

any change last night. The Professor was seized with a sort of half delirium, and you can scarcely picture a more distressing scene than him lying on the floor, his son John weeping over him, and the poor girls in equal distress. His first words were those of prayer; after that he spoke incessantly the whole night, and seemed to recapitulate the events of many years in a few hours. They were all calmer this morning. Maggy tells me that she scarcely ever spoke except when addressed; that she did not think herself in danger, and had even yesterday morning spoken of getting better. But she did not know any of them, at all times, for the last day or two, and I believe *none* of them *yesterday*. The funeral, I believe, will take place on Saturday. God bless you both;—with kindest love to all.”

So passed away from this earth the spirit of his idolized wife, leaving the world thenceforth for him dark and dreary. This bereavement overwhelmed him with grief, almost depriving him of reason, nor, when the excess of sorrow passed away, did mourning ever entirely leave his heart. When he resumed his duties next session, he met his class with a depressed and solemn spirit, unable at first to give utterance to words, for he saw that he had with him the sympathy and tender respect of his students. After a short pause, his voice tremulous with emotion, he said, “Gentlemen, pardon me, but since we last met, I have been in the valley of the shadow of death.”

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## CHAPTER XV.

LITERARY AND DOMESTIC LIFE.

1837-'44.

“PICTURES and visions which fancy had drawn and happy love had inspired, came now in fierce torrent of recollection over the prostrate and afflicted soul. Though sorrow had no part in them before, it possesses them now. Thus, one idea, and the pain which is now inseparable from it, reign over all changes of thought—though these thoughts in themselves have been fixed in their con-

nection with one another, and image linked to image long before; they rise up by those connections, but they are determined to arise and depart by that one fixed conception which holds its unshaken seat in the sorrow of the soul.”\* It is quite evident from these words, written a year after that great domestic affliction had befallen him, that my father had not shut out from his heart the image of his wife. How he thought and felt at the moment when the shadow of death darkened his life, may be gathered from the following touching lines copied from the public journals of the day:—

“Last week a paragraph appeared describing the painful situation to which Professor Wilson had been reduced from deep mental affliction. The following extract from a letter to a friend, written by himself, is the best evidence of the error into which our contemporary had fallen:—

“It pleased God on the 29th of March to visit me with the severest calamity that can befall one of his creatures, in the death of my wife, with whom I had lived in love for twenty-six years, and from that event till about a fortnight ago, I lived with my family, two sons and three daughters, dutiful and affectionate, in a secluded house near Roslin. I am now in Edinburgh, and early in November hope to resume my daily duties in the University. I have many blessings for which I am humbly thankful to the Almighty, and though I have not borne my affliction so well, or better than I have done, yet I have borne it with submission and resignation, and feel that though this world is darkened, I may be able yet to exert such faculties, humble as they are, as God has given me, if not to the benefit, not to the detriment of my fellow-mortals.’”

That letter leads one irresistibly back to one written in May, 1811, when he stood on the threshold of a new life full of anticipated happiness. Where was that solemn, calm spirit, now that she—the best and gentlest of wives—was gone? Did he say, “Comfort’s in heaven, and we on earth?” True it was, he suffered as such a soul must suffer at such a loss, and it was for a long time a terrible storm of trouble. But he gave evidence in due time that he was not forever to be overcome with sadness.

It is necessary, in order to relate some of the events of this summer, that we should follow him to the secluded house near Roslin, where he went immediately after my mother’s death, doubtless

\* “Our Two Vases,” *Blackwood*, April, 1838.

hoping to find, as he had done of old, some comfort in communion with outward nature. It was Spring, too, his very love for which carried with it a vague presage of evil.

“Yea! mournful thoughts like these even now arise,  
While Spring, like Nature's smiling infancy,  
Sports round me, and all images of peace  
Seem native to this earth, nor other home  
Desire or know; yet doth a mystic chain  
Link in our hearts foreboding fears of death,  
With every loveliest thing that seems to us  
Most deeply fraught with life.”

Thus did he meet the fair season so loved of old, sighing—

“O the heavy change, now thou art gone;  
Now thou art gone, and never must return!”

I may observe here, without any unfilial disrespect, that his deep sorrow was not without its good influence on the sufferer. Those who had known him were well aware of the sincerity of his religious belief, and of his solemn and silent adoration of the Saviour; but it was observed from this time that his faith exercised a more constant sway over his actions. The tone of his writings is higher, and they contain almost unceasing aspirations after the spiritual. The same humility, which in a singular degree now made him so modest and unobtrusive with the public, ordered all his ways in private life. The humble opinion he had of himself could have arisen from no other source than from reverence to God, whose servant he felt himself to be, and debtor beyond all for the possession of those gifts which, in the diffidence of his soul, he hoped he had used, “if not for the benefit, not for the detriment of his fellow-mortals.” As a specimen of his thoughts, and as introductory to the life of peace and charity which he led in his seclusion at Roslin, I refer my readers to a noble passage on Intellect;\* it forms a touching contrast to the simplicity and tenderness of disposition which caused him to turn aside from these lofty communings to the common humanities of nature. He was well known in the houses of the poor. No humble friend was ever cast aside if honest and upright. During the summer, an old servant of my mother's, who had formerly lived many years in her service, had fallen into bad health, and was ordered change of air. She was at once invited to

\* “Our Pocket Companions,” *Blackwood's Magazine*, vol. xlv., 1833.

Roslin, and Jessie willingly availed herself of my father's kindness, and came to his house; but the change was of little service; consumption had taken firm hold, and soon the poor invalid was confined to bed never more to rise. That she was considerably attended and soothed during those long watches—the sad accompaniment of this lingering disease—was only what was to have been expected, but it was no unfrequent sight to see my father, as early dawn streaked the sky, sitting by the bedside of the dying woman, arranging with gentle but awkward hand the pillow beneath her head, or cheering her with encouraging words, and reading, when she desired it, those portions of the Bible most suitable to her need. When she died, her master laid her head in the grave in Lasswade churchyard.

This whole season was burdened with one feeling which tinged all he wrote, and never quite left him.\* In October, he returned to Edinburgh and resumed his college duties, how, we have already seen in Mr. Smith's reminiscences. About this time circumstances occurred that in a measure removed the gloom which had settled upon his mind. Two of his daughters were married,† and the pleasant interchange of social civilities, which generally takes place on these occasions, led him into a wider circle of friends than formerly.

