

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!”

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## 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.

extinction of a "bright particular star;" nor can any one who ever saw her, altogether forget the effect of her presence. She belonged to that old school of Scottish ladies whose refinement and intellect never interfered with duties the most humble. In a large household, where the fashion of the day neither sought nor suggested a retinue of attendants, many little domestic offices were performed by the lady of the house herself. The tea china, for example, was washed, both after breakfast and tea, and carefully put away by her own delicate hands. Markets were made early in the morning. Many a time has the stately figure of Mrs. Wilson, in her elegantly fitting black satin dress, been seen to pass to and from the old market-place, Edinburgh, followed by some favorite "caddie,"\* bearing the well-chosen meats and vegetables, that no skill but her own was ever permitted to select. Shrewd sense, wise economy, and well-ordered benevolence marked all her actions. Beautiful and dignified in presence, she at once inspired a feeling of respect. Pious and good, she at the same time knew and understood the world; and false sentiment, or affectation of any sort, was not permitted to live near her; wit and humor she did not lack; but it is doubtful whether poetry was a material of her nature in any shape. Proud as she was of her son John, and great as his devotion was to her, he used always to say that his mother did not understand him. Sometimes, it is no great wonder if his eccentricity might have been a little too much for her order and regularity. It is very doubtful if any lady of the present *régime* could so wisely and peacefully rule the affairs of a household as did this lady,† when, for several years, she had under her roof two married sons, with their wives, children, and servants, along with her own immediate household, a son and two daughters, yet unmarried, making in all a family of fourteen persons. Yet peace and harmony reigned supreme; and there are now not a few of her grandchildren who remember this fine old lady, either as she moved through the active duties of her house, or, seated at the fire-side on a chair, the back of which she never touched, dignified in bearing as a queen, took a short nap, awaking with a kindly smile

\* Street porter.

† Mrs. Wilson, senior, was a keen Tory; and it is told of her that on hearing of her son contributing to the *Edinburgh Review*, she said to him significantly, "John, if you turn Whig, this house is no longer big enough for us both." She must have been well pleased with the principles of her daughter-in-law, who, writing after the Reform Bill passed, "thanked God she was born in the reign of the Georges."

at the sound of some young voice demanding a story, in the telling of which, like all good grandams, she excelled.

So, to the pleasant house of his mother, No. 53 Queen street, Wilson changed his abode from dear sycamore-sheltered Ellera.

In 1815 he was called to the bar, along with his friend Patrick Robertson.\* John Gibson Lockhart joined them in the year following. For a short time, but only for a short time, Wilson followed the usual routine of a professional promenading in the "*Hall of Lost Steps*." He did sometimes get cases, but when he found them lying on his table, he said jocularly, when speaking of this afterwards, "I did not know what the devil to do with them!" The Parliament-House life was plainly not the thing which nature meant for him. The restrictions of that arena would not suit his Pegasus, so he freed his wings and took another course.

There are some pleasant fragments of his letters to his wife, written in holiday time, when he would now and then run away for a day or two to saunter, fishing-rod in hand, by the streams of pretty pastoral Peebles, and into Yarrow to visit the Ettrick Shepherd.

He writes from the "Head of the Yarrow," on "Wednesday morning, seven o'clock," in June, 1815 :—

"MY DEAREST JANE:—I take time by the forelock merely to inform you that I am still a sentient being. On Sunday, I did not leave Sym's till near twelve o'clock. I called, on my way to Peebles, at Finlay's, at Glencorse, where I sandwiched for an hour, and arrived at Peebles about seven o'clock, a perfect *lameter*, my shoes having peeled my timbers. The walk was rather dreary. At Peebles I had to stop, and remained there all night. On Monday morning, at six o'clock (miraculous!) I uprose from the couch of slumber, and walked along the Tweed to Traquair Knowe (Mr. Laidlaw's). There I fished, and stayed all Monday, the place being very beautiful. Grieve joined the party that night, and several other people. Mr. Laidlaw is married, an insectologist and poet, and farmer and agriculturist. On Tuesday morning I walked to Hogg's, a distance of about eight miles, fishing as I went, and surprised him in his cottage bottling whiskey. He is well, and dressed pastorally. His house is not habitable, but the situation is good, and may become very pretty.

\* Among the young men, afterwards distinguished, who passed about the same time, were John Cay, Andrew Rutherford, P. F. Tytler, Sir William Hamilton, Thomas Maitland, Alexander Pringle, Archibald Alison, Duncan M'Neill, James Ivory, &c.

There being no beds in his domicile, we last night came here, a farmer's house about a quarter of a mile from him, where I have been treated most kindly and hospitably. The house and entertainment something *à la* Wastdale, but much superior. I have risen at seven o'clock, and am preparing to take a complete day's fishing among the streams near St. Mary's Loch.

