Ancieneté among the Non-Jurors: a study of Henry Dodwell' in *History of European Ideas*, xxxi, no. 1 (2005), pp 1–16. See especially p. 15. 54 For exemplification of this divergence between Chalmers and Love, see Love to Chalmers, 30 Nov. 1791 and 13 Dec. 1793 (B.L., Chalmers Correspondence, Add. MS 22,900, ff 159–60r and ff 208–209). 55 [Chalmers], *Vindication*, pp 67–72. 56 See, for example, Thomas Deacon's remarks in an appendix to [John Griffin], *The common Christian instructed . . .* (London, 1722), pp 121–39. 57 'Bishop [William] Nicholson's [sic] opinion of Collier's 'Ecclesiastical history' . . .' in Jeremy Collier, *An ecclesiastical history of Great Britain . . .*, ed. Francis Barham (new edn, London, 1840), ix, p. 458. 58 Chalmers, *Mary, Queen of Scots*, i, p. 30. 59 *Ibid.*, i, p. 29. 60 *Ibid.*, i, p. 81.

life and opinions of one who ranked among neither the most prominent churchmen nor the most influential politicians of the Reformation period, George Buchanan. This discovery of a *bête noire* in Scotland's pre-eminent humanist can be explained, partly, by his contemporary status. Duncan has spoken of the Scots' 'idolisation of Buchanan . . . from the seventeenth century until well into the nineteenth'.⁶¹ Much of this – as well as the equally fervent disapprobation – rested on his political creed, expounded most explicitly in his *De jure regni apud Scotos dialogus*⁶² and scarcely less explicitly in his historical writing. When, in 1729, Thomas Innes succeeded in overthrowing this history – and with it much that preceded it – with his *Critical essay on the ancient inhabitants of . . . Scotland*, his boast of having struck a major blow against Whiggery in his native country was by no means without justification.⁶³ However, Scottish Whiggery and even Buchanan, though no longer as an historian, survived. Chalmers accepted the perdurance of human folly and wickedness. Though the falsity of Buchanan's history had been exposed, the *De jure* would continue to be 'reprinted, during contentious times, by those, who, expecting to gain some advantage from the confusions of tumult, naturally hoped, that the licentiousness of its theory would promote the purposes of their interest'.⁶⁴ He was not in error, as, for example, Paine's acquaintance with Buchanan⁶⁵ or the republication of the *De jure* in the 1790s suggest.

The context of Chalmers' extended treatment of Buchanan was unfortunate, if revealing of his preoccupation with him. Chalmers' entry into the field of field of Scottish history came with a biography of Thomas Ruddiman, the Jacobite printer and scholar of eighteenth-century Edinburgh. Chalmers seems to have possessed an antiquarian interest in printing, and Love was interested in Ruddiman, since his history intertwined with that of his father, John. They were friends brought into enmity in a dispute about Buchanan's moral character.⁶⁶ More importantly, a study of Ruddiman gave ample opportunity to celebrate the Episcopalian, Jacobite culture of Scotland, esteemed by Johnson – as indeed was Ruddiman himself. However, the decision to compose a biography of Ruddiman sprang originally and dominantly from the opportunity it gave to speak of Buchanan,⁶⁷ whose works the Jacobite scholar had edited and about whom he had frequently engaged in controversy. A defence of Buchanan in 1792 by a Radical writer, James Callender, in anticipation of Chalmers' assault, served to

