

“Travel like a summer sun,
Itself all glory, and its path all joy;”*

but this bright change was of brief duration. The curious would doubtless desire to know something more of why this “love never found its earthly close,” while others will rest satisfied with such conclusions as may be drawn from the following expressions, met with in letters addressed to his dear friend, Robert Findlay: “I feel myself in a great measure an alien in my own family, and all this is the consequence of that my most unfortunate attachment.” And once more, in allusion to this subject, he says: “I know enough now to know that my mother would die if this happened.”

The following fragment will terminate this story:—

“I have made up my mind not to visit Torrance at present, in which case I must not come to Glasgow. This resolution, I hope, is right. It has been made after many an hour of (painful) reflection. This I know, that were I to go, I could not bear to look on my mother’s face, a feeling which must not be mine. Enclosed is a letter to Margaret. If you could take it yourself, and see how it is received, it would please me much; yet there may be people there, in which case that would be useless.

“Thine till death in joy or sorrow.

“BOWNESS, *December 22.*”

We know not how they parted, but this we may imagine, that “they caught up the whole of love, and uttered it,” and bade adieu forever.

CHAPTER V.

LIFE AT ELLERAY.

1807–1811.

IN 1807, John Wilson concluded his University career, the brilliancy of which, for many years, gave his name a prestige worthy of long remembrance within the academic walls of Oxford. He loved the beautiful fields of England, and, with all the world before him where to choose a place of rest, he turned his steps from his

* *Miscellaneous Poems.*

Alma Mater, to that lovely land where cluster the fair lakes of Cumberland and Westmoreland. Having selected a home on the banks of Windermere, we find him there in the prime of youth, with that keen nature of his alternating between light and shade, and every possible humor attendant on the impulses of an ardent heart, yet uneasy with a burden which there was none other to share. Possibly the restless life he led began in a hope of self-forgetfulness; yet there was at the same time, in the conscious possession of so much bodily strength, and that unceasing activity of spirit, an irrepressible desire to exercise every faculty. To many his life in Westmoreland may appear to have been one of idleness, but not to those who, with a kindly discernment of human nature, see the advantages which varied experience gives to a strong mind.

We now follow him to Elleray. For a description of this beautiful spot I gladly avail myself of the striking description of Mr. De Quincey:*

“With the usual latitude of language in such cases, I say *on* Windermere; but in fact this charming estate lies far above the lake; and one of the most interesting of its domestic features is the foreground of the rich landscape which connects, by the most gentle scale of declivities, this almost aerial altitude [as, for *habitable* ground, it really is] with the sylvan margin of the deep water which rolls a mile and a half below. When I say a mile and a half, you will understand me to compute the descent according to the undulations of the ground; because else the perpendicular elevation above the level of the lake cannot be above one-half of that extent. Seated on such an eminence, but yet surrounded by foregrounds of such quiet beauty, and settling downwards towards the lake by such tranquil steps as to take away every feeling of precipitous or dangerous elevation, Elleray possesses a double character of beauty rarely found in connection; and yet each, by singular good fortune, in this case, absolute and unrivalled in its kind. Within a bowshot of each other may be found stations of the deepest seclusion, fenced in by verdurous walls of insuperable forest heights, and presenting a limited scene of beauty—deep, solemn, noiseless, severely sequestered—and other stations of a magnifi-

* Letter addressed to the *Edinburgh Literary Gazette*, 1829, a forgotten newspaper, of which there were only two vols. published.

cence so gorgeous as few estates in this island can boast, and of those few, perhaps, none in such close connection with a dwelling-house. Stepping out from the very windows of the drawing-room, you find yourself on a terrace which gives you the feeling of a 'specular height,' such as you might expect on Ararat, or might appropriately conceive on 'Athos seen from Samothrace.' The whole course of a noble lake, about eleven miles long, lies subject to your view, with many of its islands, and its two opposite shores so different in character—the one stern, precipitous, and gloomy; the other (and luckily the hither one), by the mere bounty of nature and of accident—by the happy disposition of the ground originally, and by the fortunate equilibrium between the sylvan tracks, meandering irregularly through the whole district, and the proportion left to verdant fields and meadows, wearing the character of the richest park scenery; except indeed that this character is here and there a little modified by a quiet hedge-row, or the stealing smoke which betrays the embowered cottage of a laborer. But the sublime, peculiar, and not-to-be-forgotten feature of the scene is the great system of mountains which unite about five miles off, at the head of the lake, to lock in and enclose this noble landscape. The several ranges of mountains which stand at various distances within six or seven miles of the little town of Ambleside, all separately various in their forms, and all eminently picturesque, when seen from Elleray, appear to blend and group as parts of one connected whole; and, when their usual drapery of clouds happens to take a fortunate arrangement, and the sunlights are properly broken and thrown from the most suitable quarter of the heavens, I cannot recollect any spectacle in England or Wales, of the many hundreds I have seen, bearing a local, if not a national reputation for magnificence of prospect, which so much dilates the heart with a sense of power and aerial sublimity as this terrace-view from Elleray."

At the time when my father purchased Elleray, there was no suitable dwelling-house on the estate. A rustic cottage indeed there was, which, with the addition of a drawing-room thrown out at one end, was made capable for many a year to come of meeting the hospitable system of life adopted by its owner. It was built of common stone, but it might have been marble for aught that the eye could tell. Pretty French windows opened to the ground, and were the only uncovered portion of it; all else was a profusion of

jessamine, clematis, and honeysuckle. A trellised entrance, clustering with wild roses, led to the chief part of the dwelling. Beyond the dining-room windows was the entrance to the kitchen and other parts of the house, only differing from the first door in being made of the dark blue slate of the country, and unadorned by roses. The bedroom windows to the front, peeped out from their natural festoons unshaded by other curtains, while the cottage was protected by a fine old sycamore-tree that, standing on a gentle eminence, sent its spreading branches and umbrageous foliage far over the roof, just leaving room enough for the quaint, picturesque chimneys to send their curling smoke into the air.* The little cottage lay beneath the shelter of a well-wooded hill, that gave a look of delightful retirement and comfort to its situation; a poet's home it might well be called. The lofty peaks of the Langdale Pikes ever greeted the eye, in the dark shadows of evening or glittering beneath a noonday sun; and Windermere as seen from Elleray was seen best—every point and bay, island and cove, lay there unveiled. Perhaps in the clearing away of mist in early morning the scene was most refreshing, as bit by bit a dewy green cluster of trees appears, and then a gleam of water, with some captive cloud deep set in its light, a mountain base, or far-off pasture, the well-defined colors of rich middle-distance creating impatience for a perfect picture; when all at once the obscuring vapors passed away, and the whole landscape was revealed.