"To-morrow night I fish down to Selkirk, to catch the coach to Hawick in the evening; thence on Friday morning to Richmond's, whom I will leave on Sunday evening. So if I can get a seat in the coach on Sunday night at Hawick, you will see me in Edinburgh on Monday morning before breakfast. Mrs. Scott informs me breakfast is ready, so hoping that you will be grateful for this letter, bald as it is, I have the honor to subscribe myself your obedient and dutiful husband,

"JOHN WILSON."

On one of these fishing excursions he had proceeded from St. Mary's Loch to Peebles, where he could not at first get admittance to the inn, as it was fully occupied by a party of country gentlemen, met together on some county business; on sending in his name, however, he was immediately asked to join them at dinner. It is needless to say that under his spell the fun grew fast and furious. No one thought of moving. Supper was proposed, and as nothing eatable was to be had in the house, Wilson asked the company if they liked trouts, and forthwith produced the result of his day's amusement from basket, bag, and pocket, in such numbers that the table was soon literally covered. As the Shepherd afterwards said, "Your creel was fu'—your shooting-bag fu'—your jacket-pouches fu'—the pouches o' your verra breeks fu'—half-a-dozen wee anes in your waistcoat, no to forget them in the crown o' your hat, and last o' a', when there was nae place to stow awa' ony mair, a willow-wand drawn through the gills o' some great big anes."

The fresh fragrance of summer, as enjoyed by the running streams and "dowie dens o' Yarrow," combined with the desire to show his English wife something of the beauty of Scotland, suggested about this time an excursion, which was regarded by many as an act of insanity.

About the beginning of July my father and mother set out from Edinburgh on a pedestrian tour through the Western Highlands. That such a feat should be performed by a delicate young English-

woman was sufficiently astonishing. A little of the singularity, no doubt, arose from the fact, that she was the wife of an eccentric young poet, the strangeness of whose actions would be duly exaggerated. Such a proposal, therefore, could not be made without exciting wonder and talk in the demure circles of Edinburgh society. Mrs. Grant of Laggan thus writes upon the subject to a friend:—

“The oddest thing that I have known for some time is John Wilson’s intended tour to the Highlands with his wife. This gentle and elegant Englishwoman is to walk with her mate, who carries her wardrobe and his own,

‘Thorough flood and thorough mire,  
Over bush, over brier;’

that is, through all the bypaths in the Central Highlands, where they propose to sleep in such cottages as English eyes never saw before. I shall be charmed to see them come back alive; and in the mean time it has cost me not a little pains to explain, in my epistles to my less romantic friends in their track, that they are genuine gentle folks in masquerade. How cruel any authority would be thought, that should assign such penance to the wearers of purple and fine linen, as these have volunteered.”

A few facts relative to this romantic walk are not, after a lapse of so many years, lost sight of by those who remember meeting the travellers, and entertaining them kindly. Scotland was dear to Wilson’s heart, as was the fair sisterland he was so loath to leave. Who has ever written such words about Highland scenery as he has done? Well he knew all those mist-laden glens in the far west; and the glorious shadows of the great mountains, beneath whose shelter he and his wife would rest after a long day’s walk. In this tour they visited the Trosachs, Loch Katrine, and the smaller lochs in that neighborhood, taking such divisions of the Western Highlands as suited their fancy. They did not “chalk out a route,” or act as if “they had sworn a solemn oath to follow it.” From Loch Lomond westward to Inverary, and thence northward by Loch Awe and Glen Etive, they wandered on—halting when wearied, either for a night, or a day or two, and always well received, strangers though they were; making friends too, in far-off places. Through the wild rampant cliffs and mountains, which lend so awful a grandeur to Glencoe, they proceeded to Ballachulish, billeting themselves upon the hospitable household of Mr. Stewart, where

they received such kindness as made the remembrance of that family a bright spot in the wanderings of memory many years after, and meetings with its different members always agreeable. The district of country, however, which seemed to have the greatest charm, and where they lingered longest, was that between Inverary and Dalmally. Loch Awe with its wooded shores, noble bays, beautiful islands, and unsurpassed mountain range, topped by the magnificent crest of Ben Cruachan, whose mighty base, wood-skirted, sends its verdure-clad bounds gently to the margin of the deep waters—was an object too attractive for such lovers of nature soon to part from. Again and again they retraced their steps to this enchanting scene.

