

## CHAPTER IX.

## NOTES OF LIFE FROM 1824 TO 1830.

THERE is no flock, however watched and tended,  
 But one dead lamb is there !  
 THERE is no fireside, howsoe'er defended,  
 But has one vacant chair !

LET us be patient ! These severe afflictions  
 Not from the ground arise,  
 But oftentimes celestial benedictions  
 Assume this dark disguise.

LONGFELLOW.

IN 1825, Brewster was made a Corresponding Member of the French Institute, and from this time honours crowded so rapidly upon him, that, except any of special interest, it would be tedious to enumerate them in their order and succession. Suffice it to say, that the large book in which the letters, diplomas, burgess tickets, announcements of medals, etc., are collected, is a remarkable one for size and value. The large towns of Switzerland, France, Germany, Holland, Italy, Russia, Belgium, Portugal, Austria, Sweden, and Norway, South Africa, Antigua, the various States of America, besides the towns and Universities of England, Scotland, and Ireland, all contributed their quota of honours to this man of research and industry. A cape received his name in the Arctic regions, a river in the Antarctic, and a new plant discovered by Dr. Muellin in Australia was named *Cassia Brewsteri*.

He received, besides the Copley, Rumford, and Royal Medals, two Keith Medals from the Royal Society of Edinburgh, two from the French Institute, one from Denmark, one from the Société Française de Photographie, and various others; of some of the most valuable of these, duplicates were sent to him, one of gold, which he turned into plate, and a facsimile of frosted silver,—all being preserved as heirlooms.

Many men of eminence in all departments of science and literature naturally gathered around Brewster during his residence in Edinburgh, and many followed him to the country with letters of introduction, while most of them became contributors to the works which he edited. One of these, M. Audubon, the naturalist, has left a pleasing tribute to the home *bien-séances* of the philosopher, whose wife he records as “a charming woman, whose manners put me entirely at ease.” Another literary acquaintance of this period, Dr. Hibbert, the author of a book *On Apparitions*, which was well known in its day, visited Dr. Brewster at Allerly. A trifling but amusing incident which occurred on this occasion he was fond of relating to the latest years of his life. The learned guest had retired to his chamber, while the learned host pursued his researches in his study, when a loud outcry was heard in the house, which was wrapped in the silence of the small hours. Dr. Brewster rushed into the lobby, where a strange scene presented itself. The author of the book *On Apparitions*, forgetful of its scientific reasonings, was standing at the door of his room staring wildly around and ejaculating “that there was a very curious light somewhere!” while, at another door, two small boys in their night-dresses, roused at first in affright, were in

convulsed laughter, for the ghostly light arose from the thick tassel of the author's night-cap, which had been set on fire before quenching the midnight lamp, and which was now smouldering on the top of his head.

Another visitor was Baron Alexandre, a French gentleman, celebrated, among other gifts, for his skill in ventriloquism. This curious subject had occupied Brewster's attention at an early period. In 1802 we have seen that he inserted a paper on it in his *Edinburgh Magazine*; and in 1828 he wrote an article in the *Edinburgh Journal of Science* describing the "performances of different ventriloquists." An amusing and unusual incident which occurred in connection with M. Alexandre's exhibition of the art he recollected vividly, and had the pleasure of recalling to his friend when they met in Paris many years after. The exact imitation of sawing wood was one of the ventriloquist's *chef-d'œuvres*; and on proceeding to manipulate a drawing-room table, to the consternation of host, hostess, guests, and still more of the performer himself, the table accompanied the wonderful sounds by breaking in two pieces beneath his fingers, a previous fracture having of course been carefully concealed by some unknown culprit.

In 1827 the long-talked-of visit to Edgeworthstown was at last made out, and Brewster also visited several members of the family in other parts of Ireland, but he spent the greater portion of his time in the home of the Edgeworths, so celebrated as a centre of literature, of persevering work, and of happy home life. He writes as follows to his wife:—

“EDGEWORTHSTOWN, July 17, 1827.