\* "There is another incident of that period which brings out the profound emotion in a way too characteristically singular to be repeated, were it not known beyond the private circle:—how two pet dogs, special favorites of Mrs. Wilson's, having got astray within the preserve-grounds of an estate near which their owner was then staying in the country, were shot by the son of the proprietor, while engaged in field-sports with other gentlemen, and were afterwards ascertained, to their extreme regret, to belong to Professor Wilson, to whom they sent an immediate explanation, hastening to follow it up afterwards by apologies in person. His indignation, however, it is said, was uncontrollable, and we can conceive that leonine aspect in its prime—dilatating, flaming, flushed with the sudden distraction of a grief that became rage, seeing nothing before it but the embodiment, as it were, of the great destroyer. The occasion, it was gravely argued by a mediator, was one for the display of magnanimity. 'MAGNANIMITY!' was the emphatic reply,—'Why, sir, I showed the utmost magnanimity this morning when one of the murderers was in this very room, and I did not pitch him out of the window!' As murder he accordingly persisted in regarding it, with a sullen obstinate desire for justice, which required no small degree of management on the part of friends, and of propitiation from the culprits, to prevent his making it a public matter. Untrained to calamity, like Lear, when all at once—

"The king is mad! how stiff is our vile sense  
That we stand up, and have ingenious feeling  
Of our huge sorrows! Better we were distract:  
So should our thoughts be severed from our griefs;  
And woes, by wrong imaginations, lose  
The knowledge of themselves."

—From Mr. Cupples's graceful "*Memorial and Estimate of Professor Wilson, by a Student.*" 4to. Edinburgh.

† The eldest, Margaret Anne, to her cousin, Mr. J. F. Ferrier, now Professor of Moral Philosophy, St. Andrews; the second, Mary, to Mr. J. T. Gordon, now Sheriff of Midlothian.

By the marriage of his second daughter, who, along with her husband, found a home for eleven years in her father's house, a change was wrought in the feelings of some of the chief men of the Whig party towards him. It has already been shown to what an extent the bitterness of party spirit had separated good men and true from each other, not only in public matters but in private life. That spirit was now dying out, and the alienation which had for some years existed, more through force of habit than inclination, was soon to cease, as far as my father was concerned. Mr. Gordon was a Whig, and connected with Whig families; he introduced to his father-in-law's house new visitors and new elements of thought; old prejudices disappeared, and "Christopher North" was frequently seen in the midst of what once was to his own party the camp of the enemy. Many a pleasant day they spent in each other's houses; and no observer, however dull, could fail to be struck even by the aspect of the four men who thus again met together, Jeffrey, Cockburn, Rutherford, and Wilson. I think I may venture, without partiality, to say that my father was the most remarkable of the four. There was a certain similarity of bearing and manner in the three great lawyers which was not shared by him: he was evidently not one of the family. I shall never forget his manly voice, pleasantly contrasting with Jeffrey's sharp silvery tones, as they mingled sparkling wit with their more serious discourse, which was enlivened by the quaint humor and Doric notes of Cockburn, that type of the old Scottish gentleman, whose dignified yet homely manner and solemn beauty gave his aspect a peculiar grace—Rutherford also, to whose large mind, consummate ability, rich and ripe endowments, I most willingly pay a most sincere and affectionate tribute of true regard and respect.\* It will not do for me to dwell on these things, however pleasant to myself would be a digression into this fairy-land of reminiscence.†

\* The mutual appreciation and familiar friendship of Wilson and Rutherford was as instant as are question and answer to-day by telegraph; and I cannot now recall, without emotion, the fond and constant attachment which the great and busy lawyer felt and manifested to "Christopher North." I have before me at this moment letter after letter, written during a course of years to my husband from his uncle in London, in the din of the heaviest seasons of official duty, not one of which ever concludes without some special message to or inquiry about the "Professor."

† Nobody, however, will grudge me a few words in honor of that amiable and admirable man, the late Lord Murray, who may be said to have lived in the open air of universal and cheerful hospitality. His heart and his hearth were alike open, with an equal warmth of welcome, to all, old and young, big or little. None understood or relished better than he did the joyous benevolence of my father's disposition. I wish I could linger a little over the agreeable *réunions* in

My father, since the days when he wrote in the *Edinburgh*, had achieved a position in letters not only different from Jeffrey's, but higher and more enduring. As a critic, he had worked in a deeper mine than the Edinburgh Reviewer, dealing less with mere forms, and more with the true spirit of art.

His great work, indeed, was that which to me seems the highest destiny of man, to teach; and his lessons have spread far and near. In the limitations of his genius lay its excellence; it made him patriotic; and if, for example, his name is not linked with individual creations of character such as bind the name of Goethe with Faust or Werther or Wilhelm Meister, yet his immediate influence extends over a wider sphere of life. These creations of the great German, though quite accordant with nature, speak but to a high order of cultivation. They are works containing a spirit and action of life, the sympathies of which can never enter the hut of the peasant or the homes of the poor. On the other hand, Wilson is thoroughly patriotic; there is not a class in the whole of Scotland incapable of enjoying his writings; and I believe his influence in the habits and modes of thought on every subject, grave or gay, is felt throughout the country. Be it politics, literature, or sport, there is not one of these themes that has not taken color from him—a sure test of genius. In the "Noctes" alone is seen his creative power in individual character; yet its most original conception is not a type, but a being of time and place. The Shepherd is not to be found everywhere in Scotland, either sitting at feasts, or tending his flocks on the hill-side. We are not familiar with him as we are with the characters of Charles Dickens. We have to imagine the one; we see and know the others. Christopher himself is typical of what has been; he presides at these meetings, when philosophy mounts high, with the dignity of a minister of blue-eyed Athene. The spirit of the Greek school is upon him, and we can fancy, that, before assembling his companions together, he invoked the gods for eloquence and wisdom. There he was great; but in his tales, his *Recreations*, and his poetry, the true nature of the man, as he lived at home, is to be found. In the simple ways of his daily life, I see him as he sometimes used to be, in his own room, surrounded by his family—the

Jeffrey's house in his latter years, which, under the mellowed lustre of a simple domestic fire-side, rivalled the sprightliest fascinations of a Hôtel Rambouillet. No friend went to them, or was there greeted, with more cordial sympathy than Professor Wilson.

prestige of greatness laid aside, and the very strength of his hand softened, that he might gently caress the infant on his knee, and play with the little ones at his feet. And many a game was played with fun and frolic; stories were told, *barley-sugar* was eaten, and feasts of various kinds given. "A party in grandpapa's room" was ever hailed with delight. There was to be seen a tempting display of figs, raisins, cakes, and other good things, all laid out on a table set and covered by himself; while he, acting on the occasion as waiter, was ordered about in the most unceremonious fashion. After a while, when childhood was passing away from the frolics of the nursery, and venturing to explore the mysteries of life, he would speak to his little friends as companions, and passing from gay to grave, led their young spirits on, and bound their hearts to his.