In this neighborhood they found a resting-place for a time in Glenorchy, at the schoolmaster's house. Dr. Smith, the present clergyman of Inverary, remembers, when a youth, seeing this devoted pair travelling on foot in these parts; Wilson laden with their travelling gear, and his gentle wife carrying in her hand the lighter portion of it. He says: "I remember well the feelings of wonder and admiration with which I regarded his manliness and her meekness; and whether it be that the thoughts of youth are apt to become indelible impressions, or that what awakened them was a reality in this case, as I am inclined to believe; the thoughts and feelings of youth still remain, so that over and high above all he wrote, I see the man, the earnest, generous man, who though singularly tolerant to others, cared not to measure any odds against his own consciousness of power. It was on this first visit in 1815 that some of those incidents occurred which are not easily forgotten, in a country where the acts of a stranger are narrowly noticed, though kindly interpreted. He and Mrs. Wilson, on their way to Glenorchy, passed a little thatched cottage close by the falls of the Aray. The spot was beautiful; the weather had been wet, and the river rushed along its rocky bed with a fulness that was promising to the angler. It was too attractive to be passed, so they lingered, stopped, and waited for ten days or a fortnight, taking up their quarters at the cottage, and living on the easiest terms with its inmates.

"It is yet told, how on a Sabbath morning the daughter who served came into the room—the only one—where Mr. and Mrs. Wilson slept; and after adjusting her dress at the little mirror

hanging by a nail on the unmortared wall, she was unable to hook her gown behind, but went at once to the side of the bed, from which they had not yet risen, saying, 'Do help me to hook my gown.' Mr. Wilson sat up in bed, and served her with the utmost good-nature. In Glenorchy, his time was much occupied by fishing, and distance was not considered an obstacle. He started one morning at an early hour to fish in a loch which at that time abounded in trout, in the Braes of Glenorchy, called Loch Toilà. Its nearest point was thirteen miles distant from his lodgings at the schoolhouse. On reaching it, and unscrewing the butt-end of his fishing-rod to get the top, he found he had it not. Nothing daunted, he walked back, breakfasted, got his fishing-rod, made all complete, and off again to Loch Toilà. He could not resist fishing on the river when a pool looked invitingly, but he went always onwards, reached the loch a second time, fished round it, and found that the long summer day had come to an end. He set off for his home again with his fishing-basket full, and confessing somewhat to weariness. Passing near a farm-house whose inmates he knew (for he had formed acquaintance with all), he went to get some food. They were in bed, for it was eleven o'clock at night, and after rousing them, the hostess hastened to supply him; but he requested her to get him some whiskey and milk. She came with a bottle-full, and a can of milk with a tumbler. Instead of a tumbler, he requested a bowl, and poured the half of the whiskey in, along with half the milk. He drank the mixture at a draught, and while his kind hostess was looking on with amazement, he poured the remainder of the whiskey and milk into the bowl, and drank that also. He then proceeded homeward, performing a journey of not less than seventy miles.\*

"On leaving the Glenorchy schoolhouse, they went to Glen Etive. On their way along the banks of Loch Etive, and near the mouth of the river Conglas, they came to a shepherd's house, where they intended to wait for a few days to fish. The shepherd was servant to Mr. Campbell of Achlian. Wilson had a note to him from his master. The morning had been fine, but, as often happens in this climate, it had become very wet towards evening. As the pedestrians reached the cottage drenched, on knocking at the door,

\* This adventure is told, with a slight variation, by the Professor himself in his "Anglimania."  
— *Wilson's Works*.

the shepherd's wife thought not well of them, perhaps startled by the height and breadth of the shoulders of him who stood at the door, for her husband was a little man. She said at once, 'Go on to the farm-house, we cannot take in gangrels here.' The note put all right, and the shepherd with his wife, both dead now, often told the circumstance to enforce hospitality to strangers, as by so doing one might entertain angels unawares."

This kind of reception was at last no novelty to them. A gentleman now residing near Inverness remembers their arriving at Foyers, with a letter of introduction to the late proprietor of that picturesque estate, from their friend Mrs. Grant. Wilson was dressed in sailor fashion, and his wife's attire was such as suited a pedestrian in the mountains. The Highland lassie who received them at the door had not been in the habit of seeing gentlefolks so arayed, and naturally taking them for "gangrel bodies" from the South, ushered them into the kitchen.

On their returning route they passed through a village where Wilson, on a subsequent expedition, met with adventures to be afterwards recorded. Their appearance is described by the writer of a collection of Highland Sketches,\* from whose narrative I borrow the substance of the following account:—

On a fine summer evening, the eyes of a primitive northern village† were attracted by the appearance of two travellers, apparently man and wife, coming into the village, dressed like cairds or gipsies. The man was tall, broad-shouldered, and of stalwart proportions; his fair hair floated redundant over neck and shoulders, and his red beard and whiskers were of portentous size. He bore himself with the assured and careless air of a strong man rejoicing in his strength. On his back was a capacious knapsack, and his slouched hat, garnished with fishing-hooks and tackle, showed he was as much addicted to fishing as to making spoons:—

"A stalwart tinkler wight seemed he,  
That weel could mend a pot or pan;  
And deftly he could thraw the flee,  
Or neatly weave the willow wan'."