61 Duncan, *Ruddiman*, p. 154. 62 A modern edition, *A dialogue on the law of kingship among the Scots: a critical edition and translation of George Buchanan's "De jure regni apud Scotos dialogus,"* ed. and trans. Roger A. Mason and Martin S. Smith (Aldershot, Hants., 2004), contains a brief and up-to-date biography of the author. 63 Ferguson, *Scottish nation*, p. 191. 64 Chalmers, *Ruddiman*, p. 345. 65 J. C. D. Clark, *English society 1660–1832: religion, ideology and politics during the ancien regime* (2nd edn, Cambridge, 2000), p.140. 66 Chalmers, *Ruddiman*, pp 224–38. 67 Love to Chalmers, 11 April 1789 (B.L., Chalmers Correspondence, Add. MS 22,900, ff 74–77) indicates that Chalmers interest in Buchanan was at least contemporary with his first consideration of Ruddiman's life as suitable subject matter for his venture into Scottish history writing. Only a month before he had been considering a study of John Bellenden of Lasswade, another noted humanist, attention to whom might well have led him to think of Buchanan. See Love to Chalmers, 18 Feb. and 14 March 1789, (B.L., Chalmers Correspondence, Add. MS 22,900, ff 62 and 68v–69r).

increase what would probably have been, in any case, an excessive treatment of Buchanan.⁶⁸ After extended discussion of Buchanan in the course of the account of Ruddiman, Chalmers offered a complete biographical study of the humanist and politician, prefixed to which was a long refutation of the points raised by Callender.

The portrait of Buchanan and his times served to illustrate every aspect of the origins in discontent and the corrupting influence, in the individual and the state, of 'the spirit of reform'. Buchanan was denounced as a 'malcontent, reformer, and pensioner'. The malcontent was created by poverty; for his literary greatness had brought the man, by late middle life, no place in the world. Thus, he returned to his native country around 1561 still without 'any permanent provision'. Here, as in Paris in 1560, he was the beneficiary of Queen Mary's generosity and might now have been content, had he been of better character. However, he remained driven by ambition, and this malcontentment led him into the characters of the reformer and the pensioner and thence into the most degraded moral state. The disorder created by 'the spirit of reform' is the malcontent's opportunity. Buchanan found his in Protestantism and in the patronage of one equally perverted by ambition, the queen's villainous half-brother, Murray. In 1567, set over the General Assembly of the Kirk, which collaborated in the treason against the imprisoned queen, Buchanan 'commenced the drudge of a party, with which he drudged on through life'. Being now obliged to defend the dethronement of Mary, he was willing to support his lies with false oaths and in this way became, now in the most extreme degree, a traitor to his sovereign, to whom he owed personal debts of gratitude. Buchanan lived through the political chaos and violence he had helped to create. Indeed, it was his natural environment. He remained dextrous in deriving benefit from whatever upheaval afflicted the state and 'the darker passions of his soul' could be indulged in that violence which always accompanied the Scottish Reformation, as it accompanied the French Revolution. Little attention needed to be paid to Buchanan's obnoxious writings; for the whole study was an effective *argumentum ad hominem* against them. The *De jure* contained merely an expression of the politics natural to the malcontent: the *History* was the work of the drudge of party, lying to conceal his own and his patrons' criminality.⁶⁹

Buchanan received little further explicit treatment in Chalmers' writing. Perhaps he was most fruitfully present, directing Chalmers to find in Innes, his nemesis as a credible historian, the true guide to the older history of Scotland, recorded in the *Caledonia*.⁷⁰ However, the portrait of the perennial reformer drawn in the *Life of Ruddiman* remained and shaped Chalmers' most substantial study of the Reformation era, his biography of Mary, Queen of Scots, published in 1818. While the *Caledonia* has of late been found to have considerable merit