Although this picturesque cottage remained the dwelling-house till 1825, my father began to build in the year 1808 a mansion of more elegant proportions, after plans of his own. We may gather some idea of what these plans were by referring to his ideal description of Buchanan Lodge. The whole tenement was to be upon the ground flat. "I abhor stairs," said he, "and there can be no peace in any mansion where heavy footsteps may be heard over head. Suppose three sides of a square. You approach the front by a fine serpentine avenue, and enter slap-bang through a wide glass-door

* Of this sycamore he often spoke. "Never in this well-wooded world," soliloquized the poet, "not even in the days of the Druids, could there have been such another tree! It would be easier to suppose two Shaksperes. Yet I have heard people say it is far from being a large tree. A small one it cannot be, with a house in its shadow—an unawakened house that looks as if it were dreaming. True, 'tis but a cottage, a Westmoreland cottage. But then it has several roofs shelving away there in the lustre of loveliest lichens; each roof with its own assortment of doves and pigeons preening their pinions in the morning pleasure. Oh, sweetest and shadiest of all sycamores, we love thee beyond all other trees!"

into a green-house, a conservatory of every thing rich and rare in the world of flowers. Folding-doors are drawn noiselessly into the walls as if by magic, and lo! drawing-room and dining-room stretching east and west in dim and distant perspective. Another side of the square contains kitchen, servants' rooms, etc.; and the third side my study and bedrooms, all still, silent, composed, standing obscure, unseen, unapproachable, holy! The fourth side of the square is not; shrubs and trees and a productive garden shut me in from behind, while a ring fence enclosing about five acres, just sufficient for my nag and cow, form a magical circle into which nothing vile or profane can intrude."

The new house at Elleray, of which this was an ideal description, was, as Mr. De Quincey remarked, a silent commentary on its master's state of mind, and an exemplification of his character. The plan, when completed, which in appearance had been extravagant, turned out in reality to have been calculated with the coolest judgment and nicest foresight of domestic needs.

In this beautiful retirement the young poet was now at liberty to enjoy all the varied delights of poetic meditation, of congenial society, and of those endless out-door recreations which constituted no small part of his life. Soon did his presence become identified with every nook and corner of that lake region. In the mountain pass, by the lonely stream, on the waters of the lake, by night and by day, in the houses of the rich and the poor, he came to be recognized as a familiar and welcome presence. Often would the early morning find him watching the rising mist, until the whole landscape lay clear before his enraptured eyes, and the fresh beauty of the hour invited him to a long day's ramble into the heart of the valley. Though much given, as of old, to solitary wanderings, he did not neglect to cultivate the society of the remarkable men whom he found in that district, when he took up his residence at Elleray,—Wordsworth at Rydal, Southey and Coleridge at Keswick, Charles Lloyd at Brathay, Bishop Watson at Calgarth, the Rev. Mr. Fleming at Rayrig, and other friends of lesser note, but not less pleasant memory, in and around Ambleside.

The first meeting with Wordsworth did not take place till the year 1807, the poet and his family having lived the greater part of that year at Colerton, returning to Grasmere in the spring of 1808. At his house there, towards the latter end of that year, Wilson met

De Quincey. Strange to say, they had, when at Oxford, remained unknown to each other; but here, attracted by the same influence, a mutual friendship was not long in being formed, which endured— independent of years of separation and many caprices of fortune— till death divided them. The graces of nature with which De Quincey was endowed fascinated my father, as they did every mind that came within the sphere of his extraordinary power in the days of his mental vigor, ere that sad destiny—for so it may be called— overtook him, which the brightness and strength of his intellect had no power to avert. The first impressions of the “Opium Eater” must be given in his own graphic words:—“I remember the whole scene as circumstantially as if it belonged to but yesterday. In the vale of Grasmere—that peerless little vale, which you and Gray the poet and so many others have joined in admiring as the very Eden of English beauty, peace, and pastoral solitude—you may possibly recall, even from that flying glimpse you had of it, a modern house called Allanbank, standing under a low screen of woody rocks which descend from the hill of Silver How, on the western side of the lake. This house had been then recently built by a worthy merchant of Liverpool; but for some reason of no importance to you and me, not being immediately wanted for the family of the owner, had been let for a term of three years to Mr. Wordsworth. At the time I speak of, both Mr. Coleridge and myself were on a visit to Mr. Wordsworth; and one room on the ground floor, designed for a breakfasting-room, which commands a sublime view of the three mountains—Fairfield, Arthur’s Chair, and Seat Sandal (the first of them within about 400 feet of the highest mountains in Great Britain)—was then occupied by Mr. Coleridge as a study. On this particular day, the sun having only just set, it naturally happened that Mr. Coleridge—whose nightly vigils were long—had not yet come down to breakfast; meantime, and until the epoch of the Coleridgean breakfast should arrive, his study was lawfully disposable to profaner uses. Here, therefore, it was, that, opening the door hastily in quest of a book, I found seated, and in earnest conversation, two gentlemen: one of them my host, Mr. Wordsworth, at that time about thirty-seven or thirty-eight years old; the other was a younger man by good sixteen or seventeen years, in a sailor’s dress, manifestly in robust health, *fervidus juvena*, and wearing upon his countenance

* Disinterred from the columns of the *Edinburgh Literary Gazette*.

a powerful expression of ardor and animated intelligence, mixed with much good-nature. ‘*Mr. Wilson of Elleray*’—delivered as the formula of introduction, in the deep tones of Mr. Wordsworth—at once banished the momentary surprise I felt on finding an unknown stranger where I had expected nobody, and substituted a surprise of another kind: I now well understood who it was that I saw; and there was no wonder in his being at Allanbank, Elleray standing within nine miles; but (as usually happens in such cases), I felt a shock of surprise on seeing a person so little corresponding to the one I had half unconsciously prefigured. . . . Figure to yourself, then, a tall man, about six feet high, within half an inch or so, built with tolerable appearance of strength; but at the date of my description (that is, in the very spring-tide and blossom of youth), wearing, for the predominant character of his person, lightness and agility, or (in our Westmoreland phrase) *lishness*; he seemed framed with an express view to gymnastic exercises of every sort. . . . Viewed, therefore, by an eye learned in gymnastic proportions, Mr. Wilson presented a somewhat striking figure; and by some people he was pronounced with emphasis a fine-looking young man; but others, who less understood, or less valued these advantages, spoke of him as nothing extraordinary. Still greater division of voices I have heard on his pretensions to be thought handsome. In my opinion, and most certainly in his own, these pretensions were but slender. His complexion was too florid; hair of a hue quite unsuited to that complexion; eyes not good, having no apparent depth, but seeming mere surfaces; and, in fine, no one feature that could be called fine, except the lower region of his face, mouth, chin, and the parts adjacent, which were then (and perhaps are now) truly elegant and Ciceronian. Ask in one of your public libraries for that little quarto edition of the Rhetorical Works of Cicero, edited by Shutz (the same who edited *Æschylus*), and you will there see (as a frontispiece to the first volume), a reduced whole length of Cicero from the antique; which in the mouth and chin, and indeed generally, if I do not greatly forget, will give you a lively representation of the contour and expression of Professor Wilson’s face. Taken as a whole, though not handsome (as I have already said), when viewed in a quiescent state, the head and countenance are massy, dignified, and expressive of tranquil sagacity. . . . Note, however, that of all this array of personal features, as I have here described them, I then

saw nothing at all, my attention being altogether occupied with Mr. Wilson's conversation and demeanor, which were in the highest degree agreeable; the points which chiefly struck me being the humility and gravity with which he spoke of himself, his large expansion of heart, and a certain air of noble frankness which overspread every thing he said; he seemed to have an intense enjoyment of life; indeed, being young, rich, healthy, and full of intellectual activity, it could not be very wonderful that he should feel happy and pleased with himself and others; but it was somewhat unusual to find that so rare an assemblage of endowments had communicated no tinge of arrogance to his manner, or at all disturbed the general temperance of his mind."

