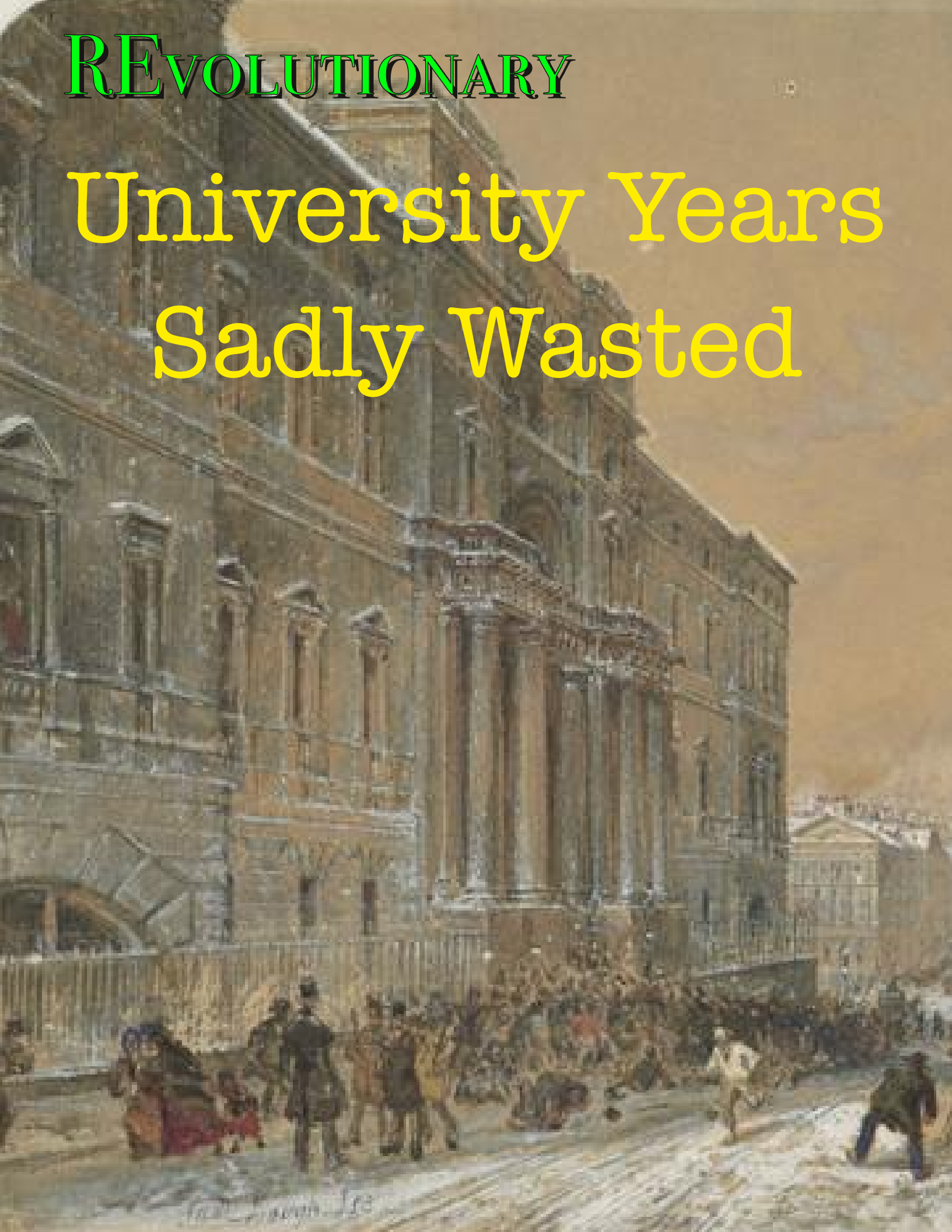


REVOLUTIONARY

University Years
Sadly Wasted



As I was doing no good at school, my father wisely took me away at a rather earlier age than usual, and sent me in October 1825 to Edinburgh University with my brother, where I stayed for two years or sessions. Soon after this period I became convinced from various small circumstances that my father would leave me property enough to subsist on with some comfort, though I never imagined that I should be so rich a man as I am; but my belief was sufficient to check any strenuous effort to learn medicine.



