

CHAPTER VI.

MARRIAGE.—“THE ISLE OF PALMS.”

1811-1815.

ON the 11th of May, 1811, the following letter was written by Wilson to his friend Mr. Findlay:—

“AMBLESIDE, *May 11, 1811.*

“DEAREST ROBERT:—I was this morning married to Jane Penny, and doubt not of receiving your blessing, which, from your brotherly heart, will delight me, and doubtless not be unheard by the Almighty. She is in gentleness, innocence, sense, and feeling, surpassed by no woman, and has remained pure, as from her Maker’s hands. Surely if I know myself I am not deficient in kindness and gentleness of nature, and will to my dying hour love, honor, and worship her. It is a mild and peaceful day, and my spirit feels calm and blest. You know what it is to possess a beloved woman’s affections, and such possession now makes me return grateful thanks to my God, and remember former afflictions with resignation and gratitude. On this tranquil day of nature and delight, to think of my earliest, best, oh! best-beloved friend, I may say, adds a solemn feeling to my dreams, and your most affectionate heart will, I am sure, be made glad to hear such words from my lips. In my heart you will ever live among images of overpowering tenderness, and to hear from you when convenient will ever gladden him who never felt, thought, or uttered word to you but those of affection and gratitude. God bless you, my dearest Robert, your wife, and all that you love! “I am your kindest brother,

“JOHN WILSON.”

I don’t know if any man ever conveyed the intimation of his marriage in terms more unaffectedly beautiful than these. In their quiet depth of natural affection that inner spirit is truly revealed, which, amid all varieties of energy and enjoyment, ever found its most congenial life among the tender sanctities of home, and connected its highest delights with a genuine sense of religion. Thence-

forth his life had a deeper purpose, and his home was a place of pure sunshine, whatever clouds darkened the sky without. Of her who made it so, it may be said, she was

“A blooming lady—a conspicuous flower;
Admired for beauty, for her sweetness praised;
Whom he had sensibility to love,
Ambition to attempt, and skill to win;”

one in whose gentleness and goodness he found long years of happiness.

His energies were not called forth by the mere humor of the hour to prove what they were, but by the solemn realization of the high purpose for which they were given.

He did not make the usual wedding tour, but took his bride directly to his cottage home. The fascination of his new life did not, however, engross him to the exclusion of work, much temptation as there was to a blissful idleness in his lot. The various expensive tastes he indulged, as well as his generous habits, could not have been so constantly exercised, had he not been in the enjoyment of a large fortune. No doubt he lived both at Oxford and Ellerray with the free munificence of one who understood the charms of hospitality, and the satisfaction of bestowing pleasure upon others, but at neither period was he wasteful or careless of money. At the time of his marriage, therefore, he was in easy circumstances, and his wife's fortune, added to his own, made him a rich man. There was no care for the future; worldly matters were in a smiling condition; every thing around the young couple was *couleur de rose*. Days passed away quickly; nothing disturbed the life of love and peace spent in that beautiful cottage home. Time brought with it only increase of happiness. Children were born; and to live at Ellerray forever was the design of the poet, who loved to look upon

“The glorious sun
That made Winander one wide wave of gold,
When first in transport from the mountain-top
He hailed the heavenly vision.”

These halcyon days were ere long interrupted by misfortune. But though that stern schooling was necessary to the full development of Wilson's character and powers, he had already, as we have

seen, determined to give the world some fruit of his meditative hours during these apparently idle years at Elleray.

Three months after his marriage he again addressed Mr. Smith on the subject of his poems:—

“ELLERAY, *August 11, 1811.*

“It is now so long since you have heard from me, that I dare say you begin to entertain rational doubts of my existence. I am, however, alive and well; better both in mind and body than when I last saw you, and unless the damnation of my poems affect my health and spirits, likely for a considerable time to be off the sick-list.