Many were the pleasant days spent by these friends together; many the joyous excursions among the hills and valleys of the lake country. One memorable gathering is still remembered in the lone places of the mountains, and spoken of to the stranger wandering there. One lovely summer day, in the year 1809, the solitudes of Eskdale were invaded by what seemed a little army of anglers. It consisted of thirty-two persons, ten of whom were servants brought to look after the tents and baggage necessary for a week's sojourn in the mountains. This camp with its furniture was carried by twelve ponies. Among the gentlemen of the party were Wilson, Wordsworth, De Quincey, Alexander Blair, two Messrs. Astley, Humphries, and some others whose names have escaped notice. After passing through Eskdale, and that solemn tract of country which opens upon Wastwater, they there pitched their tent, and roaming far and near from that point, each took his own way till evening hours assembled them together.

The beauty of the scenes through which they rambled, the fine weather, and, above all, that geniality of taste and disposition which had brought them together, made the occasion one of unforgotten satisfaction. It formed the theme of one of Wilson's most beautiful minor poems, entitled the "Anglers' Tent," which was written soon after at Elleray, where Wordsworth was then living. One morning a great discussion took place between the poets about a verse Wilson had some difficulty in arranging. At last, after much trying and questioning, it was made out between them:—

"The placid lake that rested far below,
Softly embosoming another sky,

Still as we gazed assumed a lovelier glow,
And seemed to send us looks of amity."

The troublesome line was—

"Softly embosoming another sky."

In a letter I received from Dr. Blair, he says:—"The Friend" was going on at that time—Coleridge living at Wordsworth's—Wordsworth making, and reading to us as he made them, the 'Sonnets to the Tyrolese,' first given in 'The Friend;' and from Elleray that winter went 'Mathetes.*' I remember that De Quincey was with us at the time. He may have given some suggestions besides, but we certainly owed to him our signature."

Of my father's poetic compositions during these years I shall speak presently. I find in one of his commonplace-books some unpublished verses, which may, however, be inserted here, if only in illustration of what at this time was a frequent practice of his, and continued to be indulged in for many years of his after life, viz., the habit of walking in solitude during the hours of night. In spite of his generally even flow of good spirits, and his lively enjoyment of social pleasures, it seemed as if in the depths of his heart he craved some influence more soothing and elevating than even the most congenial companionship could afford. In these silent hours, whether pacing among the hills, or resting in contemplation of the glories of the earth and sky, the solemnity of feeling which was thus induced found natural expression in words of religious adoration. At the head of the lake stood the mansion of Brathay, the property of Allan Harden, Esq. There, on his way for a midnight ramble, did he often gain admittance, and, for some time, hold converse with his friend, before taking his solitary way to the mountains, within the deep shadows of which he would wander for hours, engaged in what he appropriately calls

"MIDNIGHT ADORATION.

"Beneath the full-orb'd moon, that bathed in light
The mellow'd verdure of Helvellyn's steep,
My spirit teeming with creations bright,
I walked like one who wanders in his sleep!

* A letter on Education, the joint composition of Wilson and Blair, addressed to the editor of "The Friend."

- “The glittering stillness of the starry sky
Shone in my heart as in the waveless sea;
And rising up in kindred majesty,
I felt my soul from earthly fetters free!
- “Joy filled my being like a gentle flood;
I felt as living without pulse or breath;
Eternity seem'd o'er my heart to brood,
And, as a faded dream, I thought of death.
- “Through the hush'd air awoke mysterious awe;
God cheer'd my loneliness with holy mirth;
And in this blended mood I clearly saw
The moving spirit that pervades the earth.
- “While adoration blessed my inward sense
I felt how beautiful this world could be,
When clothed with gleams of high intelligence
Born of the mountain's still sublimity.
- “I sunk in silent worship on my knees,
While night's unnumber'd planets roll'd afar;
Blest moment for a contrite heart to seize—
Forgiving love shone forth in every star!
- “The mighty moon my pensive soul subdued
With sorrow, tranquil as her cloudless ray,
Mellowing the transport of her loftiest mood
With conscious glimmerings of immortal day.
- “I felt with pain that life's perturbèd wave
Had dimm'd the blaze to sinless spirits given;
But saw with joy, reposing on the grave,
The seraph Hope that points the way to heaven.
- “The waveless clouds that hung amid the light,
By Mercy's hand with braided glory wove,
Seem'd, in their boundless mansions, to my sigh:
Like guardian spirits o'er the land they love.
- “My heart lay pillowed on their wings of snow,
Drinking the calm that slept on every fold,
Till memory of the life she led below
Seem'd like a tragic tale to pity told.
- “When visions from the distant world arose—
How fair the gleams from memory's mystic urn;
How did my soul, 'mid Nature's blest repose,
To the soft bosom of affection turn!

"Then sinless grew my hopes, my wishes pure,
 Breeding a seraph loftiness of soul;
 Though free from pride, I felt of heaven secure
 A step, a moment from the eternal goal!

"Those fearful doubts that strike the living blood,
 Those dreams that sink the heart, we know not why,
 Were changed to joy by this mysterious mood,
 Sprung from the presence of Eternity.

"I saw, returning to its fount sublime,
 The flood of being that from Nature flowed;
 And then, displaying at the death of time
 The essence and the lineaments of God!

"Thus pass'd the midnight hour, till from the wave
 The orient sun flamed slowly up the sky;
 Such a blest spirit found illumined gaze,
 And seem'd to realize my vision high."

Another extract from the same book contains a touching record of the associations connected with a summer day's ramble with Wordsworth upon the slopes of Helvellyn. It appears to be an outline in prose of what was meant to form the subject of a poem, to be entitled **RED TARN**, and is as follows:—

"Address to the reader about the reports he may have heard about the beauty and sublimity of the lakes.

"He probably has resolved to go up to Helvellyn to admire the sublimity of that mountain: this is right. Now beneath that mountain there is a little tarn which you will see. I will tell you something about that tarn. Two persons were sitting silent and alone beside that tarn, looking steadfastly on the water, and lost in thought. These were two brothers who dearly loved each other, and had done so from earliest youth to manhood.* The one was a man of genius and a poet, who lived among these mountains enjoying his own thoughts. The other younger by a few years, and had gone to sea, but had lately returned to see his brother, and resolved to live with him. His brother accompanied him across the hills on his way to join his ship for the last time, and here they sat, about to part. They had talked over their future plans of happiness when they were again to meet, and of their simple sports. As their last

* Wordsworth and a brother who was afterwards drowned.

act, they agreed to lay the foundation-stone of a little fishing-hut, and this they did with tears.

"They parted there, in that dim and solemn place, and recommended each other to God's eternal care.

"The one brother was drowned at sea. After the first agony was over, the recollection of that parting flashed upon the mind of the survivor; he at last found courage to go there, and in a state of blindness and desolation sat down upon the very stone. At last he opened his eyes, the tarn smiling with light; the raven croaking as before when they parted; all the crags seem the same; the sheep are in the same figures browsing before them; he almost expects to find his brother at his side; he then thinks of shipwreck and agony of all kinds.