Professor Alexander Monro, 75 yrs old, 1848

The instruction at Edinburgh was altogether by Lectures, and these were intolerably dull, with the exception of those on chemistry. I attend Anatomy lectures by Alexander Monro, and they were dull and the subject disgusted me. I disliked Monro and his

lectures so much that I cannot speak with decency about them. He was so dirty in person and actions. It has proved one of the greatest evils in my life that I was not urged to practice dissection, for I should soon have got over my disgust; and the practice would have been invaluable for all my future work. This was an irremediable evil, as well as my incapacity to draw.

A Dissection Theatre, University of Edinburgh.



Depiction of a 19th century dissection theater lecture.

I attended regularly the clinical wards in the Hospital. Some of the cases distressed me a good deal, and I still have vivid pictures before me of some of them, but I was not so foolish as to allow this to lessen my attendance. I cannot understand why this part of my medical course did not interest me in a greater degree.

I also attended on two occasions the operating theatre in the hospital at Edinburgh, and saw two very bad operations, one on a child, but I rushed away before they were completed. Nor did I ever attend again, for hardly any inducement would have been strong enough to make me do so; this being long before the blessed days of chloroform. The two cases fairly haunted me for many a long year.

My summer vacations during these two years

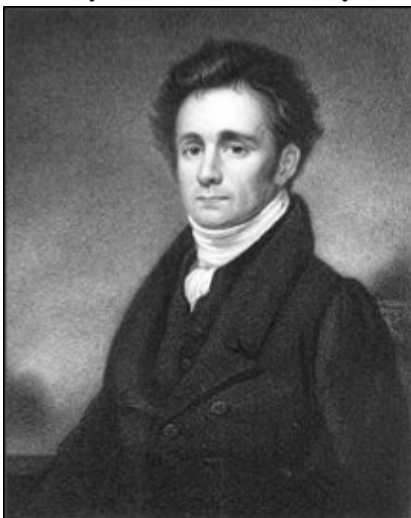


Woodhouse, home of William Owen, Shropshire.

to me of her life riding horses and attending she liked blue and silver better. My coat was blue and silver. These were the colors worn by coachmen, so she gave me the nickname "Postillion," the person who leads a team of horses drawing a carriage. Because of her bad handwriting, she said she was as unlettered as a housemaid, so she became the housemaid to my postillion.

I used to visit the Forest during the long summers and we would relax in her rooms or lie in the strawberry fields at Woodhouse. She even went shooting with me. I remember once how charming she looked when she insisted on firing off one of my guns, and, though the kick made her shoulder black and blue, she gave no sign.

During my second year in Edinburgh I attended Jameson's lectures on Geology and Zoology, but they were incredibly dull. The sole effect they



Professor Robert Jameson, 1832

produced on me was the determination never, as long as I lived, to read a book on Geology or in any way to study the science.

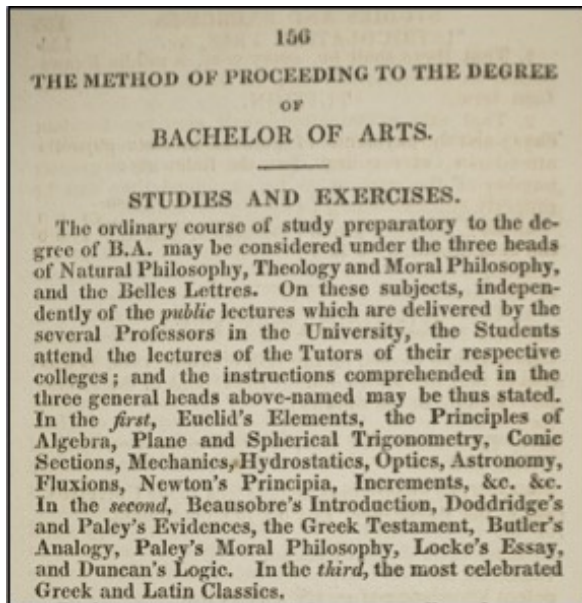
After having spent two sessions in Edinburgh, my father perceived, or he heard from my sisters, that I did not like the thought of being a physician, so he proposed that I should become a clergyman. He was very properly vehement against my turning an idle sporting man, which then seemed my probable destination.