In speaking of his kindness to *human pets*, I may mention a very delightful instance of his love to the inferior animals. I remember a hapless sparrow being found lying on the door-steps scarcely fledged, and quite unable to do for itself. It was brought into the house, and from that moment became a *protégé* of my father's. It found a lodging in his room, and ere long was perfectly domesticated, leading a life of uninterrupted peace and prosperity for nearly eleven years. It seemed quite of opinion that it was the most important occupant of the apartment, and would peck and chirp where it liked, not unfrequently nestling in the folds of its patron's waistcoat, attracted by the warmth it found there. Then with bolder stroke of familiarity, it would hop upon his shoulder, and picking off some straggling hair from the long locks hanging about his neck, would jump away to its cage, and depositing the treasure with an air of triumph, return to fresh conquest, quite certain of welcome. The creature seemed positively influenced by constant association with its master. It grew in *stature*, and began to assume a noble and defiant look. It was alleged, in fact, that he was gradually becoming an *eagle*.

Of his dogs, their name was Legion. I remember Brontë, Rover, Fang, Paris, Charlie, Fido, Tip, and Grog, besides outsiders without number.

Brontë comes first on the list. He came, I think, into the family in the year 1826, a soft, shapeless mass of puppyhood, and grew up a beautiful Newfoundland dog. "Purple-black was he all over, except the star on his breast, as the raven's wing. Strength and

sagacity emboldened his bounding beauty, and a fierceness lay deep down within the quiet lustre o' his een that tauld you, even when he laid his head upon your knees, and smiled up to your face like a verra intellectual and moral creature—as he was—that had he been angered, he could have torn in pieces a lion.”\* He was brave and gentle in disposition, and we all loved him, but he was my father's peculiar property, of which he was, by the way, quite aware; he evinced for him a constancy that gained in return the confidence and affection of his master. Every day for several years did Brontë walk by his side to and from the College, where he was soon as well known as the Professor himself. This fine dog came to an untimely end. There was good reason to believe that he had been poisoned by some members of Dr. Knox's class, in revenge for the remarks made by my father on the Burke and Hare murders.† I remember the morning we missed Brontë from the breakfast-room, a half-formed presentiment told us that something was wrong; we called, but no bounding step answered the summons. I went to look for him in the schoolroom, and there he lay lifeless. I could not believe it, and touched him gently with my foot; he did not move. I bent down and laid my hand on his head, but it was cold; poor Brontë was dead! “No bark like his now belongs to the world of sound;” and so passed Brontë “to the land of hereafter.” It was some time ere he found a successor; but there was no living without dogs, and the next was Rover, of whom I have already spoken.

The house in Gloucester Place was a rendezvous for all kinds of dogs. My father's kindness of nature made him open his house for his four-footed friends, who were too numerous to describe. There was Professor Jameson's Neptune, a Newfoundland dog, Mrs. Rutherford's Juba, a pet spaniel, and Wasp, a Dandy Dismont, belonging to Lord Rutherford, who were constant visitors; but the most notorious *sorner* of the whole party was Tory, brother to Fang, both sons of Mr. Blackwood's famous dog, Tickler. Tory paid his visits with the cool assurance of a man of the world, the agreeableness of whose society was not to be questioned for a moment; he remained as long as he wished, was civil and good-humored to every one, but, as a matter of course, selected the master of the house as his chief companion, walked with him, and patron-

\* *Noctes Ambrosiana.*

† *Ibid.*



ized him. I think he looked upon himself as the binding link between the bitter Tory of the old *régime*, and the moderate Conservative of the new. There was evidently a feeling of partisanship in his mind as he took up his position at the door of Mr. Blackwood's shop, either to throw the Professor off or take him up, as the case might be. I never knew so eccentric a dog as Tory; he had many friends, but his ways were queer and wandering. There was no place of public amusement he did not attend; his principles were decidedly those of a dog about town; and though serious, grave, and composed in deportment, he preferred stir and excitement to rest and decorum. Tory was never known to go to church, but at the door of the theatre, or at the Assembly Rooms, he has been seen to linger for hours. He was a long-backed yellow terrier, with his front feet slightly turned out, and an expression of countenance full of mildness and wisdom. Tory continued his visits to Gloucester Place, and his friendship for the Professor, for several years, but he did not neglect other friends, for he exhibited his partiality for many individuals in the street, accompanying them in their walk, and perhaps going home with them. This erratic and independent mode of existence brought him much into notice. There must be many in Edinburgh who remember his knowing look and strange habits.

One other such companion must be mentioned, the last my father ever had; he belonged to his son Blair, and was originally the property of a cab-driver in Edinburgh. Grog was his name, and it argues the unpoetical position he held in early life. He was the meekest and gentlest, and almost the smallest doggie I ever saw. His color was a rich chestnut brown; his coat, smooth and short, might be compared to the wing of a pheasant; and as he lay nestling in the sofa, he looked much more like a bird than a dog. I think he never followed my father in the street, their intimacy being confined entirely to domestic life; he was too *petit* to venture near Christopher as he strode along the street, but many a little snooze he took within the folds of his ample coat, or in the pocket of his jacket, or sometimes on the table among his papers. I cannot pretend to say of what breed Grog had come; he had little, comical, turned-out feet; he was a cosy, coaxing, mysterious, half-mouse, half-bird-like dog; a fancy article, and might have been bought very fitly from a bazaar of lady's work, made up for the

occasion, and sold at a high price on account of his rarity. He died easily, being found one morning on his master's pillow lifeless; his little heart had ceased to beat during the night. The Professor was very sad when he died, and vowed he never would have any more dogs—and he kept his vow.