“So many things have occurred, if not to occupy, at least to interrupt my time since my marriage, which took place on the 11th of May, that I thought it best not to write you till I found myself in some measure settled, and in a hopeful way of doing some good. I have written a considerable number of poems of a smaller size since my marriage, so that were the first poems of the collection finished, I think I have MS. enough for a volume of 400 pages, which I am desirous it should be. I know not how it is, but I have felt a strange disinclination to work at the longest poem; but on receiving your answer, all minor occupations shall be laid aside, and the work be proceeded with in good earnest. Indeed, such is my waywardness of fancy, that I feel constantly impelled to write each day on a different subject, which I should be prevented from doing were a day fixed for the commencement of the printing. Suppose we say that on the 1st of October every thing shall be ready for going to press; and if so, you may depend upon it that the press shall never be allowed to remain idle one day for want of matter. It would be most satisfactory for me to retain the MS. of my poems in my own hands, except such quantity as need be in the printer’s hands. Thus, I will send the longest poem by cantos, there being four, and so on. I cannot in a letter sufficiently explain my reasons for wishing this; but unless you agree to it, it will be very painful to me, and I am confident it will be for the interest of the work. With respect to preface, I am doubtful if I shall have one; if so, it will consist of a very few pages, two or three at the most. I suppose the preface will be numbered separately from the poems, and therefore may be printed after them, should I like it, and in like manner the title-page, etc.

“With respect to the size of the volume, I am still partial to that of *Marmion*; or, if you choose, a little smaller, only as many or more lines in each page. A thinly printed book of that size looks very badly. There will be verses of many different measures, though none exceeding twelve syllables. I think that a rather smaller type would look better, since the poems are miscellaneous. But all these particulars I leave to yourself. I shall expect to hear from you as soon as you can decidedly fix matters with me, and I hope that you will find me a tractable and reasonable author. The sooner every thing is fixed the better, as otherwise I shall never set to with invincible fury. If the printing can commence by the beginning of October, the first book of the *Isle of Palms* will be sent to you by the tenth of September. You should also advertise the work in the literary notices of the Reviews, and immediately; but all this I will leave to yourself.”

“ELLERAY, KENDAL, *September 17, 1811.*

“DEAR SMITH:—I send you at last the first canto of the *Isle of Palms*, ready for the press.

“I had expected Mr. Blair here to revise the poem, but he did not come, so I had to send it to him, and he returned it only yesterday, without any alteration (though with many compliments), and I had to fill up the blanks myself. The manuscript is in Mr. Blair’s handwriting, and is, I trust, legible. As to punctuation, I suppose the printer uses his discretion.

“I am going on correcting and writing, and certainly never will keep the press waiting for me. The proofs will, of course, be sent to me; but I conceive that double proofs are altogether unnecessary.

“Let it go to press immediately, and write me when you think it right to inform me of your proceedings.

“This first canto will, I believe, occupy 32 pages at all events, as there are nearly 600 lines.

“You will give strict injunctions to Ballantyne to let no one see the proof-sheets. For the *Isle of Palms* is a wild tale, and must not be judged of piecemeal. But there are many reasons for this.

“J. WILSON.”

“ELLERAY, *Sept. 27 and 28, 1811.*

“I am glad that you are pleased with the manuscript on the whole. The introductory stanzas are perhaps not, at first reading,

and in manuscript, very perspicuous; but they were written upon principle, and will, I doubt not, give pleasure when the canto is thought of together, and distinctly embraced in one whole. Blair and Wordsworth were both delighted with them, and, as I shall have a very short preface, I am not afraid of their seeming obscure. At the same time, I shall be obliged to you for any remarks of the kind, as, though I have written nothing without due thought, all hints should be, and will be attended to, and gratefully received.

“I am in daily expectation of receiving the second canto from Blair, written over in the same manner, and think you may be expecting it on Thursday. Indeed, fear not of having regular and sufficient supplies.

“The whole *Isle of Palms* is of a wild character, though, I trust, sufficiently interspersed and vivified with human feelings to interest generally and deeply. Its wildness and romantic character, being qualities that suffer greatly by piecemeal quotation, render me desirous of its being seen entire or not at all; but still this is not a matter of much importance, as I fear nothing when the poem comes before the public. I know the public taste, and neither will violate nor cringe to it, and, with its own merits, and the respectable way in which it will be given to the world, I am fearless of its success. I find that the *Isle of Palms* will be nearer 3,000 than 2,000 lines. Of the other poems, I know there are many that will be more popular, and therefore I expect that, as the printing proceeds, you will see reason to confide in those hopes of my success, which you have already been good enough to entertain.