“We stayed all Friday night at the Observatory of

Armagh, at Dr. Romney Robinson's, the astronomer, a person of most extraordinary talents. My visit here has been a very agreeable and delightful one. A more extraordinary family for talents, mutual affection, and everything that can interest, I could not have conceived. You must come to Ireland to see what will never be seen again. We sit down to dinner, a family party of sixteen, and a merrier one you have never seen. The country about Edgeworthstown is not at all to be compared with the county of Antrim, but the place itself is fine, and the lawn extensive and grand. Miss Edgeworth is to send with me some plants for you, and I hope to get what is very rare, a white rhododendron from Ballydrain, from whence she is also to get one. I have seen a good deal of Ireland during the short time I have been here. It is in every way a most extraordinary country. I like the people amazingly, and have no more fear of travelling at night than if I were in Roxburghshire. We have been busy here all day with meteorological observations, which have been made principally by Miss Fanny, a most elegant and accomplished person. I hope Charles has not forgotten them. Yesterday Mr. William Edgeworth, M. Davidoff, Mr. Collyar, and I drove to Loch Gorma, a lake about twelve miles distant, so that with that journey, and our visit to the school, etc., here, I have scarcely leisure to scribble this epistle. Miss Edgeworth is to send some curiosities to Harry."

In this year the family residence was changed entirely to Allerly, which possessed many advantages of health, comfort, and leisure. The society of Roxburghshire at that time presented a most extraordinary circle of literature. Abbotsford itself was a sun and centre from

whence the great enchanter drew to himself, with the cords of his mighty genial genius, those eminent in kindred pursuits from every part of the world, not to speak of the inferior crowds of "beasts with sketch-books," as his lively daughter, Anne Scott, designated the followers of the great lion. The country-houses around Abbotsford were also peopled with authors and wits. Chiefswood, a lovely cottage *ornée* within a short walk of Abbotsford, up a wooded glen, was tenanted first by Captain Hamilton, author of *Cyril Thornton*, to whom Mrs. Hemans, the poetess, paid a long visit, and afterwards by Lockhart, the son-in-law of Scott, and himself celebrated as a critic and author. Huntly Burn was the residence of Sir Adam Ferguson, the chosen friend and companion of Sir Walter Scott, whose witty stories and *bon mots* mixed well with the other literary ingredients. At Maxpoffle, some miles farther, G. P. R. James, the well-known historical novelist, pitched his tent, and Mr. Poulett Scrope, author of *Days of Deer-stalking* and *Nights of Salmon-fishing*, who was also an excellent amateur painter, resided at the Pavilion for some years; and if we add to the list the philosopher of Allerly, with his science and occasional *savans*, it would be difficult to find a country circle in which so many men of mark were included.

There was much sociability in the neighbourhood of Melrose. Some of the families above mentioned, among whom were Sir David and Lady Brewster and other neighbours, formed a club which they called "The Barley Broth Club," the rules of which laid its members under the pleasant necessity of dining alternately at each other's houses every Saturday, and these

happy genial reunions are recalled with regretful pleasure by the few survivors.<sup>1</sup>

The enthusiastic admiration and affection for "Sir Walter," and the interest attached to the localities and originals of the Waverley Novels, can scarcely be understood in these days of sensational and police-court literature. But at the time when stage-coaches were surrounded and almost pillaged of the "new volumes" before they reached their destination, everything connected with the author of Waverley was of intense interest, especially in his own district. A popular neighbour lost none of her popularity from being the believed original of "Die Vernon;" and a Divinity student of much originality and kindness of character, who acted as tutor to some of the neighbouring families, amongst others to the Allerly boys, was universally recognised as "Dominie Sampson," his well-known "Pro-dee-gious" delighting the ears of young and old. The friendship and intercourse between the families of Abbotsford and Allerly was intimate and frequent. My own memory goes back as in a dream to that time—the men of mail and the armoury, the dogs of flesh and stone, the galleried study, the favourite invalid grandson, "Hugh Little John," and kind words and caresses from the Great Wizard himself. Nowhere was the throb of sorrow that pervaded the nation in 1832 more felt than at Allerly, when, on the 21st of September, the honoured head lay down in its melancholy last slumber on that "beautiful day, so warm that every window was wide open, and so perfectly still that the sound of all others most delicious to his ear, the gentle

<sup>1</sup> This club is mentioned in a letter from Dr. Clarkson, one of its members, to Sir J. Y. Simpson, Bart.

ripple of the Tweed over its pebbles, was distinctly audible as we knelt around the bed, and his eldest son kissed and closed his eyes."<sup>1</sup>