In connection with this subject, there remains something to be said of his continued devotion to the birds mentioned in an earlier part of this Memoir. I think it was the love of the beautiful in all created things that made my father admire the glossy plumage, delicate snake-like head, and noble air of game birds—the aristocracy of their species. For many months he pampered and fed no fewer than *sixty-two* of these precious bipeds in the back-green of his house. The noise made by this fearful regiment of birds beggars all description, yet, be it said, for the honor of human patience and courtesy, not a single complaint ever came from friend or neighbor; for months it went on, and still this

“*Bufera infernal*”

was listened to in silence.\*

Fearing lest any of his pets should expand their wings and take flight, their master sought to prevent this by clipping a wing of each. He chanced to fix upon a day for this operation when his son-in-law, Mr. Gordon, was occupied in his room with his clerk, the apartment adjoining which was the place of rendezvous. Chanticleer, at no time “most musical, most melancholy” of birds, on this occasion made noise enough to “create a soul under the ribs of death.” Such an uproar! sounds of fluttering of feathers, accompanied by low chucklings, half hysterical cackling, suppressed crowing, and every sign of agitation and rage that lungs not human could send forth. During the whole of this proceeding, extraordinary as it may have appeared to the uninitiated ear, not an observation escaped the lips of the clerk, who for more than an hour was subjected to “this lively din.”

If, however, the silence of neighbors did honor to their virtue, there were distresses and perplexities which domestic tongues

\* His medical attendant naïvely relates that one day when the Professor took him into his “aviary,” and pointed out the varied beauties of his birds, the Doctor asked, “Do they never fight?” “Fight!” replied the Professor, “you little know the noble nature of the animal; he will not fight unless he is incited; but,” added he, with a humorous twinkle of the eye, “put a hen among them, and I won’t answer for the peace being long observed;—and so it hath been since the beginning of the world,” added the old man eloquent.

found no difficulty in expressing. Two of the birds fell sick, and change of air was considered necessary for their restoration to health. A happy thought suggested to the Professor, that an hospital might be found for the invalids in a room of the attic story, where boxes and various unused articles of the *ménage* were kept, in short, the lumber-room, not unfrequently, however, a repository for very valuable articles—so far belying its name. In this apartment, for more than a week, walked in undisturbed quiet the two invalids, tended, fed, and visited many times during each day by their watchful patron. Health by those means was restored, and nothing now remained but to remove the pets to their old abode in the back-green, where they crowed and strutted more insolently than ever. A few days after the lumber-room had been evacuated by its feathered tenants, the Professor's daughters ascended to the said apartment, happy in the possession there—secure in a well-papered trunk—of certain beautiful ball-dresses to be worn that very night in all the freshness of unsullied crape and ribbons. What sight met their eyes on opening the door of the room! Horrible to say, the elegant dresses were lying on the floor in a corner, soiled, torn, and crumpled, in fact useless. The box in which they had been so carefully laid, had been, on account of its size, at once secured by the Professor as an eligible coop for his birds. The dresses were of no value in his eyes; probably he did not know what they were; so tossing them ruthlessly out, he left them to their fate. It was quite evident, from the appearance they presented, that along with the empty trunk—according to the caprice of the fowls—they had been used as a *nest*. To imagine the feelings of the young ladies at the sight of their fair vanities, “all tattered and torn,” is to call up a subject which, even at this distant date, causes a natural pang. It was a trial certainly not borne with much patience, and no doubt, in the hour of disappointment, called forth expressions of bitter and undisguised hatred towards all animated nature in the shape of *feathers*. The *aviary* was after a time shut up, and all its inhabitants were sent off in various directions. The following note to Dr. Moir will show how they were disposed of:—

“6 GLOUCESTER PLACE, *Monday*.

“MY DEAR SIR:—I have a game-cock of great value which I wish to walk (as it is technically termed) for a few months. Can

you take him in? This will depend entirely on your setting any value on the bird you now may have, and who, I presume, is Dung-hill. If you do, on no account displace him from his own throne. If you do not, I will bring mine down on Thursday, and see him safely deposited in your back court. In that case, his present majesty must either be put to death or expatriated, as if put together they will fall by mutual wounds. Yours affectionately,

“J. WILSON.”

Apparently the only article from his pen during 1840 in *Blackwood* was a review of “A Legend of Florence,” by Leigh Hunt. If he had not long ere that made the *amende honorable* for the unjust bitterness of the past, he certainly in this review used “the gracious tact, the Christian art,” to heal all wounds, illustrating finely his own memorable words, “The *animosities* are mortal, but the *humanities* live forever.”

Preparatory to beginning an essay upon Burns, which he had engaged to write for the Messrs. Blackie, he was desirous to seek the best domestic traces of him that could be found, and naturally turned to Dumfriesshire for such information. Two interesting letters to Mr. Thomas Aird, will, better than words of mine, show how earnestly he set about his work, although I cannot, at the same time, avoid drawing attention to certain expressions of anxious interest concerning the better part of the man. For example, his desire to hear “if Burns was a church-goer, regular or irregular, and to what church.” All his inquiries show a tender sympathy, a Christian desire to place that erring spirit justly before men, for well did he know how in this world faults are judged. There is a touching simplicity, too, in the personal allusions in these words, “*Her* eyes never having looked on the Nith.”

“May 3, 1840.

“MY DEAR MR. AIRD:—I have been ill with rose in my head for more than a fortnight, and it is still among the roots of my hair, but in about a week or so, I think I shall be able to move in the open air without danger. I have a leaning towards Dumfriesshire, it being unhaunted by the past, or less haunted than almost any other place, *her* eyes never having looked on the Nith. Perhaps thereabouts I might move, and there find an hour of peace. Is Thornhill a pleasant village? and is there an inn between it and Dumfries? Is there an

inn in the pass of Dalvine? Is Penpont habitable quietly for a few days, or any of the pretty village-inns in that district? Pray let me hear from you at your leisure *how the land lies*. Perhaps I may afterwards step down to your town for a day, but I wish, if I make out a week's visit to Nithsdale or neighborhood, to do so unknown but to yourself. Affectionately yours,  
JOHN WILSON."