"Next time he sits calmly and thinks upon it all; he even now loves the spot, and can talk of it.

"I one sweet summer day went along with him and heard the melancholy tale.

"Then, whoever goes to that sublime solitude, muse with holy feelings, and with the wildness of nature join human sympathies."

But there were other pursuits besides poetry that formed a part of my father's life at Elleray too prominent and characteristic to be passed unnoticed. Of these his various commonplace-books contain not a few memoranda, strangely intermixed with matters of a graver or more sentimental kind. Among the other amusements with which he diversified life in the country, boating was one of the principal. As may be supposed, this was a favorite diversion in the lake country, and Wilson's taste for it was cultivated with a zeal that, in fact, became a passion. The result was a degree of skill and hardihood beyond that of most amateurs. He had a small fleet on Windermere, the expense of maintaining which was undoubtedly very considerable.* Of the numerous boatmen required to man these vessels there was one whose name became at Elleray familiar as a household word—the faithful Billy Balmer. Billy was the neatest and best rower on Windermere, and knew that beauteous water from head to foot, in all her humors, from sunrise to night-

* Among the miscellaneous jottings, from which I have been extracting above, I find such items as the following:—"Endeavor, and masts and sails, £160; ballast, £15-£175;" "Eliza, £30;" "Endeavor, £150;" "Palafox, £20;" "Jane, £180;" "additional Endeavor, £25;" "Clyde, Billy, Snail, £10." The names of his sailing vessels were—The Endeavor, The Eliza, The Palafox, The Roscoe, The Clyde, The Jane, The Billy, besides a fine ten-oared Oxford barge, called Nil Timeo.

fall, and even later. There was not a more skilful boatman, or a steadier steersman on the lake, and he was about the best judge of a pretty craft and good sailing to be found. He could sing a sailor's song, had an undeniable love of fun, understood humor, and felt the difference of wit. No one knew how to tell a story better, and with a due unction of excusable exaggeration combined with reality; and in every tale of Billy his master was invariably the hero. He was a little man, weather-beaten in complexion, and much marked from smallpox. His hair was of a light sandy color; his eyes blue and kindly in expression, as was also his smile; his gait, rather doglike, not quite straight ahead, but, like that honest animal, he was sure-footed, and quick in getting over the ground. That pleasant broad Westmoreland dialect of his, too, gave peculiar character to his voice; and there is a grateful remembrance of the hearty grasp of his little, hard, horny hand when it greeted welcome, or bade adieu, while the whole picture of the man, in his blue dress, sailor fashion, stands distinctly before me, either as he steered the "Endeavor" or mowed the grass on the lawn at Elleray.*

One or two anecdotes still linger about the country, showing how recklessly Wilson could expose himself at all hours to the chances of the weather. Cold, snow, wind, and rain were no obstacles; nothing could repress the impulse that drove him forth to seek nature in all her moods. During a stormy December night, when the snow was falling fast, with little or no light in the heavens, he took a fancy to tempt the waters of Windermere, and setting off with the never-failing Billy, they took boat from Miller-ground and steered for Bowness. In a short time all knowledge of the point to which they were bound was lost. The darkness became more dismal every moment; the cold was intolerable. Several hours were spent in this dreary position, poor Billy in despair, expecting every instant would find them at the bottom of the lake, when suddenly the skiff went aground. The oars were not long in being made use of to discover the nature of their disaster, what and where they had struck, when, to their great satisfaction, a landing-

* "Seldom rose we," said my father in after years, "from our delightful dormitory till, about twelve o'clock, we heard the south breeze come pushing up from the sea. Then Billy used to tap at our door, with his tarry paw, and whisper, 'Master, Peggs is ready. I have brailed up the fore-sail; her jigger sits as straight as the Knave of Clubs, and we have ballasted with sand-bags. We've beat the Liverpoolian to-day, Master.' Then I rose." See also Wilson's *Works*.

place was found. They had been beating about Miller-ground all the time, scarcely a stone's-throw from their starting-place. Billy's account of the story was, "that Master was well-nigh frozen to death, and had icicles a finger-length hanging from his hair and beard." This adventure ended in the toll-keeper on the Ambleside road being knocked up from his slumbers, and their spending the rest of the night with him, seated by a blazing fire, telling stories and drinking ale, a temptation to which Billy had no difficulty in yielding.

These lake escapades were not confined to boating. Riding one day with his friend, Mr. Richard Watson, by the margin of Rydal Lake, my father's horse became restive. Finding that no ordinary process would soothe the animal, he turned his head to the lake, with the intention of walking gently among the oozy reeds that grew on its banks, when, quite forgetful or heedless that they suddenly sloped to the water, the horse and his rider were in a moment plunged beyond their depth. Having got into deep waters, there was nothing for it but to swim through them; and presently he became aware that his friend's horse, true to the lead, was following close behind. Fortunately the lake was not very broad, and their passage across was soon made, though not without some little feeling of apprehension; for his friend Watson could not swim a stroke.

This equestrian performance suggests a story of another kind of diversion in which, according to Mr. De Quincey's account, my father occasionally indulged at Elleray. It is best given in the Opium-Eater's own words:—"Represent to yourself the earliest dawn of a fine summer's morning, time about half-past two o'clock. A young man, anxious for an introduction to Mr. Wilson, and as yet pretty nearly a stranger to the country, has taken up his abode in Grasmere, and has strolled out at this early hour to that rocky and moorish common (called the White Moss) which overhangs the Vale of Rydal, dividing it from Grasmere. Looking southwards in the direction of Rydal, suddenly he becomes aware of a huge beast advancing at a long trot, with the heavy and thundering tread of a hippopotamus, along the public road. The creature is soon arrived within half a mile of his station; and by the gray light of morning is at length made out to be a bull apparently flying from some unseen enemy in his rear. As yet, however, all is mystery;

but suddenly three horsemen double a turn in the road, and come flying into sight with the speed of a hurricane, manifestly in pursuit of the fugitive bull: the bull labors to navigate his huge bulk to the moor, which he reaches, and then pauses, panting, and blowing out clouds of smoke from his nostrils, to look back from his station amongst rocks and slippery crags upon his hunters. If he had conceived that the rockiness of the ground had secured his repose, the foolish bull is soon undeceived; the horsemen, scarcely relaxing their speed, charge up the hill, and speedily gaining the rear of the bull, drive him at a gallop over the worst part of that impracticable ground down into the level ground below. At this point of time the stranger perceives, by the increasing light of the morning, that the hunters are armed with immense spears fourteen feet long. With these the bull is soon dislodged, and scouring down to the plain below, he and the hunters at his tail take to the common at the head of the lake, and all, in the madness of the chase, are soon half ingulfed in the swamps of the morass. After plunging together for ten or fifteen minutes, all suddenly regain the *terra firma*, and the bull again makes for the rocks. Up to this moment there had been the silence of ghosts; and the stranger had doubted whether the spectacle were not a pageant of aerial spectres, ghostly huntsmen, ghostly lances, and a ghostly bull. But just at this crisis, a voice (it was the voice of Mr. Wilson) shouted aloud, 'Turn the villain; turn that villain; or he will take to Cumberland.' The young stranger did the service required of him; the villain was turned and fled southwards; the hunters, lance in rest, rushed after him; all bowed their thanks as they fled past; the fleet cavalcade again took the high road; they doubled the cape which shut them out of sight; and in a moment all had disappeared, and left the quiet valley to its original silence, whilst the young stranger and two grave Westmoreland 'statesmen' (who by this time had come into sight upon some accident or other) stood wondering in silence, and saying to themselves, perhaps,

'The earth hath bubbles as the water hath;
And these are of them!'