I asked for some time to consider, as from what little I had heard and thought on the subject I had scruples about declaring my belief in all the dogmas of the Church of England; though

were wholly given up to amusements. The autumns were devoted to shooting, chiefly at Mr. William Owen's at Woodhouse. Mr. Owen and I hunted together there, and my sisters delighted in socializing with his two beautiful daughters, Sarah and Fanny. Fanny, as all the world knew, was the prettiest, plumpest, charming personage that Shropshire possessed. Fanny was a free spirit. While at school, she would write balls full of red coats and mustachios, but



Fanny Owen



Curriculum for the Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of Cambridge in Darwin' time.

Though I did not study botany, I attended the lectures on botany by Professor John Henslow and I liked them much for their extreme clearness and the admirable illustrations. I soon became intimate with Professor Henslow, for he had a remarkable power of making the young feel completely at ease with him, though we were all awestruck with the amount of his knowledge. He continually asked me to his house, and allowed me to accompany him in his walks. Some even called me "the man who walks with Henslow." He talked on all subjects, including his deep sense of religion, and was entirely open. I owe more than I can express to this excellent man.

Although there were some redeeming features in my life at Cambridge, my time was sadly wasted there and worse than wasted. From my passion for shooting and for hunting and when this failed, for riding across country I got into a sporting set, including some dissipated low-minded young men. We used often to dine together in the evening and we sometimes drank too much, with jolly singing and playing at cards afterwards. I know that I ought to feel ashamed of days and evenings thus spent, but as some of my friends were very pleasant and we were all in the highest spirits, I cannot help looking back to these times with much pleasure.

otherwise I liked the thought of being a country clergyman. Accordingly I read with care a few books on divinity; and as I did not then in the least doubt the strict and literal truth of every word in the Bible, I soon persuaded myself that our Creed must be fully accepted

As it was decided that I should be a clergyman, it was necessary that I should go to one of the English universities and take a degree, so I attended the University of Cambridge. During the three years which I spent at Cambridge my time was wasted, as far as the academical studies were concerned, as completely as at Edinburgh and at school. I attempted mathematics, but I got on very slowly. With respect to Classics I did nothing except attend a few compulsory college lectures, and the attendance was almost nominal.



Professor John Stenes Henslow

No pursuit at Cambridge was followed with nearly so much eagerness or gave me so much pleasure as collecting beetles. I will give a proof of my zeal: one day, on tearing off some old bark, I saw two rare beetles and seized one in each hand; then I saw a third and new kind, which I could not bear to lose, so that I popped the one which I held in my right hand into my mouth. Alas it ejected some intensely acrid fluid, which burnt my tongue so that I was forced to spit the beetle out, which was lost, as well as the third one.



Darwin as beetle collector.

While I studied at Cambridge, I visited Woodhouse in the summer and I took Fanny beetle hunting. Woodhouse was full of strawberry beds. We hunted these beasts among the strawberries. On our hands and knees, perhaps lower, stretching out full length while grazing on the luscious fruit. Ah, Fanny, as all the world knows, she was the prettiest, plumpest, charming personage that Shropshire possessed, ay, and Birmingham too.

Alas, during my Cambridge years, the blush seemed to come off the rose. She wrote to scold me that perhaps some dear little Beetles were keeping me away from her. Our correspondence became less frequent as I became more involved with my studies and she with her social life and innumerable suitors. When I left on the voyage of the Beagle, shortly after leaving Cambridge, I learned that Fanny had become engaged to be married. This caused many mournful days in the first months of the voyage.

(L) Young men at Cambridge. (R) Charles Darwin's sitting room at his residence in Christ's College.





(L) Alexander von Humboldt, (R) San Cristobal de La Laguna, Canary Islands.