Four months later we find him writing again to the same friend:—

“EDINBURGH, *Sept. 24, 1840.*

“MY DEAR MR. AIRD:—I have at last set to work—if that be not too strong an assertion—on my paper about Burns, so long promised to the Messrs. Blackie of Glasgow, for *The Land of Burns*. They have in hand about fifty printed quarto pages, but some of it has not been returned to me to correct for press. They expect, I believe, thirty or fifty more.

“Can you find out from good authority in Dumfries (Jessie Lewars, they say, is yet alive, and is Mrs. Thomson) if Burns was a church-goer at Dumfries, regular or irregular, and to what church? 2. If he was on habits of intimacy with any clergyman or clergymen in the town—as, for example, Dr. Burnside? In 1803, I stayed two days with the Burnside—all dear friends of mine *then*, and long afterwards, though *now* the survivors are to me like the dead. I then called with Mary Burnside,\* now Mrs. Taylor, in Liverpool, on Mrs. Burns. Robert I remember at Glasgow College, but hardly knew him, and I dare say he does not remember me. 3. Did any clergyman visit him on his dying bed; and is it supposed that when dying the Bible was read by him more than formerly or not? 4. Had Burns frequent, rare, or regular family worship at Dumfries? At Ellisland I think he often had. If these questions can be answered affirmatively, in whole or in part, I shall say something about it; if not, I shall be silent, or nearly so. In either case I hope I shall say nothing wrong.

“I have not left Edinburgh since I saw you, but for a day or so, and I won't leave it till this contribution to *The Life of Burns* is finished. Then I intend going for a week to Kelso, and from the 20th October to ditto April, if spared, be in this room, misnamed a

\* Mary Burnside was the friend and confidante of the “Orphan Maid,” whose image was so hard to tear from his young heart.

study—it is a sort of library. I am alone with one daughter, my good Jane; her mother's name, and much of her nature—but not . . . Yours affectionately,  
JOHN WILSON."

During this summer he went into Dumfries and Galloway, accompanied by his two sons. I have an interesting account of a visit he paid to the Rev. George Murray of Balmaclellan, Glenkens, with a day's fishing in Lochinvar, but it is too long for insertion.

In speaking of his room, which he calls "a sort of library," something may be said of that careless habit which overtook him in his later years, and gave to his whole appearance an air of reckless freedom. His room was a strange mixture of what may be called order and untidiness, for there was not a scrap of paper, or a book, that his hand could not light upon in a moment, while to the casual eye, in search of discovery, it would appear chaos, without a chance of being cleared away.

To any one whose delight lay in beauty of furniture, or quaint and delicate ornament, well-appointed arrangements, and all that indescribable fascination caught from *nick-nacks* and articles of *vertu*, that apartment must have appeared a mere lumber-room. The bookshelves were of unpainted wood, knocked up in the rudest fashion, and their volumes, though not wanting in number or excellence, wore but shabby habiliments, many of them being tattered and without backs. The chief pieces of furniture in this room were two cases: one containing specimens of foreign birds, a gift from an admirer of his genius across the Atlantic, which was used incongruously enough sometimes as a wardrobe; the other was a book-case, but not entirely devoted to books; its glass doors permitted a motley assortment of articles to be seen. The spirit, the tastes and habits of the possessor were all to be found there, side by side like a little community of domesticities.

For example, resting upon the *Wealth of Nations* lay shining coils of gut, set off by pretty pink twinings. Peeping out from *Boxiana*, in juxtaposition with the *Faëry Queen*, were no end of delicately dressed *flies*; and pocket-books well filled with gear for the "gentle craft" found company with Shakspeare and Ben Jonson; while fishing-rods, in pieces, stretched their elegant length along the shelves, embracing a whole set of poets. Nor was the gravest philosophy without its contrast, and Jeremy Taylor, too,

found innocent repose in the neighborhood of a tin box of barley-sugar, excellent as when bought "at my old man's." Here and there, in the interstices between books, were stuffed what appeared to be dingy, crumpled bits of paper—these were bank-notes, his *class fees*—not unfrequently, for want of a purse, thrust to the bottom of an old worsted stocking, when not honored by a place in the book-case. I am certain he very rarely counted over the fees taken from his students. He never looked at or touched money in the usual way; he very often forgot where he put it; saving when these stocking banks were his humor; no one, for its own sake, or for his own purposes, ever regarded riches with such perfect indifference. He was like the old patriarch whose simple desires were comprehended in these words:—"If God will be with me, and keep me in the way I am to go, and give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on"—other thought of wealth he had not. And so there he sat, in the majesty of unaffected dignity, surrounded by a homeliness that still left him a type of the finest gentleman; courteous to all, easy and unembarrassed in address, wearing his *négligé* with as much grace as a courtier his lace and plumes, nor leaving other impression than that which goodness makes on minds ready to acknowledge superiority; seeing there "the elements so mixed in him, that nature might stand up and say to all the world, This was a man."

"Writing for Blackwood" were words that bore no pleasant significance to my ears in the days of childhood. Well do I remember, when living long ago in Ann Street, going to school with my sister Margaret, that, on our return from it, the first question eagerly put by us to the servant as she opened the door was, "Is papa busy to-day; is he writing for Blackwood?" If the inquiry was answered in the affirmative, then off went our shoes, and we crept up stairs like mice. I believe, generally speaking, there never was so quiet a nursery as ours. Thus "writing for Blackwood" found little favor in our eyes, and the grim old visage of Geordie Buchanan met with very rough treatment from our hands. If, as sometimes happened, a number of the Magazine found its way to the nursery, it never failed to be tossed from floor to ceiling, and back again, until tattered to our hearts' content. In due time we came to appreciate better the value of these labors, when we learned what love and duty there was in them; and a good lesson of endurance and

power the old man taught by the very manner of his work. How he set about it, *à propos* of his study, may claim a few words of description.