"But they were no bubbles: the bull was a substantial bull; and took no harm at all from being turned out occasionally at midnight for a chase of fifteen or eighteen miles. The bull, no doubt, used to

wonder at this nightly visitation; and the owner of the bull must sometimes have pondered a little on the draggled state in which the swamps would now and then leave his beast; but no other harm came of it."*

His love of animals has already been noticed.† Next to his boats, if not claiming an equal share of attention, came his game-cocks; these afforded a favorite pastime while he was at Oxford. As other men keep their studs, and are careful of the pedigree and training of their racers, so did Wilson watch with studious solicitude over the development and reputation of his game-birds. The setting down of hens to hatch was registered as duly and gravely as an astronomer notes the transit of the planets; the number of eggs, the day of the month, and sometimes even the hour of the day being carefully specified.‡

In one of the MS. books containing the principal portion of *The Isle of Palms*, I find many of these quaint entries in most eccentric juxtaposition to notes of a very different kind.§ Along with

* Letter in *Edinburgh Literary Gazette*.

† Of this there are numberless indications in his works. Birds were his special favorites, but he was a general lover of animals, beasts, birds, and insects. Even that, to most people, unpleasant creature the spider, was interesting to him; and the *Noctes* contain sundry references to his observations on their habits. "I love spiders," he says; "look at the lineal descendant of Arachne; how beautifully she descends from the chair of Christopher North to the lower regions of our earth." See *Works*, vol. i., 120; vol. ii., 148, 178, 230, 252, 262. Regarding his qualifications as a naturalist, De Quincey writes:—"Perhaps you already know from your countryman Audubon, that the Professor is himself a naturalist, and of original merit; in fact, worth a score of such meagre bookish naturalists as are formed in museums and by second-hand acts of memory; having (like Audubon) built much of his knowledge upon personal observation. Hence he has two great advantages; one, that his knowledge is accurate in a very unusual degree; and another, that this knowledge, having grown up under the inspiration of a real interest and an unaffected love for its objects—commencing, indeed, at an age when no affectation in matters of that nature could exist—has settled upon those facts and circumstances which have a true philosophical value: habits, predominant affections, the direction of instincts, and the compensatory processes where these happen to be thwarted—on all such topics he is learned and full; whilst, on the science of measurements and proportions, applied to dorsal fins and tail-feathers, and on the exact arrangement of colors, &c.—that petty upholstery of nature, on which books are so tedious and elaborate—not uncommonly he is negligent or forgetful."

‡ The following are some specimens from his memoranda:

"Small Paisley hen set herself with no fewer than nine eggs on Monday, the 6th of July. Black Edinburgh hen was set on Tuesday, the 23d of June, with twelve eggs—middle of the day. Large Paisley hen was set on Wednesday, the 24th of June, with twelve eggs—middle of the day; one egg laid the day after she was set. Red pullet in Josie's barn was set with nine eggs on Thursday, the 2d of July. Sister to the above, was set with five eggs same day, but they had been sat upon a day or two before. Small black muffled hen set herself with about eight eggs on Monday night, or Tuesday morning, 7th July."

§ Side by side with those beautiful lines beginning—

"Oh, Fairy Child! what can I wish for thee?
Like a perennial flow'ret may'st thou be,
That spends its life in beauty and in bliss;

calculations of the number of lines to be allotted to various proposed poems, such as "St. Hubert," "The Manse," "The Ocean Queen," there are elaborate memoranda of the "broods proposed for next spring." "The spangled cock," and "Lord Derby," the black brass-winged cock, bred from Caradice with the Keswick Gray," the "Red Liverpool hen," the "Paisley hen," large and small, and many other distinguished fowls, take a prominent position in these curious lists. The name of "Lord Derby," in particular, from its frequent occurrence, implies that that high-bred animal, doubtless of the Knowsley stock, was one of the prime favorites of the establishment. The phraseology and figures in these memoranda are sometimes altogether unintelligible to the uninitiated.

Of the many fields of fame on which "Lord Derby," "Caradice," and their fellows must have distinguished themselves, there is but one brief record. It is given by one of a party present (James Newby), who recollects "a main of cocks being fought in the drawing-room at Elleray, before the flooring was laid down, and its being covered with sods for this occasion. The rival competitors were Mr. Wilson and Mr. Richard Watson. All the neighboring farmers were invited, and, after the sport, entertained at a *genteel* supper served from Mrs. Ullock's. Wilson was the victor, and won a handsome silver drinking-cup, bearing an inscription, with date, etc."

The solemnity of these proceedings illustrates the enthusiasm with which this sport was cultivated in those days by such amateurs as Wilson, who really believed that they were keeping up one of the characteristic and time-honored institutions of the country.*

Soft on thee fall the breath of time,
And still retain in heavenly clime
The bloom that charms in this"—

is ranged the following "List of Cocks for a main with W. and T.," of which a specimen may suffice:—

1. A heavy cock from Dobinson.....	£5 8 0
2. " " from Keene.....	5 8 0
3. " " "	5 8 0
4. Piled cock, Oldfield	5 2 0

"Lord Derby" comes in as No. 13, £4 10s., and the total makes up 22 birds. Of these "13 are to be chosen for the main, and perhaps two byes. J. W."

* Before passing from the subject, I may mention an amusing illustration of it, showing that, at a date considerably more recent than that of the above event, the rearing of game-cocks was zealously practised in Scotland by some worthy gentlemen of the old school. One Sunday, in St. John's Chapel, Edinburgh, an old gentleman, a friend of my father's, was sitting gravely in his

Wrestling has always been the principal athletic exercise in the north of England, particularly in Cumberland, where it is still practised perhaps more generally than in any other part of the kingdom. "It is impossible," says the Professor, "to conceive the intense and passionate interest taken by the whole northern population in this most rural and muscular amusement. For weeks before the great Carlisle annual contest nothing else is talked of on road, field, flood, foot, or horseback; we fear it is thought of even in church, which we regret and condemn; and in every little comfortable 'public' within a circle of thirty miles' diameter, the home-brewed quivers in the glasses on the oaken tables to knuckles smiting the board, in corroboration of the claims to the championship of a Grahame, a Cass, a Laugklen, Solid Yaik, a Wilson, or a Wightman. A political friend of ours, a stanch fellow, in passing through the Lakes last autumn, heard of nothing but the contest for the county, which he had understood would lie between Lord Lowther (the sitting member) and Mr. Brougham. But, to his sore perplexity, he heard the names of new candidates, to him hitherto unknown; and on meeting us at that best of inns, 'White Lion,' Bowness, he told us with a downcast and serious countenance that Lord Lowther would be ousted, for that the struggle, as far as he could learn, would ultimately be between Thomas Ford of Egremont, and William Richardson of Caldbeck, men of no landed property, and probably radicals!"*

During my father's residence at Elleray, and long after he became Professor, he steadily patronized this manly amusement, and though, as the historian of the subject, Litt,† remarks, "he never sported his figure in the ring," he was not without skill and practice in the art, being, as an old wrestler declared, "a varra bad un to lick," which one can readily believe. He gave prizes and belts for the Ambleside competitions, such as had never been offered before, and the historian above mentioned describes in glowing terms how much the success of the annual sports in the neighborhood was owing to his liberal encouragement. In some of his let-

seat, when a lady in the same pew moved up, wishing to speak to him. He kept edging cautiously away from her, till at last, as she came nearer, he hastily muttered out: "Sit yont, Miss —, sit yont! Dinna ye ken ma pouch is fu' o' gemm eggs!"

