

Peterborough March 27/1846

Dear Margaret,

There is some ground for your forebodings, respecting the <sup>unsocial</sup> tendencies of my present employment; for this reason, that time is limited, and when the day is occupied by business chiefly or solely, the evening is perhaps not too much to devote to social enjoyment. But if it must be employed in that way, then what time can a shopkeeper have for mental improvement, or for doing anything that may be in his power in aid of the progress of religion or knowledge.

After all, there is no reason why scientific studies, any more than the service of God, should make a man unsocial. They may prevent him from devoting much time to ~~it~~ <sup>social intercourse;</sup> they may perhaps make him a little lip gay, but they must rather tend to make him love communion with human minds, at least with the intelligent and good. Scientific and literary studies, when properly pursued, consist in the search for truth and beauty; and though they may tend to withdraw the mind, sometimes perhaps too much, from the realities of life,

21A

They tend to preserve and strengthen the freshness  
and youthfulness of the heart, and have nothing  
to do either with the stiffness of pedantry or  
the coldness of selfishness! This is still  
more strictly true of piety. The hermits and  
monks and nuns who thought it to be their  
duty to remove themselves altogether from the  
active world, that they might wholly de-  
vote themselves to god; and the worldly men  
whose whole thoughts are of the "main chance"  
with whom the activities, duties, utilities, of  
the present time are everything; were and are  
both equally wrong. I need not say where  
the proper mean lies; we both know where  
to look for it, and may god's grace enable us  
to keep to it, however impracticable this may be  
to our unaided natural powers. I do not think  
that my taste for cheerful society is at all di-  
minished, although perhaps I enjoy less of it than  
I should; and for the benevolence which turns  
towards distant objects, and neglects its own friends  
& kindred I have no sympathy, there is always some  
selfishness or worldliness at the bottom of it; but  
then how liable are we all to fall into selfish-  
ness & worldliness, how constantly indeed do these mingle  
with our best efforts, sad experience often convinces  
me that in this I am no exception to the

ordinary character of humanity.

218

You must not feel very sure that I shall be in Edin next autumn. You know enough of me to understand that, though I may sometimes be a little obstinate, I am often not very decided, and may abandon a cherished plan if any important difficulty opposes, or injurious consequence seems to follow it. The amount of the matter is this, that if I can, without serious injury to interests here, do so, I will revisit Scotland; and I am the more inclined to do so, as I see that I am continually becoming more and more involved in work of all kinds private and public, so that every year it becomes more and more difficult to leave home. I mean to make ready as far as I can; and when autumn comes, if I can go I will, if not I must stay. I doubt well know why you should feel as if you would "hide from rather than welcome" me. A game of hide and seek would be rather an odd

reception for an old friend, and you know  
 you and I must meet as friends, very  
 dear friends no doubt, but at the same  
 time very wise and serious ones. With res-  
 pect to my views of future employment, I do  
 earnestly wish that I could devote myself  
 to the cause of Religion, wholly; but I cannot  
 now see any feasible way of doing so,  
 in consistency with my feelings towards my  
 parents, and the duties I owe them. I  
 intend however, if God give me time and  
 opportunity, to qualify myself as far as pos-  
 sible for the duties of a religious teacher,  
 and then for being as useful as possible whether  
 I can or not ever actually discharge those  
 duties as a pastor. If I revisit Scotland, I  
 will probably do so with a determination  
 to spend as much as possible of my time  
 in the theological seminaries of the Secession  
 and Free Church. At the same time,  
 however, I see no immediate prospect  
 of leaving my present business, and will  
not do so, if situated as I am at present.