His habit of composition, or rather I should say the execution of it, was not always ordered best for his comfort. The amazing rapidity with which he wrote, caused him too often to delay his work to the very last moment, so that he almost always wrote under compulsion, and every second of time was of consequence. Under such a mode of labor there was no hour left for relaxation. When regularly in for an article for Blackwood, his whole strength was put forth, and it may be said he struck into life what he had to do at a blow. He at these times began to write immediately after breakfast, that meal being dispatched with a swiftness commensurate with the necessity of the case before him. He then shut himself into his study, with an express command that no one was to disturb him, and he never stirred from his writing-table until perhaps the greater part of a "Noctes" was written, or some paper of equal brilliancy and interest completed. The idea of breaking his labor by taking a constitutional walk never entered his thoughts for a moment. Whatever he had to write, even though a day or two were to keep him close at work, he never interrupted his pen, saving to take his night's rest, and a late dinner served to him in his study. The hour for that meal was on these occasions nine o'clock; his dinner then consisted invariably of a boiled fowl, potatoes, and a glass of water—he allowed himself no wine. After dinner he resumed his pen till midnight, when he retired to bed, not unfrequently to be disturbed by an early printer's boy; although sometimes, these familiars did not come often enough or early enough for their master's work,\* as may be seen from the following note to Mr. Ballantyne:—

\* That these familiars were not always so dilatory, the following humorous description will testify:—"O these printers' devils! Like urchins on an ice-slide *keeping the pie warm*, from cock-crow till owl-hoot do they continue in unintermitting succession to pour from the far-off office down upon Moray Place or Buchanan Lodge, one imp almost on the very shoulders of another, without a minute devil-free, crying, 'Copy! copy!' in every variety of intonation possible in gruff or shrill; and should I chance to drop asleep over an article, worn down by protracted sufferings to mere skin and bone, as you see, till the wick of my candle—one to the pound—hangs drooping down by the side of the melting mutton, the two sunk stories are swarming with them all a-hum! Many, doubtless, die during the year, but from such immense numbers they are never missed any more than the midges you massacre on a sultry summer eve. Then the face and figure of one devil are so like another's—the people who have time to pay particular attention to their personal appearance, which I have not, say they are as different as sheep. That tipsy Thammuz is to me all one with Bowzy Beelzebub," &c.—*Noctes*.



“The boy was told to call this morning at seven, and said he would, but he has not come till . . . I rose at five this morning on purpose to have the sheets ready. I wish you could order the devils to be more punctual, as they never by any accident appear in this house at a proper time. The devil who broke his word is he who brought *the first packet last night*. The devil who brought the second, is in this blameless. I do not wish the first devil to get more than his due: but you must snub him for my sake. For a man who goes to bed at two, does not relish leaving it at five, except in case of life or death. Would you believe it, I am a *little* angry just now?  
J. W.”

I do not exaggerate his power of speed, when I say he wrote more in a few hours than most able writers do in a few days; examples of it I have often seen in the very manuscript before him, which, disposed on the table, was soon transferred to the more roomy space of the floor at his feet, where it lay “thick as autumnal leaves in Vallombrosa,” only to be piled up again quickly as before. When I look back to the days when he sat in that confused, dusty study, working sometimes like a slave, it seems to me as if Hood’s “Song of the Shirt,” with a difference of burden, would apply in its touching words to him; for it was

“Write, write, write,  
While the cock is crowing aloof;  
And write, write, write,  
Till the stars shine through the roof;”

And so was his literature made, that delightful periodical literature which, “say of it what you will, gives light to the heads and heat to the hearts of millions of our race. The greatest and best men of the age have not disdained to belong to the Brotherhood; and thus the hovel holds what must not be missing in the hall—the furniture of the cot is the same as that of the palace; and duke and ditcher read their lessons from the same page.”

He never, even in very cold weather, had a fire in his room; nor did it at night, as most apartments do, get heat from gas, which he particularly disliked, remaining faithful to the primitive candle—a large vulgar tallow, set in a suitable candlestick composed of ordinary tin, and made after the fashion of what is called a kitchen can-

dlestick. What his fancy for this was I cannot say, but he never did, and would not, make use of any other.

From 1840 to 1845 there were only two papers contributed by him to Blackwood, viz., the review of Leigh Hunt's *Legend of Florence*, already spoken of, and a laudatory criticism of Macaulay's *Lays of Ancient Rome*. The latter appeared in December, 1842. This cessation from labor arose in the first instance from a paralytic affection of his right hand, which attacked him in May, 1840, and disabled him for nearly a year. It was the first warning he received that his great strength and wonderful constitution lay under the same law as that which commands the weakest. Writing thenceforward became irksome, and the characters traced by his pen are almost undecipherable. This attack gradually wore away, but it was during its continuance, and for years after, that he imposed upon himself rules of total abstinence from wine and every kind of stimulant. Toast and water was the only beverage of which he partook.

I have nothing more to relate of this time, nor are there any other traces of literary occupation beyond that belonging directly to his College duties. The remaining portion of this year must be permitted to pass in silence; and not again till the summer of 1841, is there a trace of any thing but what belongs to a retired and quiet life.

In June, 1841, he presided at a large public dinner given in honor of Mr. Charles Dickens,\* and immediately afterwards started for the Highlands. The following letter to Mr. Findlay recalls recollections of that delightful tour. I was then with him at Rothesay, as his communication shows, on occasion of a melancholy nature, which, however, at that period did not result as was anticipated, and left the summer months free from any other sorrow than that of anxiety. Mrs. Gordon rallied for a time, and was well enough to bear removal to Edinburgh in the autumn, but the sad condition in which she was brought friends around her, of whom my father was one; and on one of these visits to Rothesay, he made from thence a short detour by Inverary and Loch Awe, taking me with him, along with his eldest son John.

“ROTHESAY, *Thursday Night,*  
*July 1, 1841.*”

“MY DEAR ROBERT :—Gordon and I left Edinburgh suddenly by

\* Reported in *Scotsman*, June 26, 1841

the night mail on Monday, and arrived here on Tuesday forenoon. Dr. Hay and my daughter Mary followed in the afternoon, in consequence of the illness of Mrs. Gordon, senior, who, I fear, is dying. To-day, Mary and Gordon had nearly met a fatal accident, having been upset in a car, over a considerable depth among rocks on the shore-road, along with their friend Mr. Irvine, and his son. All were for a while insensible except Mary, and all have been a good deal hurt. Mary was brought home in Mrs. T. Douglas's carriage, and is going on well. In a day or two she will be quite well; and Gordon is little the worse. It was near being a fatal accident, and had a frightful look. I was not of the party. Mrs. Gordon's condition and Mary's accident will keep me here a day or two, so my plans are changed for the present, and I shall not be at Easter Hill till next week. Be under no anxiety about Mary, for she has recovered considerably, and will soon again be on her feet. My hand is not so well to-day, and I fear you will hardly be able to read this scrawl. Yours affectionately,  
JOHN WILSON."