“On the whole, I think Ballantyne ought to print the work, if you can make good terms with him. Blue stockings are dirty things, but not very deleterious.

“Next letter, I expect to hear from you positively when you begin printing, that I may never be from home, and keep the devils from getting cool. In ten days I shall have sent you the first three cantos, containing above 2,000 lines, and then I am not afraid of my heels being pressed upon, as correction will be my only task.

“All the booksellers in Oxford know me well. Indeed, I once talked to Parker about publishing some poems there, but, though he was most willing to undertake it, I afterwards changed my mind, for the University is but a dullish spot, though undoubtedly many copies will be sold there.

“The whole copy shall be sent in Blair’s writing, or in a hand still better; and if there are any directions necessary about correcting the press, of which you think it probable I may be ignorant, you will instruct me. I am still in hopes of Blair coming here soon.

“Poor Grahame, I hear, is gone; let me hear some particulars; he was a truly estimable being.”

The reference here is to the Rev. James Grahame, author of “The Sabbath,” and other poems. My father greatly esteemed him and his poetry, and at this time composed an Elegy to his memory,* which was published anonymously while the *Isle of Palms* was going through the press.

Another letter is sent by and by along with the third canto of the *Isle of Palms*, which had been kept some time by Mr. Blair. He says:—“I expect you will like it fully more than any of the preceding; and Blair thinks it equal to any poetry of modern times. The fourth canto I will send to him this day; so Ballantyne will have it in time, although I fear he has been stopped for want of this one, which will never again be owing to me.

“I have had a long letter from John Ballantyne, most anxiously requesting a share in the work, or any concern in it that I would grant, so that his name should appear in the imprint. He wishes to have 500 copies to [sell], but on what terms I do not very clearly understand.

“I think that if he could be allowed some kind of share or connection with it, it might be well, as he has, I suppose, good connections. I wish to hear from you immediately upon this subject, and I cannot answer his letter till I know your wishes and views on it. It augurs well, his anxiety. Should you wish to see his letter? He says that Longman is now preparing his winter catalogue; and that insertion of the title there would *double* the *first demand*. This seems fudge, although same time it should be sent for insertion in that catalogue, of which you probably know more than I do. I have advertised the work in the Kendal paper, and shall in one or two of the Liverpool.

“Let me hear from you if the paper has been sent to Ballantyne, and if you think the work may be out by Christmas. Stir Ballan-

* “Lines sacred to the Memory of the Rev. James Grahame, author of ‘The Sabbath,’ &c. ‘A man he was to all the country dear.’ 4to. Glasgow: Smith & Son.”

tyne up with a long pole, and henceforth depend upon my being punctual.”

From these and other letters, it will be seen that the poet was by no means a careless man of business ; and that if he was pretty confident of success, he did not neglect any means to secure it.

In his next letter he complains bitterly of the delay in the printing, not having heard from Ballantyne for a month, and then proceeds to give some practical suggestions regarding the lines on Grahame :—

“The copies of the ‘Lines, etc.,’ came safely to hand. They are exceedingly well printed and accurate in all respects. One copy I gave to Lloyd ; the other to my wife’s sister, both of whom were greatly pleased. I find that it will be in my power to distribute a few copies without suspicion ; and there is a bookseller in Kendal who would, I think, dispose of half a dozen very easily. Send me, therefore, per coach, a dozen copies ; six to my own account, and six for the trade, which I will send to the bookseller in Kendal ; and if he sells them, he will account to me for them. Let me hear how they take ; now that Edinburgh is filling, perhaps some copies will be going off. I would wish a copy to be sent to Mr. Alison, and one to Mr. Morehead, the Episcopal clergyman in Edinburgh, with ‘from the author’ on the title-page. Grahame was known about Carlisle, and I should think some of the trade there would take copies ; Durham also. Are there any inquiries made after the author ? Is it attributed to any one ? You should tell a paragraph to be extracted from it in each of the Edinburgh papers ; perhaps the same two as in the Glasgow papers. Some copies would sell in Oxford if seen there ; I should also think in Liverpool. A passage ought also to appear in the *London Courier* and in the *Scots Magazine* ; and also very early in other magazines. It is perhaps not worth all this trouble.”