* *Blackwood*, December, 1828.

† *Wrestliana; or, an Historical Account of Ancient and Modern Wrestling*. By William Litt. 12mo. Whitehaven.

ters in after years, we shall meet with allusions to this subject, which he considered not unworthy of a special article in *Blackwood*. Speaking of the beauty of the spectacle presented by the ring at Carlisle, he thus amusingly parodied Wordsworth's lines on a hedge-sparrow's nest, which, he says, by a slight alteration, "eggs to men, and so forth, become a sensible enough exclamation in such a case :"—

" See, two strong men are struggling there,*
 Few visions have I seen more fair,
 Or many prospects of delight
 More pleasing than that simple sight."

These imperfect reminiscences of my father's out-door life at Elleraŷ may be appropriately closed by an extract from a clever little work recently published.† The author, Mr. Waugh, in his wanderings in Westmoreland, encountered at Wastdale Head, in the person of the innkeeper there, one of the most characteristic specimens that could well be found of a genuine old Laker, William Ritson. "I was most interested," says the writer, "in Ritson's anecdotes of famous men who visited Wastdale. He had wandered many a day with Professor Wilson, Wordsworth, De Quincey, and others. Ritson had been a famous wrestler in his youth, and had won many a country belt in Cumberland. He once wrestled with Wilson, and threw him twice out of three falls. But he owned the Professor was 'a varra bad un to lick.' Wilson beat him at jumping. He could jump twelve yards in three jumps, with a great stone in each hand. Ritson could only manage eleven and three quarters. 'T' first time 'at Professor Wilson cam to Wast'd'le Head,' said Ritson, 'he hed a tent set up in a field, an' he gat it weel stock't wi' bread an' beef, an' cheese, an' rum, an' ale, an' sic like. Then he gedder't up my granfadder, an' Thomas Tyson, an' Isaac Fletcher, an' Joseph Stable, an' aad Robert Grave, an' some mair, an' there was gay deed amang em. Then, nowt would sarra, bud he mun hev a boat, an' they mun all hev a sail. Well, when they gat into t' boat, he tell't un to be particklar careful, for he was liable to git giddy in t' head, an' if yan ov his giddy fits sud chance to cum on, he mud happen tumble into t' watter. Well that pleased 'em all

* In the original—

" See, five blue eggs are shining there."

† *Rambles in the Lake Country*. By Edwin Waugh. 12mo. London, Whittaker.

gaily weel, an' they said they'd tak varra girt care on him. Then he leaned back an' called oot that they mun pull quicker. So they did, and what does Wilson do then but topples ower eb'm ov his back i' t' watter with a splash. Then there was a girt cry—" 'Eh, Mr. Wilson's i' t' watter !" an' yan click't, an' anudder click't, but nean o' them could get hod on him, an' there was sic a scrowe as nivver. At last, yan o' them gat him round t' neck as he popped up at teal o' t' boat, an' Wilson taad him to kep a good hod, for he mud happen slip him ageàn. But what, it was nowt but yan ov his bit o' pranks, he was suurkin' an' laughin' all t' time. Wilson was a fine, gay, girt-hearted fellow, as strang as a lion, an' as lish as a trout, an' he hed sic antics as nivver man hed. What-ivver ye sed tull him ye'd get yowr change back for it gaily soon. . . . Aa remember, there was a "Murry Neet" at Wastd'le Head that varra time, an' Wilson an' t' aad parson was there amang t' rest. When they'd gotten a bit on, Wilson med a sang aboot t' parson. He med it reight off o' t' stick end. He began wi' t' parson first, then he gat to t' Pope, an' then he turned it to t' devil, an' sic like, till he hed 'em fallin' off their cheers wi' fun. T' parson was quite astonished, an' rayder vex't an' all, but at last he burst oot laughin' wi' t' rest. He was like. Naabody could stand it. . . . T' seàm neet there was yan o' their wives cum to fetch her husband heàm, an' she was rayder ower strang i' t' tung wi' him afore t' heàl comp'ny. Well, he took it all i' good pairt, but as he went away he shouted oot t' aad minister, 'Od dang ye, parson, it wor ye at teed us two tegidder! . . . It was a' life an' murth amang us, as lang as Professor Wilson was at Wastd'le Head.' "

In the same year that Wilson settled at Elleray, an agreeable addition was made to the society of the neighborhood by the arrival of a family of the name of Penny, who took up their abode at Gale House, Ambleside. The Misses Penny were the daughters of a Liverpool merchant, and removed to Windermere for the sake of its proximity to the residence of their eldest sister, who had been married for some years to Mr. James Penny Machell, of Hollow Oak and Penny Bridge. Wilson soon became acquainted with these ladies, and an intimacy gradually sprung up with the fair inhabitants of Gale House, which by and by led to frequent mention of his name in the correspondence of Miss Jane Penny. Writing in girlish confidence to a friend who has sent her a piece

of dress, she informs her that "the jacket has been much admired; I wore it at a ball at Kendal, and there was only one like it in the room—that was worn by Lady Lonsdale; it will always remind me of one of the pleasantest evenings I ever spent. I danced with Mr. Wilson; *he* is the only one of my partners worth mentioning."

It is not very difficult to perceive why it was one of the "pleasantest evenings" ever spent.

A ball or party seldom took place at Ambleside or elsewhere in the neighborhood, at which Mr. Wilson and Miss Jane Penny were not present. De Quincey, speaking of the gayeties at Low Brathay, the residence of his friend Charles Lloyd, says that at one of the social gatherings there he "saw Wilson in circumstances of animation, and buoyant with youthful spirits. . . . He, by the way, was the best male dancer (not professional) I have ever seen. . . . Here also danced the future wife of Professor Wilson, Miss Jane P[enny], at that time the leading belle of the Lake country." They were, undoubtedly, a couple of very uncommon personal attractions. A spectator at a ball given in Liverpool in those days, relates that when Mr. Wilson entered the room with Miss Penny on his arm, the dancers stopped and cheered them, in mere admiration of their appearance.