The appearance of his companion contrasted strikingly with that

\* Mr. William Stewart.

† Mr. Stewart calls it Tomintoul, but that must be a mistake, as at a subsequent date my father speaks of it as a place visited for the first time.



of her mate. She was of slim and fragile form, and more like a lady in her walk and bearing than any wife of a caird that had ever been seen in those parts. The natives were somewhat surprised to see this great caird making for the head inn, the "Gordon Arms," where the singular pair actually took up their quarters for several days. Thence they were in the habit of sallying forth, each armed with a fishing-rod, to the river banks, a circumstance the novelty of which, as regarded the tinker's wife, excited no small curiosity, and many conjectures were hazarded as to the real character of the mysterious couple.

A local hero named the King of the Drovers, moved by admiration of the peculiar proportions of this king of the cairds, felt a great desire to come into closer relations with the stranger. He was soon gratified. A meeting was arranged, in order to try whether the son of the mountain or the son of the plain were the better man in wrestling, leaping, running, and drinking; and in all of these manly exercises the great drover, probably for the first time, found himself more than matched.

After nearly two months' tour, the travellers came down by the low-lying lands of Dunkeld, where Mr. Wilson was somewhat suspiciously regarded, being by some good folks looked upon as a lunatic. Mrs. Izett, a lady of accomplishments and taste, and a great admirer of genius, gives a description of Mr. and Mrs. Wilson's arrival at her house at midnight. She writes to Mr. John Grieve, a friend of my father's, who lived many years in Edinburgh, a man of good judgment, and refined and elegant pursuits:—

"Had you a glimpse of Byron, Southey, etc.? By the way, Southey brings your friend Wilson to my recollection. We had the pleasure of seeing him and his agreeable partner here. Though they were here for several nights, I really could not form an opinion of him. They arrived here late at night. The following day, and *greatest part of the night*, he passed rambling among our glens alone, and the day after, the whole of which he passed within doors, I happened unfortunately to be confined to my room with the headache—at least during the greatest part of it—and thus lost the opportunity you kindly afforded me, of enjoying what I should have considered a great treat. There is something very striking in the countenance of Mr. Wilson, particularly his eye. His head I think quite a model for a minstrel; there is so much of fire, and at

the same time so much simplicity. His wanderings, etc., etc., made some people in this quarter—no matter who—think him quite mad, and they will not be persuaded to the contrary. The eccentricities of a poet certainly do bear some resemblance to this at times, and to say truth, Mr. Wilson has his good share of these. I was quite tantalized the day he passed in the house that I was not able to appear, and avail myself of so good an opportunity to become acquainted with him. I saw more of Mrs. Wilson, and was much pleased with her. She made out her *walks* you see, and after this you must allow woman to possess resolution and perseverance. I greatly admired the patience and good-humor with which she bore all the privations and fatigues of her journey. She might make some of your southern *beaux* blush for their effeminacy."

My mother during this tour walked one day twenty-five miles. The travellers had been overtaken by a mist falling suddenly over them when in Rannoch. They missed the beaten track of road, and getting among dreary moors, were long before they discovered footing that could lead them to a habitation. My father made his wife sit down among the moss, and taking off his coat, wrapped her in it, saying he would try and find the road, assuring her, at the same time, that he would not go beyond the reach of her voice. They could not see a foot before them, so dense and heavy was the dreary mist that lay all around. Kissing his wife, and telling her not to fear, he sprang up from where she sat, and bounded off. Not many seconds of time elapsed, ere he called her to come to him—the sound guiding her to where he stood. He was upon the road; his foot had suddenly gained the right path, for light there was none. He told her he had never felt so grateful for any thing in his life, as for that unexpected discovery of the beaten track. He knew well the dangers of those wild wastes when mists fall, and the disasters they not unfrequently cause. A weary walk it was that brought them to "King's House," the only inn at that time for travellers among these Highland fastnesses.

On their return from this wonderful tour, they were quite the lions of Edinburgh. It was fully expected by the anxious community of the fairer sex, that Mrs. Wilson would return weather-beaten and robbed of her beautiful complexion, sunburnt and freckled. But such expectations were agreeably disappointed. One lady who called upon her directly after her return, old Mrs.

Mure of Caldwell, exclaimed, "Weel, I declare, she's come back bonnier than ever!"