The elegy attracted considerable attention, and a second edition was soon called for. His next letter is written in December :—

“I have had many letters from Edinburgh highly commending the ‘Lines,’ which I understand are considerable favorites there, though I find I am strongly suspected in that quarter. With respect to giving my name, you may now use your own discretion.”

At Christmas he was in Edinburgh at his mother’s with his young wife and her sisters. He writes to Mr. Smith :—

“The volume gets on tolerably. Page 250 has gone to press this day. All the manuscript is in Ballantyne’s hands. He thinks the volume would not be the worse of being 450 pages. In that case, would you wish the lines on Grahame to be included? Fergusson, Cranstoun, and Glassford think them better than any thing Grahame himself has written. The *Eclectic* is favorable enough, but stupid enough too! Who, in writing an elegy, would give a critical dissertation on a poem? The motto is a good one, and the punctuation excellent, except in two cases, which do not destroy the sense.

“Walter Scott talks to me in great terms of what he has seen of the ‘Isle.’* The elder Ballantyne is in raptures, and prophesies great popularity. Considerable expectations are formed here among the blues of both sexes, and I am whirled into the vortex of fashion here in consequence.

“I shall say nothing to any one of the dedication. Send Mr. M’Lachie a copy of the ‘Lines,’ ‘with the author’s affectionate regard,’ and one to Mr. Gill with my ‘respectful compliments.’

“You ought certainly to come here before the publication, and soon, to arrange every thing. I think we shall attract some attention.”

A little glimpse of the life at 53 Queen street, and the pleasant footing subsisting between the relatives gathered there, is afforded in a note of young Mrs. Wilson’s about this time to her sister. She thanks “Peg” for her note, which, she says, “was sacred to myself. It is not my custom, you may tell her, to show my letters to John.” She goes on to speak of Edinburgh society, dinners and evening parties, and whom she most likes. The Rev. Mr. Morehead is “a great favorite;” Mr. Jeffrey is a “horrid little man,” but “held in as high estimation here as the Bible.” Mrs. Wilson, senior, gives a ball, and 150 people are invited. “The girls are looking forward to it with great delight. Mrs. Wilson is very nice with them, and lets them ask anybody they like. There is not the least restraint put upon them. John’s poems will be sent from here next week. The large size is a guinea, and the small one twelve shillings.”

* Sir Walter, writing to Miss Joanna Baillie about this time, says:—“The author of the elegy upon poor Grahame is John Wilson, a young man of very considerable poetical powers. He is now engaged upon a poem called the ‘Isle of Palms,’ something in the style of Southey. He is an eccentric genius, and has fixed himself on the banks of Windermere, but occasionally resides in Edinburgh, where he now is. He seems an excellent, warm-hearted, and enthusiastic young man: something too much, perhaps, of the latter quality, places him among the list of originals.”

After sundry delays from want of paper or other causes, the volume duly appeared on the 20th of February, 1812, entitled, *The Isle of Palms, and other Poems*, by John Wilson. The potent name of Longman, whose catalogue could work such wonders, came first, followed by those of Ballantyne and Co., Edinburgh, and John Smith and Son, Glasgow. It was affectionately dedicated to the author's old teachers, Professors Jardine and Young. How the work was received may be gathered from his own letters. Poets are seldom entirely satisfied with the reception of their works. The author of the *Isle of Palms* had no great reason to complain, and he did not do so. At any rate, any dissatisfaction he felt, as will be seen, took the very practical form of urging all legitimate means for promoting the sale of the work.

TO MR. SMITH.

“53 QUEEN STREET, 1st April, 1812.
A day consecrated to Poets.

“My long-delayed visit to Glasgow has been entirely put a stop to by the miserable weather and other causes, till I find that it will not be in my power to make it out at all for nearly two months to come. Mrs. Wilson is in that state now that I could not comfortably leave her, and therefore it will not be in my power to see you till the time I mention.

“From your last letter it would appear that the *Isle of Palms* has hitherto been tolerably successful. In Edinburgh it is much read, praised, etc., but I question if the sale of it has been very great. A less enterprising set of men than Edinburgh booksellers I never had the misfortune to meet with.