Another extract from a letter of Miss Penny gives some further information about Mr. Wilson. There had been a regatta at Windermere:—

"It proved universally pleasant. I think I never enjoyed any thing more than I did that week. The day of the regatta we spent the morning at Mr. Bolton's, Storr's Hall, and sailed upon the lake the greater part of the day. We had the honor of being steered by a *real* midshipman, a strikingly fine young man of the name of Fairer. Mr. Wilson gave us a ball at the Inn in the evening. I had the honor of opening it with him, and of course I spent a charmingly delightful evening. We are likely to have a most delightful acquisition to our society this winter in Mrs. and Miss Wilson, mother and sister to our favorite. They are very nice people indeed. I think Mrs. Wilson one of the finest and most ladylike women I have seen for a long time. They mean to be at Elleray all winter, which will make it very pleasant to us. I hope we shall see a great deal of them. Mr. Wilson is flirting with a pretty little widow who lives in Kendal. She is generally admired by the male

part of creation, but not by our sex. I think her appearance is very pretty, particularly her figure, but I think her deficient in feminine propriety and modesty. Her husband has been dead some years; she was married at fourteen, and is still quite a girl in appearance. I don't know whether Mr. Wilson's attentions to her will end in a marriage, but I hope not, for his sake. I think he is deserving a very superior woman."

There is a pretty touch of female character about this relation; the evident *penchant* for Mr. Wilson, the reserved manner of speaking of him, the slight grudge, if so it may be called, against the "little widow," the constant recurrence to his name, the interest taken in those belonging to him, all declare very plainly how much *tendresse* there lay in the wish, "he deserves a very superior woman." And most truly did he obtain one.

The flirting with the "little widow" was but the amusement of idle hours, and Wilson had now begun seriously to feel the want, as he called it himself, of "an anchor," without which, he said, he should "keep beating about the great sea of life to very little purpose." A closer intimacy with Miss Jane Penny revealed qualities more precious than those which shine most in the light of ball-rooms, and he found that "the belle of the lake district" was also such a woman as was worthy of his whole heart's love, and wanted no quality to fit her for giving happiness and dignity to his life. It took some time, however, before his mind settled down to this conclusion. The image of Margaret still rose before him tenderly in his solitary hours: he had as yet found no woman's heart in which he could confide so utterly as he had done in hers. Among other projects to divert his thoughts, he meditated an expedition into Spain along with Blair and De Quincey; and in the course of the year 1809, he and the former occupied themselves for some time assiduously in the study of Spanish, in order to qualify themselves for enjoying the journey. The intelligence of Bonaparte's fresh descent upon that country caused the breaking off alike of their plan and their studies.

The following letter, addressed about this time to his friend Mr. Harden, who was about to proceed to Edinburgh to edit the *Caledonian Mercury*,* gives some idea of the state of his mind and prospects:—

* Mr. Allan, the proprietor, was Mr. Harden's father-in-law.

“MY DEAR HARDEN:—I received your interesting letter this morning about an hour ago, and cannot delay answering it for a single day, deeply concerned as I feel myself in every thing that regards your happiness. That you are to leave the clouds and mountains of this our delightful land, gives me, as far as my selfish emotions go, much real pain. I need not say how many happy days I have passed at Brathay, and how affectionately I regard the family living within its walls. Our friendship, which I fear not, in spite of absence or distance, will continue with unabated sincerity, was voluntary on both sides; and, during the few years we have known each other, neither of us has found cause to repent of the affection bestowed. That the determination you have formed is in all respects right, I firmly believe, and the consciousness of having in part sacrificed enjoyments so dear to you, for the sake of those you tenderly love, will no doubt forever secure your happiness.

“After all, you will appear to me in the light of a distant neighbor, and when you have leisure to come to your beloved and beautiful lakes, if the smoke of Elleray is on the air, you know where you and yours will experience an affectionate welcome.

“That you will find the paper a good concern there is no doubt; and, at the same time, I cannot see that there will be any thing very irksome in it. Living at this distance, and being no very vehement admirer of daily politics, I fear it will not be often in my power to give you effectual assistance. Any thing I can do will at all times be cheerfully communicated. And, in the first place, a copy of the paper will not be amiss. Please mark what are your lucubrations. Of Oxford politics I neither know much nor care a great deal. Oxford has long been sunk beneath the love or admiration of thoughtful men, in spite of all her magnificence and all her learning. The contest has ere now been decided, though I have not heard the result. If I find that any thing interesting can be said on the election of the Chancellor,* I shall transmit it to you in a frank, and you can either burn it or print it, as you think proper.

“On this subject, therefore, let me conclude with every warm wish for your success; and may your residence in Edinburgh afford every enjoyment you can desire.

“As for myself, all my plans of delight and instruction, at least on one great subject, are for the present abandoned. It would be

* Lord Grenville.

tedious to enter into a detail of all unlucky causes which have occasioned this. Such as they are, they could not in the present juncture be avoided; and I have at least the satisfaction to know, that my plans failed not from any want of zeal or determination on my part.

“I have not, however, by any means relinquished my scheme of going to Spain, and whether we shall meet this summer or not seems very doubtful. I agree with you that travelling will make me, for some years at least, happier than any thing else. The knowledge it bestows can be acquired by no other means, and, unless a man be married, it seems very absurd to remain, during the prime of his youth, in one little corner of the world, beautiful and glorious as that corner may be. I do not, I hope, want either ballast or cargo or sail, but I do want an anchor most confoundedly, and, without it, shall keep beating about the great sea of life to very little purpose. Since I left Edinburgh, I have had a very dear old friend staying with me, and we have studied to the wonder of the three counties. We have made some progress in Spanish, though not much, the perplexity attending our change of scheme having occasioned some little interruption. I have written many poems, some of considerable length, which I may some night or other repeat to you over a social glass, or a twinkling fire.

“A little elegy I wrote on poor little Margaret Harden* last spring, and which I promised to send to your mother, has been lost. I shall, however, endeavor to recollect it the first time I can vividly recall the melancholy event that gave rise to it. Let it be considered as the affectionate sympathy of a friend. I am, you know, the worst correspondent breathing; yet to hear from you often and minutely, as to your pleasures and occupations, will always afford me genuine satisfaction.

“While I write this, your paintings of Stavely and the Brathay smile sweetly upon me, though all without doors is wild and stormy, it being the most complete hurricane I ever saw at Elleray. The windows of the parlor have, during the night, been almost entirely destroyed, and the floor is literally swimming. I cannot conclude without again observing what pleasure I shall have in hearing from you, especially while you are just entering on such a new scheme of life.”

* A daughter of his friend.

About the same time he took an excursion into Scotland. Before starting, he addressed De Quincey as follows:—

“MY DEAR DE QUINCEY:—I am obliged to leave this to-morrow for Glasgow. I therefore trouble you with this note in case you should think of coming over during my absence. I expect to return to Elleray in a few days, yet there is an uncertainty attending every motion of mine, and possibly of yours also. If you are ready for a start, I will go with you to-morrow on foot through Kentmere and Hawesdale to Penrith, and on Monday you can easily return by Ulleswater to Grasmere. The fine weather may induce you.* If you feel a wish to look at Glasgow and Edinburgh, would you take a trip with me on the top of the coach? I will pledge myself to return with you within eight days. If so, or if you agree to the first plan only, my pony or horse is with my servant who carries this, and you can come here upon it. I hope you will do so. There is no occasion for wardrobe. I take nothing with me, and we can get a change of linen. The expense will be small to us.