My father's own account of their adventures is contained in the following letter to the Ettrick Shepherd, soon after his return, written evidently in the full enjoyment of the highest health and spirits,—to use his own phrase, "strong as an eagle:"—

"EDINBURGH, *September.* 18

"MY DEAR HOGG:—I am in Edinburgh, and wish to be out of it. Mrs. Wilson and I walked 350 miles in the Highlands, between the 5th of July and the 26th of August, sojourning in divers glens from Sabbath unto Sabbath, fishing, eating, and staving. I purpose appearing in Glasgow on Thursday, where I shall stay till the circuit is over. I then go to Elleray, in the character of a Benedictine monk, till the beginning of November. Now pause and attend. If you will meet me at Moffat, on October 6th, I will walk or mail it with you to Elleray, and treat you there with fowls and Irish whiskey. Immediately on the receipt of this, write a letter to me, at Mr. Smith's bookshop, Hutcheson street, Glasgow, saying positively if you will, or will not do so. If you don't, *I will lick you*, and fish up Douglas Burn before you, next time I come to Ettrick. I saw a letter from you to M—— the other day, by which you seem to be alive and well. You are right in not making verses when you can catch trout. Francis Jeffrey leaves Edinburgh this day for Holland and France. I presume, after destroying the king of the Netherlands, he intends to annex that kingdom to France, and assume the supreme power of the United Countries, under the title of Geoffrey the First. You, he will make Poet Laureate and Fishmonger, and me admiral of the Mosquito Fleet.

"If you have occasion soon to write to Murray, pray introduce something about 'The City of the Plague,' as I shall probably offer him that poem in about a fortnight or sooner. Of course I do not wish you to say that the poem is utterly worthless. I think that a bold eulogy from you (if administered immediately) would be of service to me; but if you do write about it, do not tell him that I have any intention of offering it to him, but you may say, you hear I am going to offer it to a London bookseller.

"We stayed seven days at Mrs. Izett's, at Kinnaird, and were most kindly received. Mrs. Izett is a great ally of yours, and is a

fine creature. I killed in the Highlands 170 dozen of trouts. One day nineteen dozen and a half, another seven dozen. I, one morning, killed ten trouts that weighed nine pounds. In Loch Awe, in three days, I killed seventy-six pounds' weight of fish, all with the fly. The Gaels were astonished. I shot two roebucks, and had nearly caught a red-deer by the tail—*I was within half a mile of it at farthest.* The good folks in the Highlands are not dirty. They are clean, decent, hospitable, ugly people. We domiciliated with many, and found no remains of the great plague of fleas, etc., that devastated the country from the time of Ossian to the accession of George the Third. We were at Loch Katrine, Loch Lomond, Inverary, Dalmally, Loch Etive, Glen Etive, Dalness, Appin, Ballachulish, Fort William, Moy, Dalwhinny, Loch Ericht (you dog), Loch Rannoch, Glen Lyon, Taymouth, Blair-Athole, Bruar, Perth, Edinburgh. Is not Mrs. Wilson immortalized?

“I know of ‘Cona.’\* It is very creditable to our excellent friend, but will not sell any more than the ‘Isle of Palms,’ or ‘The White Doe.’† The ‘White Doe’ is not in season; venison is not liked in Edinburgh. It wants flavor; a good Ettrick wether is preferable. Wordsworth has more of the poetical character than any living writer, but he is not a man of first-rate intellect; his genius oversets him. Southey’s ‘Roderic’ is not a first-rate work; the remorse of Roderic is that of a Christian devotee, rather than that of a dethroned monarch. His battles are ill fought. There is no processional march of events in the poem, no tendency to one great end, like a river increasing in majesty till it reaches the sea. Neither is there national character, Spanish or Moorish. No sublime imagery; no profound passion. Southey wrote it, and Southey is a man of talent; but it is his worst poem.

“Scott’s ‘Field of Waterloo’ I have seen. What a poem!—such bald and nerveless language, mean imagery, commonplace sentiments, and clumsy versification! It is beneath criticism. Unless the latter part of the battle be very fine indeed, this poem will injure him.

“Wordsworth is dished. Southey is in purgatory; Scott is

\* *Cona or the Vale of Clwyd, and other Poems.* Edinburgh. 12mo. The author of this little volume was Mr. James Gray, one of the teachers in the High School, an accomplished man, a friend of my father’s. He afterwards took orders in the Church of England, and was appointed to a chaplaincy in India. He died in September, 1830.