“From what you told me, I doubt not that Longman will advertise it properly. I have certainly seen it occasionally in several papers, but not so often as many other volumes of far less moment (poetical); and almost all the booksellers I have spoken to here agree in stating, that the London advertising is very dull and insufficient. I mention this as I hear it, without supposing for an instant that any thing will be wanting on your part to forward the sale of the volume. It seems evident to me that some steps should be taken to make the volume known better than it is, and first of all by inserting occasional extracts in newspapers. I shall take care to do something in the Edinburgh and London papers. But what

is of more importance is the provincial sale in England. Considerable inquiry was made after them in Liverpool; and had there been copies there, many would have sold. And I think you should still establish some correspondence with the booksellers there. Two hundred of Crabbe's poems were sold in Liverpool. In Manchester, many, many books are sold; one shop of considerable magnitude is kept by a Mr. Ford. But it seems certain to my mind that you must bestir yourself through the towns of England, for the people are so stupid as not to know where to send for them, unless they come to the town where they live. This I had proof of from Liverpool in abundance.

"I have sent Southey a copy. He will, I know, review it in the *Quarterly*, if he likes it, which I think probable; otherwise he will not. Jeffrey likes it much; but will very likely abuse it for all that. I see it will be reviewed in the next *Edinburgh Quarterly Review*, but I suppose it is a despicable effort; its praise or blame will be alike indifferent.

"I find that people distrust their own judgment more than I had ever believed possible, and durst not admire any thing till they can quote authorities. I shall be happy to hear from you when at leisure. Glasgow criticism is not worth regarding; but I wish to hear from you an exact account of the number of copies sold by you in Glasgow, etc., to the public, and also of the number which you have altogether disposed of to the Edinburgh booksellers; London and Oxford, too, if you have heard any thing from those quarters. I have as yet had no correspondence with England about it; here I am not a little caressed by the great, but I would excuse their caresses, if the public would buy my volume. If the volume do ultimately succeed, and nothing has yet occurred to make me suppose that it will not, then I shall in a year or two come before it again in strength; but if not, I shall court the *Muse* no more.

"Have any of my poems gone to Paisley or to the Sister Isle? Give me the names of as many of the purchasers as you can. Have you ever sent Watson his copies? for they had not been seen at Calgarth so late as last week, and I suppose the Kendal bookseller sent his there. Have any been sent to Cambridge or Birmingham? two places, by the by, well joined together. The longer your letter is the better, and by making a parcel of it, you may send the letters of the Oxford booksellers, and any thing else you desire, but

taking care not to write till you have time to send me a full and long letter.”*

In the next number of the *Edinburgh Review* appeared a criticism of the *Isle of Palms*, what publishers would call a “favorable notice,” but, it would appear, not quite to the taste of the author. He would probably have preferred a good “cutting up” to the measured and somewhat patronizing approval of the reviewer. On the 3d of May, he writes to Mr. Smith:—

“I write this in great haste, it being near two o’clock on Sunday morning, and at eight I leave Edinburgh on a fishing excursion to Kelso for a week.

“Jeffrey’s review is beggarly. I don’t much like the extract; it is too much of an excerpt, too quackish; but please yourself. The other review is a masterpiece of nonsense and folly.”

Soon after he writes again from Ellera:—

“I am meditating many other poems, and probably shall begin to write soon. I know that I can in a year write another volume that will make the *Isle* hide its head. But unless the *Isle* travels the Continent a little more before that time, I shall not throw pearls before swine in a hurry.”

“ELLERA, *Monday morning,*

“*Nov. 23, 1812.*”

“MY DEAR SMITH:—The day after I received your last, I left Ellera for Ireland, on a visit to my sister, who lives near Killarney. I stayed there a month, and on my return have received the melancholy intelligence of my dear brother’s death.† Since then I have not had the power of thinking of my literary concerns. We often know not how dearly we love our near relations, till called on to

* The anxiety and disappointment of the author as to the early sale of the volume does not seem altogether unreasonable, when we find that in Edinburgh, where the chief demand was to be looked for, “the trade” received the work so cautiously, as the following “subscription list” indicates:—“*The Isle of Palms, and other Poems.* By John Wilson. Demy 8vo, retail at 12s.; under 10, 8s. 6d.; above, 8s. A few copies Royal 8vo at sub. John Ballantyne & Co., two hundred copies, demy; Manners & Miller, twenty-five; Archd. Constable & Co., twenty-five copies; Jno. Anderson, twenty-five copies; Wm. Blackwood, six copies.”