Before that time, however, the cloud of sorrow had gathered over Allerly itself deep and dark. There was no mill-stream near the house, as at the dreaded Allars, but the full rippling Tweed rolled its waters in sufficient proximity to be tempting for boyish sports. A strange fear of drowning had pervaded Dr. Brewster's life. He always believed that he himself was to perish in that way, a fear which strangely enough was discovered to haunt the mind of more than one of his descendants, even when too youthful to be prepossessed by any knowledge of others having felt the same. But the father's fears and caution seem to have slumbered for a while, and the young Brewsters were frequently allowed to bathe in the river with companions. The second son, Charles, was a boy of fifteen, of the highest promise for steadiness and talent,—one of those beings so universally beloved and so perfect in home life that it is commonly, though wrongly, said, "They are too good to live," as if the grace of God could not fit for life as well as death. One summer's afternoon, in 1828, the sudden, fearful summons came to the agonized parents from the neighbour's house to which the unconscious boy had been conveyed from the fatal river; but, alas! life was proved to be extinct before they could reach the house, and the young fair form of their cherished "Charlie," that went forth at noon in health and strength and beauty, was brought back ere evening a lifeless corpse to the desolated home. It was Dr. Brewster's first great sorrow, and it was his most over-

<sup>1</sup> See Lockhart's *Life of Scott*.

whelming. A year afterwards Sir Walter Scott wrote to Miss Edgeworth :—" Dr. and Mrs. Brewster are rather getting over their heavy loss, but it is still too visible on their brows, and that broad river lying daily before them is a sad remembrancer."<sup>1</sup>

The slightest mention of death by drowning was an agony. For many years neither parent ever mentioned the "once familiar word," and even when long years of time allowed of the occasional utterance of the beloved name, it was never without the peculiar thrill and almost sob of an ever-living grief.

Some years after, his son David was very nearly lost in Duddingston Loch, but the narrow escape was carefully kept from his father's knowledge. About thirty years afterwards the following incident occurred, which his daughter-in-law, Mrs. Macpherson, thus relates :—" One evening I was showing him an album which had been sent for his autograph. When we came to a picture of Duddingston Loch, I said, 'Oh, that is where David was so nearly drowned.' He had never heard of the incident, and I never saw him so overpowered as when I told him the story. I suggested that perhaps he had forgotten it. 'No, indeed,' was the answer, 'it would have made an awful impression upon me after his brother's death.'"

Of the real effects of this bereavement upon Brewster's mind and spirit we know little. Mr. Veitch hastened to see and sympathize with his old friend soon after the heavy trial. He was deeply and thankfully impressed with the apparent deepening of religious thought in the bereaved father, who had been reading Baxter's *Dying Thoughts* with extreme interest, and gave a copy of it

<sup>1</sup> Lockhart's *Life of Scott*.



to his friend. After this Mr. Veitch frequently visited Allerly on less melancholy occasions. I remember well the fine old man of science, with his racy Scotch and massive figure, while the two grey-headed men enjoyed together much of the pleasant intercourse of the old, old days. Correspondence was still carried on at intervals, but Mr. Veitch was a much older man for his years than the ten years of seniority to his friend warranted; failing health began to set in, and symptoms of bodily decline interfered with the old activity. The mind, however, and the fingers retained their pristine vigour. The last work that he finished, just in time to lie down immediately afterwards on his dying-bed, was two thermometers, finished with all his wonted accuracy and delicacy of execution. Notwithstanding the bodily prostration which rapidly ensued, his mind retained its full powers until two days before the end, and then it wandered into the belief, full of a solemn and joyful truth, that he was on a long journey, and that he was going home. The workings of his mind before that slight final wandering seem to have been most characteristic; from the first seizure he felt that he had no more to do with the world, and devoted himself to fresh preparation for the great change, which, however, had never been forgotten in the midst of science, mechanics, and busy life. "He spoke repeatedly," says an unexceptionable authority, "of the mystery of man's being, and the close alliance, yet clear distinction, between mind and body, testing the continued soundness of intellect by his ability to go through a process of calculation. His concern, however, was chiefly about the things of his peace; he expressed his deep sense of sinfulness and his trust in redemption through the blood of Christ.

He frequently requested the Scriptures to be read, especially the Psalms and passages from the Gospel of John, and also to have prayer offered in which he might join; he seemed himself to be privately much engaged in commending himself to the mercy of the Saviour. Of his approaching end he spoke with calmness and solemnity, and, if not with assurance, yet with good hope through grace. At length, on the morning of the 10th day of June 1838, his strength completely failed, and he quietly departed to his rest in the sixty-eighth year of his age. Though unable to speak, he evidently retained his consciousness till nearly the last breath. Of keen temperament, his language might be at times strong, but he ever honestly expressed his convictions without regard to fear or favour. He was warmly attached to the Church of Scotland, of which he was an elder; he venerated the memory of her martyrs, and amidst tokens of change was zealous for the maintenance of her purity of doctrine and worship. The writings of the old divines were his favourite study, especially on the Lord's day. He regularly maintained family worship, and through life it had been his desire and endeavour that, whatever others did, he and his house should serve the Lord."