68 Whitaker to Chalmers, 30 May 1792 (Chetham's, Whitaker Correspondence, Mun. A.6.93, f. 43r).

69 Chalmers, *Ruddiman*, pp 310–354. 70 Chalmers, *Caledonia*, i, second roman pagination, p. v.

and importance in its treatment of the famous problem of the Picts, this equally noted work has quite uniformly been treated with disapproval. The foundation of such criticism lies in the ascription to Chalmers of that vice so frequently found in his period's treatment of the Scottish past — sentimentality. The present entry for Chalmers in the *Dictionary of national biography* finds the work 'saturated in sentimental Jacobitism' and similar to the vindication of Mary produced by Whitaker, who undoubtedly did possess a 'romantic passion . . . [for] the beautiful heroine of the old lost cause', which Chalmers' unsympathetic biographer detected in her subject.⁷¹ In fact, Chalmers' Jacobitism was of a decidedly unsentimental kind. In his *Life of Ruddiman*, it appeared as admiration for the perennial cultural values which underlay Jacobite politics in Anglophone society. In the *Vindication of Reeves*, Jacobite principles served the immediate political purposes of the 1790s. Chalmers, it should be noted, did not take up the writing of a biography of Mary entirely of his own accord. He was requested by Whitaker's family to prepare for publication the material left at his death by the Scottish queen's zealous champion. Chalmers, however, hardly shared the purposes for which this had been compiled and 'found it necessary to new-write the whole'.⁷² If there are found passages and themes in the work which reflect the obsessions of Chalmers' deceased friend, as disclosed in his publications of the late 1780s about Mary and in his correspondence at the time of his further research of the early 1790s,⁷³ this is to be expected. However, by far the greater part of the work reflects Chalmers' own thought on the Scottish Reformation, as disclosed in the *Life of Ruddiman* and elsewhere. No doubt Chalmers' historical analysis of the immoral character of 'the spirit of reform or of sedition' will appeal little more to present-day taste than sentimental Jacobitism; but it does offer some insight into the political mind of the age of Restoration.

Chalmers was faithful to Whitaker in the latter's fundamental vindicatory purpose, having convinced himself by his 'own labours, and reflection, that . . . [Queen Mary] was a calumniated woman, and an injured princess'.⁷⁴ However, he was by no means uniform in eulogising her as a ruler. She was, for example, plainly condemned for her acquiescence and indeed active collaboration in the successful attack on the Gordons, engineered by her half-brother, in 1562: and the matter was treated at length. Here were the first signs of the 'political diseases' that were to afflict the queen throughout her reign.⁷⁵ The treatment of Mary was, in its totality, highly sympathetic; but this sympathy was for the victim of those whose immorality assisted in the creation of and was magnified by the revolution which the reign saw. It was these who were at the centre of Chalmers' attention. On agreeing to pay his deceased friend the compliment of ensuring that his labours were not lost, Chalmers was confronted, firstly, by the need to

⁷¹ Cockroft, *Chalmers*, 190. The view is repeated elsewhere. See Ferguson, *Scottish nation*, pp 276–7. ⁷² Chalmers, *Mary, Queen of Scots*, i, p. vii. ⁷³ See, for example, Whitaker to Chalmers, 22 Aug. 1791 or 2 July 1792 (Chetham's, Whitaker Correspondence, Mun. A.6.93, ff 19 and 46–49). ⁷⁴ Chalmers, *Mary, Queen of Scots*, i, pp viii–ix. ⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, i, chap. 4. See especially pp 141, 143 and 154.

create a readable narrative of the events of Mary's reign out of material which had been gathered for a work which was intended to be 'more disquisitive than narrative, more critical than historical'; for thus Whitaker viewed the consequences of his opinionated wanderings.⁷⁶ However, to the narrative that was created was joined a series of 'memoirs', all but one biographical, of the major figures mentioned in it. In this way a focussed analytical and illustrated treatment of the moral character of Mary's contemporaries, serving to explain the events described in the narrative, came to occupy fully half the work. In brief, Chalmers *Life of Mary, Queen of Scots* is an extended disclosure of the author's belief in the pre-eminence of moral considerations in the study of historical causation. This belief might have been discovered elsewhere in Chalmers' writings, including his account of Buchanan; but the biography of Mary, by virtue of its length, displayed it with greater clarity, as it similarly displayed the ways Chalmers could develop it to reflect the thought of the era of reaction to revolution. Thus, for example, the extended account of the career of Secretary Maitland allowed very ample scope for reflection on that ever-recurring theme of the era – the role of conspiracy in advancing revolution. Cecil was quoted to indicate the distinguishing character of Maitland's role in the subversion of Scotland's affairs, which he compassed: it was Maitland who sustained 'the whole burden of foresight'.⁷⁷ Again, the extended narrative allowed a much greater emphasis than had appeared in the account of Buchanan on the violence, of which those who sought innovation were characteristically guilty. Chalmers constantly sought to identify the advance of the Reformation in Scotland with the use of violence, undertaken to serve the purposes of the immorally ambitious.⁷⁸