In my last year at Cambridge, I worked with some earnestness for my final degree of the Bachelor of Arts, and brushed up my Classics together with a little Algebra and Euclid. I sat for my final exams in the third week of January 1831. Surprisingly to me, I placed 10 out of 178 in the polls.

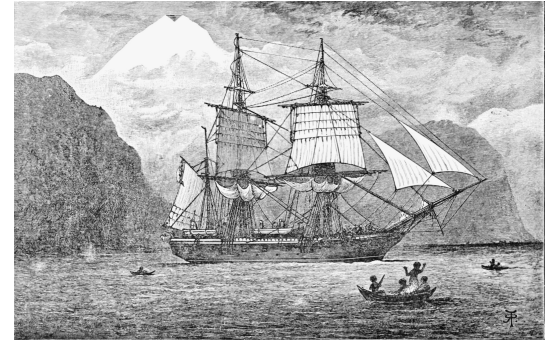
I had to remain in Cambridge for two terms after I passed my exam in January and so I lived much with Prof. Henslow, often dining and walking with him. During this time I read Alexander von Humboldt's book that described his travels to Ascension Island and I spoke to my friends about this. We hatched a plan to voyage there soon, but though some of the party declared they would endeavor to go there, I think that they were only half in earnest. I was, however, quite in earnest, and got an introduction to a merchant in London to enquire about ships, But the scheme was, of course, knocked on the head by the voyage of the Beagle.

I returned home in the summer and at the beginning of August I went on a geological tour with my Cambridge geology professor, Professor Adam Sedgwick. This tour was of decided use in teaching me a little how to make out the geology of a country and gave me skills that ultimately assisted my work on the Beagle voyage.



Professor Adam Sedgwick

On returning home from this tour, I found a letter from Henslow, informing me that Captain Robert FitzRoy was willing to give up part of his own cabin to any young man who would volunteer to go with him without pay as naturalist on the voyage of the *Beagle*. Thus, my life was changed.



HMS Beagle

Credits

On the Cover: Snowballing Outside Edinburgh University, 1853, Samuel Bough

<https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/20538/snowballing-outside-edinburgh-university>

Professor Alexander Monro, 75 yrs old, 1848, David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Monro_\(tertius\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Monro_(tertius))

The Gross Clinic Canvas, Thomas Eakins, 1875

<https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/portrait-of-dr-samuel-d-gross-the-gross-clinic/tQFcdDEg2oosqg?hl=en>

Dissection Theatre, University of Edinburgh

<https://theirregularanatomist.wordpress.com/2014/02/01/from-dissections-to-death-masks-the-anatomical-museum-the-university-of-edinburgh/>

Woodhouse

<https://www.oswestrygenealogy.org.uk/photos/osw-ph-r-3-14-woodhouse-rednal/>

Fanny Owen

<https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/young-beauty-who-won-darwins-2114080>

Robert Jameson, 1832, painted by Kenneth Macleary, engraved by J. Jenkins

<https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/44010/robert-jameson-1774-1854-mineralogist>

Professor John Stevens Henslow

<https://agardenthroughtime.wordpress.com/themes/professor-john-steven-henslow/>

Darwin as beetle collector, drawing by his friend, Albert Way

<https://www.utas.edu.au/library/exhibitions/darwin/insects.html>

Young men at University (from *The Adventures of Mr. Verdant Green*, Cuthbert Bede, 1870)

<https://web.mit.edu/redingtn/www/netadv/SP20140922.html>

Charles Darwin's sitting room at his residence in Christ's College (photo from 1909)

<https://www.christs.cam.ac.uk/taxonomy/term/12?page=15>

Alexander von Humboldt (1806)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_von_Humboldt

Sketch of San Cristobal de La Laguna, Canary Islands in the 19th century

<http://tenerifepivatetours.com/a-wilde-irishman-in-canary-islands/>

Professor Adam Sedgwick (1832)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adam_Sedgwick

HMS Beagle

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Voyage_of_the_Beagle#/media/File:PSM_V57_D097_Hms_beagle_in_the_straits_of_magellan.png