At no time did my father ever appear so free from care as when communing with nature. With him it was indeed communion. He did not, as many do when living in the presence of fine scenery, show any impatience to leave one scene in order to seek another; no restless desire to be on the top of a mountain, or away into some distant valley; but he would linger in and about the place his heart had fixed to visit. All he desired was there before him; it was almost a lesson to look at his countenance at such moments. There was an expression, as it were, of melancholy, awe, and gratitude, a fervent inward emotion pictured outwardly. His fine blue eye seemed as if, in and beyond nature, it saw some vision that beatified the sight of earth, and sent his spirit to the gates of heaven.

I remember walking a whole day with him, rambling about the neighborhood of Cladich; scarcely a word was uttered. Now and then he would point out a spot, which sudden sun-gleams made for a moment what he called a "sight of divine beauty;" and then again, perhaps when some more extended and lengthened duration of light overspread the whole landscape, making it a scene of matchless loveliness, gently touching my arm, he signified, by a motion of his hand, that I too must take in and admire what he did not express by words; silence at such moments was the key to more in-

tense enjoyment. We sat down to rest on an eminence at the head of Loch Awe, when the midday sun glittered over every island and promontory, streaking the green fields with lines of gold. Not a sound escaped his lips; but when, after a while, the softening shades of afternoon lent a less intense color to the scene, he spoke a few words, saying: "Long, long ago, I saw such a sight of beauty here, that if I were to tell it no one would believe it; indeed, I am not sure whether I can describe what I saw; it was truly divine! I have written something very poor and feeble in attempt to describe that incomparable sight, which I cannot now read; but to my dying day I shall not forget the vision."

Did this vision suggest "Lays of Fairyland?"—taking too, in after years, another form than verse. It appeared in one of the most beautiful morsels of prose composition he ever wrote, which so impressed Lord Jeffrey's mind, he never was tired of reading it.

It is a description of a fairy's funeral, and rather than refer the reader to the volume and page where it is to be found, I give the extract, as in fitting association with Loch Awe and the unforgotten vision or poet's dream near the brow of Ben Cruachan:—

"There it was, on a little river island, that once, whether sleeping or waking we know not, we saw celebrated a fairy's funeral. First we heard small pipes playing, as if no bigger than hollow rushes that whisper to the night winds; and more piteous than aught that trills from earthly instrument was the scarce audible dirge! It seemed to float over the stream, every foam-bell emitting a plaintive note, till the fairy anthem came floating over our couch, and then alighting without footsteps among the heather. The pattering of little feet was then heard, as if living creatures were arranging themselves in order, and then there was nothing but a more ordered hymn. The harmony was like the melting of musical dewdrops, and sang, without words, of sorrow and death. We opened our eyes, or rather sight came to them when closed, and dream was vision. Hundreds of creatures, no taller than the crest of the lapwing, and all hanging down their veiled heads, stood in a circle on a green plat among the rocks; and in the midst was a bier, framed as it seemed of flowers unknown to the Highland hills; and on the bier a fairy lying with uncovered face, pale as a lily, and motionless as the snow. The dirge grew fainter and

fainter, and then died quite away; when two of the creatures came from the circle, and took their station, one at the head, the other at the foot of the bier. They sang alternate measures, not louder than the twittering of the awakened woodlark before it goes up the dewy air, but dolorous and full of the desolation of death. The flower-bier stirred; for the spot on which it lay sank slowly down, and in a few moments the greensward was smooth as ever, the very dewes glittering above the buried fairy. A cloud passed over the moon; and, with a choral lament, the funeral troop sailed duskily away, heard afar off, so still was the midnight solitude of the glen. Then the disenthralled Orchy began to rejoice as before, through all her streams and falls; and at the sudden leaping of the waters and outbursting of the moon, we awoke."

I know not what the custom of authors is with regard to their own works, but this is true, that Professor Wilson never read what he wrote after it was published. He never spoke of himself but with the greatest humility. If egotism he possessed, it belonged entirely to the playful spirit of his writings, as seen in the lighter touches of the "Noctes." It was this humility that gave so great a charm to his graver conversation; and in listening to him, you felt perfectly convinced that truth was the guiding principle of all he said. There was no desire to produce an impression by startling theories, or by careless off-hand *bits* of brilliancy—the glow without heat. Simple, earnest, eloquent, and vigorous, his opinion carried the weight with it which belongs to all in whom implicit confidence rests. I never knew any one the *truth* of whose nature, at a glance, was so evident; not a shadow of dissemblance ever crossed that manly heart. His sympathies are best understood in examples of the love which gentle and simple bore to him.

Fortunately, one of the few letters I ever received from him has been preserved. It brings the reader to 1842, when it will show him in one of his happiest moods. He has shaken the dust of the pavement from his feet, and pitched his tent for the time being on the pastoral slopes of a retired valley, the beautiful boundary of the river Esk, renowned in story for the adventures of "Young Loch-invar." There, in the spring of the year, he rambled, full of interest and occupation, not angling, or loitering through day-dreams by holm or shaw, but looking on with approving eye, suggesting and aiding, as circumstances required, in the appointment of a new

house for his son John, who had just entered upon the pleasant, though anxious, toil of a farmer's life.

As the summer advanced I was to join him there. Meanwhile he writes a description of the *locale*, so beautifully minute in character that it may stand as a daguerreotype of the scene. I offer the letter as one of the best specimens of his domestic correspondence:—

“BILLHOLM, LANGHOLM,  
*Friday Forenoon, May 27, 1842.*

“MY DEAR MARY:—We left Linhope on Wednesday, dined at the farmer's ordinary in Langholm, and came to Billholm in the evening. Yesterday we were all occupied all day taking stock on the hills—sixty score; twelve gentlemen dined, thirty-four shepherds and herdsmen, ten horses, and twenty-five dogs. The scene surpassed description, but it is over. This morning the party (with Billholm and Menzion at their head) went off for a similar purpose to Craighope, distant some ten miles; and Billholm, I believe, will return with Mr. Scott (the outgoing tenant) in the evening. Meanwhile I am left alone, and shall send this and some other letters to Langholm by a lad, as *there is no post*. That is inconvenient—very.

“In a day or two we shall be more quiet, but you can have no idea of the bustle and importance of all at this juncture, nor has John an hour to spare for any purpose out of his own individual concerns.