The last item in the list looks specially curious now; but at that time Mr. Blackwood’s business was in its infancy, and the future Christopher North was unknown to him.

About the same time Longman & Co. wrote to Mr. Smith, to report the London “subscription:”—“We received a copy of Wilson’s Poems from Ballantynes, and our clerk, who subscribes our books, took it round the trade yesterday and this morning; but as the author is not known amongst the London booksellers, we are sorry to say we have been enabled to subscribe only between forty-five and fifty, though, from what you say of the merit of the work, and what we hear of it from other quarters, we have no doubt of its selling very well here when it is known.”

† His brother Andrew.

mourn over their graves. I know that I tenderly loved my dear brother, but his death has affected me more than I could have imagined, and I yet feel as if I could never again be happy or cheerful enough to resume my former occupations.

"I leave every thing relating to my poems to your own judgment. If they do not sell, my poetry never will; for though I may write better, they are good enough for popularity—far better than many that circulate widely—and they deserve to sell.

"Southey would have gladly reviewed them in the *Quarterly*, but found it impossible, without speaking at length of himself and Wordsworth; so he from conscience declined it. Blair I have heard nothing of since I saw you, nor am I likely to hear. A book must ultimately owe its circulation to itself, and not to the grace of reviewers. Take such steps about a second edition as you choose. I would advise, if there be one, no more than 750 copies. I will add no new poems, nor preface, nor note.

"I would fain write you at greater length, but feel unable. Let the beginning of my letter be my excuse."

The extent of his plans of composition at this time is indicated by a "List of subjects for meditation," in one of his books, containing no less than 131 titles of proposed poems. In what spirit he entered on his work, the following note, written in his commonplace-book, may illustrate:—

"*June* 12, 1812.—Expected that a volume will be completed by *June* 12, 1814. May the Almighty enlighten my mind, so that I may benefit my fellow-creatures, and discharge the duties of my life.—J. W.:"*

The list of subjects begins on the opposite page, and the proposed character of the strain in each case is indicated by such notes as these:—

"Red Tarn—melancholy and mournful.

"The widow—beautiful and fanciful.

"A poet—characteristic and copious.

* It will not, I hope, diminish in any reader's eyes the respect due to this solemn and surely most heartfelt aspiration, that it is copied from a page, never meant for other eyes to see, beginning with so different a kind of memorandum as this—"Small black muffled hen set herself with about eight eggs on Monday night or Tuesday morning, 7th July." So far am I from being offended by this curious contrast, that I specially note the fact as a characteristic illustration of the wholeness and sincerity of the man, who, whether it were high poetic meditation or the breeding of game-cocks that occupied him, did it with all his heart and strength, each in its season.

“On the death of Gough among the hills—different view of it from W. and Scott.

“City after a plague—awful and wild, solemn.

“Town and country—vigorous and bold.

“On the Greek sculpture—in strong heroics.

“The murderer and the babe—a contrast; the moral to be—to watch well our own hearts against vice.”

A calculation is then given for a volume of 500 pages out of a selection of this large list, in which 170 are allotted to “St. Hubert,” and 50 each to “The Manse” and “The Ocean Queen,” and to the “City after a Plague” only 5. The proposed volume did not appear till January, 1816, not from any lack of materials, but in consequence of a change of plan, the “City after a Plague” having developed into a drama, instead of St. Hubert, while of the other subjects very few were ever wrought out, and some that were have been withheld from posterity. Of subjects completed and published, the titles of some will be recognized from the above extract. It is perhaps to be regretted that so rich a promise did not come to perfection; but it was no sudden or fortuitous impulse that made the poet choose to develop his poetical powers in another form than that of verse.