† Wordsworth’s “White Doe of Rylstone.”

dying; and Byron is married. Herbert\* is frozen to death in Scandinavia. Moore has lost his manliness. Coleridge is always in a fog. Joanna Baillie is writing a system of cookery. Montgomery is in a madhouse, or ought to be. Campbell is sick of a constipation in the bowels. Hogg is herding sheep in Ettrick forest; and Wilson has taken the plague. O wretched writers! Unfortunate bards! What is Bobby Miller's† back shop to do this winter! Alas! alas! alas! a wild doe is a noble animal; write an address to one, and it shall be inferior to one I have written—for half a barrel of red herrings!‡

“The Highlanders are not a poetical people. They are too national; too proud of their history. They imagine that a *colley-shangy* between the Macgregors and Campbells is a sublime event; and they overlook mountains four thousand feet high. If Ossian did write the poems attributed to him, or any poems-like them, he was a dull dog, and deserved never to taste whiskey as long as he lived. A man who lives forever among mist and mountains, knows better than to be always prosing about them. Methinks I feel about objects familiar to infancy and manhood, but when we speak of them, it is only upon great occasions, and in situations of deep passion. Ossian was probably born in a flat country!§

“Scott has written good lines in the ‘Lord of the Isles,’ but he has not done justice to the Sound of Mull, which is a glorious strait.

“The Northern Highlanders do not admire *Waverley*, so I presume the South Highlanders despise *Guy Mannering*. The Westmoreland peasants think Wordsworth a fool. In Borrowdale, Southey is not known to exist. I met ten men at Hawick who did not think Hogg a poet, and the whole City of Glasgow think me a madman. So much for the voice of the people being the voice of God. I left my snuff-box in your cottage. Take care of it. The Anstruther bards have advertised their anniversary; I forget the day.

\* The Honorable William Herbert, Dean of Manchester, died in 1847, in his 70th year. He was author of several volumes or translations from the Icelandic and other northern languages. The poem here referred to is evidently “Helga,” which was published in 1815.

† One of the principal Edinburgh booksellers.

‡ An excusable challenge. The “Address to a Wild Deer” is one of his happiest compositions.

§ For a very different and more serious criticism of Ossian's Poems by him, see *Blackwood's Magazine* for November, 1839.

“I wish Lieutenant Gray of the Marines\* had been devoured by the lion he once carried on board his ship to the Dey of Algiers, or that he was kept a perpetual prisoner by the Moors in Barbary. Did you hear that Tennant† had been taken before the Session for an offence against good morals? If you did not, neither did I. Indeed it is, on many accounts, exceedingly improbable.

“Yours, truly, JOHN WILSON.”

Apparently the *Isle of Palms* had by this time made way with some success, if it did not quite realize the hopes of the author. Previously to the writing of the above letter, he had put himself in communication with Mr. Smith, in reference to the publication of his new volume:—

“EDINBURGH, 53 QUEEN STREET,  
September 5, 1815.

“I have as many poems as would make such another volume as the *Isle of Palms*, which I wish to publish this winter. The longest is nearly 4,000 lines. I have as yet spoken of it to no one, friend or bookseller. I have made up my mind not to publish it unless I sell the copyright for a specific sum. I shall not correspond with any other person on the subject till I hear from you, and what your intentions may be concerning it.

“I hope that you are quite well. I have been in the Highlands for two months, with Mrs. Wilson, and am strong as an eagle.”

Having received no reply, he wrote a few days later:—

“I felt myself bound by friendship and other ties to acquaint you with my intention before I communicated it to any other person of the trade. As the winter is fast approaching, I wish to have this business settled, ere long, either in one way or another, and will therefore be glad to hear from you as soon as convenient. It is probable that I may appear in Glasgow during the Circuit, to smell the air of the new court, but my motions are uncertain. If I do make it out, I trust the oysters will be in season.”

Early in October he writes again, from Glasgow:—

“The volume which I have now ready for the press will contain any number of pages the publisher may think fit, from three to four

\* Charles Gray, author of several Scotch ballads, poems, and songs. He died in 1851.

† William Tennant, Professor of Oriental Languages in St. Andrews; Author of “Anster Fair;” died in 1843.

hundred, so as to be sold for twelve shillings, and to be a counterpart of the *Isle of Palms*.

“The first and longest poem is entitled ‘The City of the Plague,’ is dramatic, and consists of nearly four thousand lines, or between three and four thousand. The scene is laid in London, during the great plague of 1665, and the poem is intended to give a general picture of the situation of a plague-struck city, along with the history of a few individuals who constitute the persons of the drama.

“The second poem, ‘The Convict,’ is likewise dramatic and in blank verse, and its object is to delineate the passions of a man innocently condemned to death, and the feelings of his dearest relations. It is between two and three thousand lines.

“The third poem is a dramatic fragment, entitled ‘The Mariner’s Return,’ about six hundred lines, and principally consisting of descriptions of sea scenery.