“This place is, beyond doubt, in all respects sweet and serene, being the uppermost farm in the valley of the Esk before it becomes bare. It is not so rich or wooded as a few miles farther down, but is not treeless; the holms or haughs are cultivated and cheerful; the Esk about the size of the Tweed at the Crook, and the hills not so high as the highest about Innerleithen, but elegantly shaped, and in the best style of pastoral.

“The house ‘shines well where it stands,’ on a bank sloping down to the river, which is not above twenty yards from the door, so Goliath\* has nothing to do but walk in and float down to Langholm. But after Port Bannatyne he is safe against water. It fronts the river; many pleasant holms in the middle distance, and the aforesaid hills about a mile off, surrounding the horizon. Sufficient

\* One of his grandchildren.

trees up and down the banks; but the view in front open, not exposed. The house was originally of this common kind: door in the middle, window on each side, three windows above, and windowless roof. A stone portico, since erected, takes away the formality, and breaks the blast. Freestone, neat with a window, good place for a clock, or even a 'beetle.' Entering through a glass door into the passage, to the left is the drawing-room, about sixteen feet square, I think, though I have not measured it yet; one window looking to the front, another up the river into a close scene pretty with trees; a most pleasant parlor.

"To the right is *the* parlor, 15 feet by 12, small no doubt, but lodgeable and comfortable. Up-stairs (which face you on your entrance) are four bedrooms, all comfortable; the two to the front excellent and fit for anybody; one of them with a small dressing-room with a window. I forgot to say, that behind the drawing-room is a pretty little room for a boudoir, study, or bedroom. All these rooms are papered, not, perhaps, as we would have papered them, but all neat and tidy, and not to be needlessly found fault with. So done only two years ago; so is the passage and staircase. An addition had been made to the house at the end to the right hand; and on the ground floor is the dining-room, into which you enter through the aforesaid parlor. It is, I believe, 18 feet by 16. One window looks to the front, and one into a grove of trees. It is oil-painted, of the color of dark brick-dust, with a gilt moulding; rather ugly at first sight, but I am trying to like it, and, for the present, it will do. Doors, etc., of all the rooms, good imitation of oak.

"Above the dining-room, and behind it overhead, are two largish rooms, very low in the roof, communicating with one of the best bedrooms aforesaid, and used formerly as nurseries.

"So there are, in fact, seven bedrooms.

"There is a good kitchen (fatally to me, not to John) near the dining-room, and back kitchen, also servants' hall, as it is called, or rather *butler's* pantry—a very comfortable and useful place—and fitted up with presses, which John bought. There is a woman-servant's room, with two beds; ditto, ditto, man-servant's. A storeroom—good size—and a large dark closet, fit to hold the six tin canisters, though they were sixty, and other things besides. Behind are a few out-houses in rather a shaky condition. The

farm-offices are about 100 or 150 yards from the house. The garden is an oblong, containing, I should think, about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  acres. One end joins the house; one side is walled, and the farther end; the other side, hedged prettily, and with many lilacs, runs along the banks of the river, and 'tis a very pretty garden indeed. Fruit-trees rather too old, and gooseberry-bushes too; but the latter show a pretty good crop, and I counted 120 bushes. There are also currants and *rasps*, and a promising strawberry bed. Every thing in it will be late this season, as it was dressed since John came here, only three weeks ago, but every thing is growing. The furniture has not yet made its appearance, but I believe is at Langholm, and I shall hear about it by return of my messenger.

"I will write again first opportunity, and expect to be at home by the middle of the week. Observe the directions in my last letter. Love to Blair and Umbs, Gordon and Goliah, Lexy and Adele, Taglioni, Mary Anne, and the rest.

"Your affectionate father,

JOHN WILSON."

Almost the whole of this summer was spent at Billholm. The winter, coming again with its usual routine of work, calls him to town somewhere about October. In December his fine "Roman hand" strikes fire once more through the languid ribs of "Maga," and he greets with good heart and will the *Lays of Ancient Rome*. No *arrière pensée* of political differences obtrudes its ill-concealed remembrance through his words. What is it to him whether it be Whig or Tory who writes, when genius, with star-like light, "flames in the forehead of the morning sky?" "What! poetry from Macaulay? Ay, and why not? The House hushes itself to hear him, even when 'Stanley is the cry.' If he be not the first of critics (spare our blushes), who is? Name the young poet who could have written *The Armada*, and kindled, as if by electricity, beacons on all the brows of England till night grew day! The young poets, we said, all want fire. Macaulay is not one of the set, for he is full of fire."

And so does he proceed, with honest words of praise, to the end, giving what is due to all. More of his treatment of this noble enemy in another place.

As I have already remarked, there was nothing written for *Blackwood* during the years 1842-'44. What was he about?



What right has such a question to be put? Is literature worked as if on a tread-mill, under the hand of a task-master; or is the public voice never to cease from the weary cry of "give, give?"

The contents of the following letter to Dr. Moir will show that he was not absolutely idle:—

"4th Oct., 1842.

"MY DEAR SIR:—I have lost several days in looking over till I am sick, all *Blackwood*, for a description of Christopher's house in Moray Place. It is somewhere pictured as the House of Indolence, and with some elaboration, as I once heard Horatio Macculloch, the painter, talk of it with rapture. I wish you would cast over in your mind where the description may be, as I would fain put it into a chapter in vol. iii. of 'Recreations' now printing. Sometimes a reader remembers what a writer forgets. It is not in a 'Noctes.' I read it with my own eyes not long ago; but I am ashamed of myself to think how many hours (days) I have wasted in wearily trying to recover it. Perhaps it may recur to you without much effort of recollection. Yours affectionately,

"JOHN WILSON."

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## CHAPTER XVI.

### LITERARY AND DOMESTIC LIFE.

1844-'48.

WE now come to February, 1844, where an old correspondent reappears, whose letters, if not written in the sunny spirit of *bonhomme*, have a peculiar excellence of their own. Never did graver's tool give more unmistakable sharpness to his lines, than the pen of John Gibson Lockhart gave to his words. The three following letters are as characteristic of his satirical power as any of those off-hand caricatures that shred his best friends to pieces, leaving the most poetical of them as bereft of that beautifying property, as if they had been born utterly without it. I have seen various portraits of my father from that pencil, each bearing the grotesque image of the