So much meantime of poetry. Of the four happy years that were passed in the cottage at Elleray, from 1811 to 1815, there is little to be recorded. It would appear that in the former year he had come to the resolution of joining the Scottish Bar, and, in that view, became a member of the Speculative Society, then in a highly flourishing condition. He must of course have spent some part of the succeeding winters in Edinburgh, but the only trace of the matter I find is the following allusion in a letter from his friend Blair, dated December, 1813:—

“MY DEAR JOHN:—I desire very much to hear further from you, and to know how your great soul accommodates itself to the Law Class, and other judicial sufferings and degradations, and more about your Greek and polite literature.”

I find also, that he opened, on the 4th of January, 1814, the debate in the Speculative Society—topic, “Has the War on the Continent been glorious to the Spanish nation?”—in the affirmative, when the majority of the Society voted with him. He only wrote, it appears, one Essay for that Society on “some political institutions

of military origin," of which there are some traces in one of his MS. books.

This happy life at Elleray was soon to come to a close. In the fourth year from the date of his marriage, there came a calamity so heavy and unlooked for that the highest fortitude was required to meet it, as it was met, bravely and cheerfully.

The circumstances which occurred to make it absolutely necessary to leave Elleray were of a most painful nature, inasmuch as they not only deprived Wilson of his entire fortune, but in that blow revealed the dishonesty of one closely allied to him by relationship, and in whom years of unshaken trust had been reposed. An uncle had acted the part of "unjust steward," and, by his treachery, overwhelmed his nephew in irretrievable loss. A sudden fall from affluence to poverty is not a trial easily borne, especially when it comes through the fault of others; but Wilson's nature was too strong and noble to bow beneath the blow. On the contrary, with a virtue rarely exemplified, he silently submitted to the calamity, and generously assisted in contributing to the support of his relative, who, in the ruin of others, had also ruined himself. Here was a practical illustration of moral philosophy, more eloquent, I think, than even the Professor's own lectures, when he came to teach what he had practised. In such a noble spirit, and with a conscience void of offence, he prepared to quit the beautiful home where he had hoped to pass his days, and set his face firmly to meet the new conditions of life which his lot imposed. The following letter to De Quincey describes his journey from Elleray with his wife and infant family:—

"PENRITH, CROWN INN,

"Friday Evening, half-past Six, 1815.

"MY DEAR FRIEND:—I found that it was impossible to see you again at your cottage before taking leave of Elleray. The tempestuous weather prevented me from going to Kendal on the day I had fixed, so I was forced to go on Thursday, a cold, rainy, and stormy day. Had I returned in the afternoon, I certainly would have cantered over to Grasmere for a parting grasp of cordiality and kindness; but I did not return to Elleray till near eleven o'clock. We rose this morning at six, and got under weigh at eight. We arrived here about five, and the children being fatigued, we propose to lie to during the night. The post-boy being about

to return to Ambleside, I gave Keir this note, which has no other object than to kindly wish you all peace, and such happiness as you deserve till we meet again. If I cannot pay you a visit at Christmas, we shall surely meet early in summer. I will write you from Edinburgh soon.

“Blair left Ellera on an opposite tack this morning; weather hazy with heavy squalls from the northwest. Mrs. Wilson begs to be kindly remembered to you, and so would doubtless the progeny were they of maturer age and awake. Yours with true affection,

“JOHN WILSON.

“My books had not been sent to Ellera from the ‘stamp-master’s’* when I took my departure. If they still linger with fond, reluctant, amorous affection near Green’s rotundities, perhaps you might wish to see those about Spain. If so, order them all to your cottage. The dinner in honor of Blucher and the Crown Prince at Ambleside, was, I understood, attended only by the Parson, the Apothecary, the Limner;—the King, Lord North, and Mr. Fury, signifying nothing.

“Vale! iterumque, vale!”

CHAPTER VII.

LIFE IN EDINBURGH.—THE BAR.—THE HIGHLANDS.—
ELLERAY.

1815–1817.

JOHN WILSON’S new home was now in Edinburgh. His mother received him and his family into her house, where he resided until the year 1819. Mrs. Wilson, senior, was a lady whose skill in domestic management was the admiration and wonder of all zealous housekeepers. Under one roof she accommodated three distinct families; and, besides the generosity exercised towards her own, she was hospitable to all, while her charities and goodness to the poor were unceasing. This lady was so well known and so much esteemed in Edinburgh, that when she died, it was, as it were, the

* Wordsworth.