“The remainder of the volume will be made up to the length deemed necessary for poems of a miscellaneous character, in rhyme and blank verse,

“It is not my intention to publish this volume unless I dispose of the copyright; and the sum I have set on it is £200.

“If you feel any inclination to purchase it *of yourself*, one word can do it; if not, one word between friends is sufficient.

“If you determine against purchasing it *of yourself*, then you can inform me whether or not you would be willing, along with Murray, or Miller in Edinburgh, or any other bookseller, to give me that sum for the copyright,

“If you determine against having any thing to do with it, as a principal, on these terms, then, for the present, the subject drops.”

Mr. Smith appears to have declined the sole responsibility of the publication, which was ultimately undertaken by Constable, along with whose name those of Smith and of Longman appeared on the title-page. Shortly after this communication my father paid a visit to Elleray, probably for the purpose of inspecting the state of the place, and making arrangements for letting it. On the 31st of October he reports his progress to his wife:—

“ELLERAY, *Friday night, Oct. 31, 1815.*

“DEAREST JANE:—I am not to blame for not having written before this night, owing first to a mistake about the post-night;

and secondly, to the want of sealing-wax or wafer; so, if angry, pray become appeased. On Monday I reached Penrith, the weather being coldish to Hawick; then I took inside to Carlisle, thence outside to Penrith. At Penrith I dined with an old Oxonian, and walked on to Pooley Bridge; there I found Jeany\* waiting for me, and proceeded to Patterdale, which I reached about ten o'clock; dark and stormy night. On Tuesday morning I walked to Ambleside, sending Billy (whom I found there) with pony to Elleray. From Ambleside I walked to De Quincey's, with whom I dined; we returned per coach to Ambleside, and drank punch with Dr. Scandler, who is considerably better. The night being indifferent, I stayed all night at Chapman's; on Wednesday I sent for pony and rode to Elleray. I found Mrs. Ritson alive and well. Rode down and called at the parsonage; all glad to see me. Called at the Island; saw Mrs. Curwen and children, well and looking well; W. Curwen in Cumberland; dined therefore at Ullock's; went in the evening to parsonage and drank tea. Thursday, walked about Elleray; dined at Pringle's; met the Baxters and Greaves; pleasant party, Greave falling asleep immediately after dinner. Mr. Pringle is looking tolerably, though I fear he will feel the effects of the accident all his days. Blind of one eye, and confused at times in his head. Mrs. Pringle handsome and kind, and Miss Somerville with her. Friday, have spent all this day along with myself and Mr. Ritson, and Billy at Elleray. The place which had been a wilderness is again trim and neat, and looks as well as possible. The trees are greatly grown, and every thing seems thriving and prosperous. There are eight chickens with whom I am forming a friendship; and I feel as idle as ever.

"I dare say no more about a place so dear to us both; would to God you were here!

"But next time I come, whenever that is, you shall be with me. I have not seen the 'stamp-master.' Saturday and Sunday I intend keeping alone, and at Elleray. Monday I shall probably go to Hollow Oak or Ulverston. The Misses Taylor have gone to Bath. Of the Hardens I know nothing. Mr. Lloyd is worse than ever, and gone to Birmingham; I believe never to return. Kitty Dawes (mother to Dawes) is dead. So is the old miller of Restock, and young Bingham of Kendal, two well-known cockers.

\* A favorite pony.



“De Quincey will accompany me to Scotland; but I will write about his rooms in a day or two.

“I have not yet been in the new house. The little detestable bit of avenue looks tolerable. Of Robert and Eliza I know nothing. Kiss everybody you meet for me up-stairs. Write to me, care of Mrs. Ullock, immediately. Thine with eternal affection,

“JOHN WILSON.”

Of what happened in the interval between this date and January following there is no record. No doubt he was busy with the proof-sheets of the *City of the Plague*. In January, 1816, he was again at Elleray, and thus relates his adventures to Mrs. Wilson:—

“BOWNESS, *Sunday, January, 1816.*

“DEAREST CZARINA:—I hope that you received my scroll from Carlisle, which I committed to the custody of Richard, and therefore doubt not that he would fulfil his trust.