“Yours ever affectionately,

“JOHN WILSON.

“ELLERAY, *Saturday*, 1809.”

Of this pedestrian excursion we have a glimpse in the biographical notice of his friend John Finlay, with whom they spent a few hours at Moffat.†

I now come to speak of his poetry, and I am fortunately enabled, from the preservation of his letters to his friend Mr. John Smith, the Glasgow publisher, to give some account of his first publication, for which the materials should otherwise have been wanting. The first trace I find in MS. of poems afterwards published is in the year 1807. A small note-book contains a considerable number of sonnets, composed in the autumn of that year, a selection from which appeared among the miscellaneous pieces appended to *The Isle of Palms*. His commonplace-books contain the whole of the latter

* The proposal to walk over so much ground proclaims De Quincey to have been no weak pedestrian. Although he was a man considerably under height and slender of form, he was capable of undergoing great fatigue, and took constant exercise. The very fact of his being a walking companion of Wilson's speaks well for his strength, which was not unfrequently taxed when such a tryst was kept. Perhaps, in later years, of the two men he preserved his activity more entire.

† *Blackwood*, vol. II., p. 188.

poem, parts of it apparently written down for the first time, and other parts being final copies of the work as sent for revision to his friend Blair. The alterations in the first draught are more of entire passages than of phrases. It is evident that he never composed without first forming a clear conception of what he intended to embody in each particular poem. The prose outlines of some pieces in these books are sometimes so full as to require only their translation into verse to entitle them to the name of poems. Of this the sketch entitled "Red Tarn," already given, may be taken as a specimen. The contents of these books show, in fact, that poetry was not a mere amusement with him, but a serious study, and that he had in those days very extensive plans of composition, on which he entered with an earnest desire to use well the gifts with which he had been endowed.*

His first communication on the subject to Mr. Smith is from Edinburgh, and is as follows:—

"EDINBURGH, 53 QUEEN STREET,
Wednesday Evening, December 13, 1810.

"DEAR SIR:—I have, during the last three years, written a number of poems on various subjects, from which I intend to form a selection for the press. The principal poem, entitled *The Isle of Palms*, which will give its name to the volume, is descriptive of sea and island scenery, and contains a love-story. It is nearly 2,000 lines. The second is entitled "The Anglers' Tent." It contains nearly forty stanzas of seventeen lines each, in the same measure as Collins' Ode on the Superstitions of the Highlands. The third is a blank-verse poem upon Oxford. The rest it is needless to particularize. I can furnish as many poems as will make a volume of 350 or 400 pages. As you have an opportunity of knowing the probable merit of any works of mine from Finlay, Blair, and others, I offer my poems in the first place to you. In a publication of such

* Dr. Blair, in a letter, has expressed to me the following opinion:—"I have been always at a loss to know why your father did not follow further his youthful impulsion towards verse. I thought him endowed beyond all the youthful poets of his day, and in some powers beyond any of his contemporaries. I believe he had more of absolute deep and glowing enthusiasm than any of them. He might require a severe intellectual discipline and learned study to balance that natural fire and energy for the composition of a great work. But he had both will and ability for severe thought, and he had the capacity for searching and comprehensive inquiry, and such a wonderful power of storing materials and of managing them to his use, that I never could, nor can I now, understand why, loving poetry as he did, he left it. He had a flood of eloquence which not one of the other poets who have lived in his day had or has." This is the opinion of the man most familiar with my father's mind.

magnitude, I feel my own character deeply concerned, and will therefore insert nothing that does not please myself. The volume might in size resemble the octavo edition of the *Lady of the Lake*, and sell for the same price.

“If you are willing to purchase from me the copyright of 400 pages, such as I have described, I am ready to listen to your terms. I may, without presumption, say that at Oxford my name would sell many copies, nor am I unknown either in Cambridge or London. But you will judge for yourself. I am not a man who would thoughtlessly risk his reputation by a trivial or careless publication.

“I would prefer disposing entirely of the copyright to any other plan, as I wish to be free from all trouble or anxiety about it. In the case of a first publication I know that booksellers ought to be cautious. But I am now past the days of boyhood, and I feel that I shall come before the world, if not in the fulness of my strength, at least with few youthful weaknesses.

“As I am uncertain of being soon in Glasgow, I shall expect an answer to this as quickly as convenient to yourself. Should we agree about this volume, I have other works in contemplation that I know will attract public notice. I am, sir, your obedient servant,

“JOHN WILSON.”

A few days subsequently he replied to Mr. Smith's proposals; part of which was that the work should be printed by Ballantyne:—

“MY DEAR SIR:—Your proposals seem perfectly reasonable and honorable, and I have no objection to agree to them. I have to mention, however, that it will be impossible for me to have my poems ready for publication as soon as you wish. I was indeed ignorant of the season of publication, and also imagined that the printing would take much more time than I understand it will do.

“For a few months to come my time will not, I fear, be at my own disposal; for besides several important engagements, I have been very unwell lately, and may perhaps be obliged to take a short voyage somewhere. Considering all these circumstances, it would seem that the publication of my poems must be deferred for a considerable time. Perhaps, on the whole, this may be of advantage.

“I cannot believe that a volume of that size could be printed in less than four months from the commencement of printing it. You

will consider, therefore, of this hasty note, and arrange matters with Ballantyne, etc., etc. I am, yours truly,

“JOHN WILSON.”

In April, 1811, he writes from Elleray. He is on the eve of being married, and wants all the ready money he can get. He proposes, therefore, to dispense with some of those standard works “which no gentleman’s library should be without,”—Annual Registers, Parliamentary Histories, Statistical Accounts, best editions of various Classics in Russia, etc., etc.

“ELLERAY, *Tuesday morning (April, 1811).*”

“MY DEAR SIR:—Since my arrival here I have been tolerably busy, and have written several small poems that please me, and it is to be hoped will produce the same effect on several thousand of the judicious part of the reading world.

“My second longest poem I have also given the last polish to, and it now looks very imposingly. In a week or two, when the spring has a little advanced, I shall emigrate to the ‘Isle of Palms,’ and build myself a cottage there, both elegant and commodious, and subject to no taxation. I have this day written to Blair about Finlay, and expect to hear all particulars from him. If any thing further has occurred about his affairs in Glasgow, I should like to hear from you.

“The principal object of my present letter is to speak to you about some books I wish to part with, being either tired of them or having duplicates.

“The following is a list of some of the best. If they suit you, you will take them, or any part of them, *at your own price*, most of them being books that you could sell easily. . . .

“Out of these, I think, you might find some that might suit you well. I go to Liverpool to-morrow, to James Penny, Esq., Seel street, where I should like to hear from you on receipt of this. You might make something upon them, and I be enabled to take a little longer marriage jaunt, in these hard times money being scarce.

“On my return, I shall send you some portion of my manuscript, of which, if you make any use beyond yourself, I don’t fear it will be judicious. Remember that few are entitled to pass judgment on poetry. I am, dear sir, yours very truly, JOHN WILSON.

“P. S.—Should you ever publish any edition of any poet, and wish for preface, etc., you know where to apply.”