It may at first seem curious that Chalmers presented in his appended biographical memoirs no account of John Knox, who, though spoken of, had no very prominent place in the narrative of the queen's life either. But then, as his pre-occupation with Buchanan at his entry into Reformation history some thirty years before suggests, Chalmers' interest in this subject was dominated by political ideology, rather than by properly religious concerns. Buchanan appeared, with some considerable justification,⁷⁹ to be the fountainhead of the Calvinist political tradition in the British Isles and appeared also, by virtue of the decidedly secular character of his discourse, more clearly related than any divine to that tradition as it appeared at the end of the eighteenth century. Knox was execrated, but as a fanatic, not an immorally ambitious politician, in which role he failed. Indeed, it was precisely '[b]y his fanaticism, and forwardness, Knox injured himself' in the political sphere. Fanaticism, of course, was odious too. Like political ambition, it activated discontent and produced an inability to

⁷⁶ Whitaker to Chalmers, 6 March 1793 (Chetham's, Whitaker Correspondence, Mun. A.6.93, f. 64r).

⁷⁷ Chalmers, *Mary, Queen of Scots*, iii, p. 535. ⁷⁸ See, for example, *ibid.*, i, pp 83–4. ⁷⁹ Roger A. Mason, *Kingship and the commonweal: political thought in Renaissance and Reformation Scotland* (East Linton, E. Lothian, 1998), p. 189.

perceive 'the immoral tendency of reformations'.⁸⁰ It was also the means of transmitting the immorality of the great to the populace. Yet, it could not become the historian's proper study, for it was merely a species of unreason.⁸¹ In any case, it was unlikely to manifest itself as a public danger without the presence of that which the historian could profitably describe from his study of political conduct.

If Chalmers' entry into the study of the Scottish Reformation was brought about by his participation in politics still in a large measure unsecularised, his treatment of his chosen subject matter reveals something of the extent of the secularisation which had taken place. Historians have, of late, devoted considerable attention to the secularisation of the thought of those who inclined to view the Revolutionary politics of Europe with varying degrees of approval. Chalmers' works on the Scottish Reformation offer an indication of the extent to which Counter-Revolutionary or Restorationist thought, as it has been called here, was also subject to secularising tendencies. An expression of perception of a positive role for religious belief, as opposed to the morality it might stimulate, in regulating the social order, let alone the role of the social order in sustaining religious truth, is hardly to be found in those works. Such a secularised view constitutes Chalmers' chief fault. Denigration of his talents as an historian has been, at least, excessive. He stood close to the time at which history writing as the provision of serious – generally moralising – entertainments would cease to find general approval; but with such a task in view, he executed it well and with features, such as constant commitment to research, which might have gained him more approval than he has had from critics of later times. In view of his adherence to a tradition of Anglican political conviction and the role which that had in generating his work as an historian, Chalmers is hardly to be complained of for failing to present a view of Scottish history which would have been serviceable in making a popular appeal to Scots for a restoration of their past. That was clearly beyond his capacity. Yet he might well have had more of the political effect he desired to have on at least some of his fellow countrymen and on others – and gained for himself more enduring attention – than was the case. To have done so, however, would have required him to come to the perception that resistance to Revolutionary ideas could not be sustained by mere understanding of their origins in the individual and by moral outrage at instances of their realization. It would also have been necessary for him to restrict severely his use of the category of 'fanaticism', on finding in it elements that might give the best reasons to oppose what only his experience and moral convictions led him to detest.

⁸⁰ Chalmers, *Mary, Queen of Scots*, iii, pp 603–4. ⁸¹ See, for example, Chalmers, *Strength of Great Britain*, pp xcvi–xcvii.