“I supped at the Pearsons’, and was very kindly received there; Miss Alms being in love with me, which I think I told you before. Going down to their house I fell *upon a slide*, and was most severely bruised, so much so that I had to be carried into a shop, and drink wine which the people very kindly gave me. This was an infernal fall, my rump and head suffering a dire concussion against one of the most fashionable streets. I however made out my visit, though still rather sick and headachy all night. Indeed my journey seemed to consist wholly of disasters. In the morning (no coach going sooner) I pursued my journey to Penrith—day cold and snowy—outside for cheapness. I then got tired of the coach, and, after drinking a glass of wine and water, started on foot for Coleridge’s at Pooley Bridge; there I dined, and, at half-past seven in the evening, feeling myself bold and chivalrous, I started again for Patterdale, against the ineffectual remonstrances of the whole family who all prophesied immediate death. The night was not dark, and in two hours I was seated in the kitchen of Mr. Dobson at a good fire. I then proposed crossing Kirkstone, when shrieks arose from every quarter, and I then found a young man had just been brought in *dead*, having been lost on Sunday evening coming from Ambleside, and only found that day. Of course, the melancholy accident made me give up all thoughts of pursuing my journey till daylight, so

I supped and went to bed. Next forenoon at eleven o'clock, a party of men arrived from Ambleside with the Coroner, and I found from them that the road though difficult was passable, so I faced the hill and arrived safe at Chapman's in two hours and ten minutes, having slid along with great rapidity. The thaw was beginning, and had I waited another day, the snow would have been soft and impassable, as it lay in many places ten feet deep, and I walked over two gates. I dined with William Curwen, and walked to De Quincy's, which I reached at half-past one o'clock in the morning; he was at the *Nab*, and when he returned about three o'clock, found me asleep in his bed. I reached Elleray only last night, having spent the whole of Saturday with the lesser man; he walked to Elleray with me, where we drank tea; he then returned to Grasmere; and no sheets being on the bed, I walked to Bowness, and stayed all night. I am still here, and it rains severely. As yet, Elleray is all in the dark. I shall dine there to-morrow alone, but not stay all night, for the lonesomeness is insupportable. I will write a longer letter, and give you news. Nobody, I fear, has died here since I saw you. Billy is well, and his two nephews are at present residing with him at Elleray. His father and mother are expected daily, and a few distant relations.

"Lloyd is in a mad-house; Wordsworth and family from home. Write me on receipt of this (if not before); direct to me at Mrs. Ullock's, Bowness. Eternally thine with all affection,

"J. WILSON."

During the next month he was constantly occupied with the printers, and on the 13th of March he writes to Mr. Smith:—

"I ought long ago to have acknowledged the receipt of your different letters; but I have been busier than any man ever was before.

"My volume went round the trade to-day; with what success I know not. My expectations are but moderate. The volume is too thin and so is the paper, but I believe there is more printing and pages than 10s. 6d. books in general. I put your name into the title page, which I shall ever be happy to do on similar occasions.

"These failures in Glasgow will not be favorable to me as an author."

The reception of the volume was altogether favorable; and it was recognized as indicating a marked increase of power and discipline

in the mind of the author. With the exception of that first suggestion of the subject already referred to, I find no allusion to the principal poem nor any trace of it in note-books. Of the other poems, there are but four which correspond in title with any in the "List of Subjects" of 1812. These are "The Children's Dance," "The Convict," "Solitude," and "The Farewell and Return."

In the next number of the *Edinburgh Review*, the volume received a friendly criticism from the hand of Jeffrey, who, in reply to a letter from the author, unfortunately not extant, addressed the following interesting letter to him:—

"MY DEAR SIR:—I am extremely gratified by your letter, and thank you very sincerely, both for the kindness it expresses, and the confidence it seems to place in me. It is impossible, I think, to read your writings without feeling affection for the writer; and under the influence of such a feeling, I doubt whether it is *possible* to deal with them with the same severe impartiality with which works of equal literary merit, but without that attraction, might probably be treated. Nor do I think that this is desirable or would even be fair; for part, and not the least part of the merit of poetry, consists in its moral effects, and the power of exciting kind and generous affections seems entitled to as much admiration as that of presenting pleasing images to the fancy.

"You wish, however, to be treated *as a stranger*, and, I think, I have actually treated you as one, for the partiality which I have already mentioned as irresistibly produced by your writings, certainly has not been lessened by the little personal intercourse we have had. I am not aware that it has been materially increased by that cause, and was inclined to believe that I should have felt the same kindliness towards the author of the work I am reviewing, although I had never seen his face. As to showing you no favor for the future on the score of the past, I am afraid if I do not exactly comply with your request, it will be more owing to my own selfish unwillingness to retract my former opinions and abandon my predictions, than from any excess of good-nature towards their objects. However, your request is very natural and manly, and I shall do what I can to let you have nothing more than justice, and save you from having any other obligations to your critic than for his diligence and integrity.

“As to Wordsworth, I shall only say, that while I cannot at all agree, nor is it necessary, in your estimate of his poetical talents, I love and honor the feelings by which I think your judgment has been misled, and by which I most readily admit that your conduct should be governed. I assure you I am not the least hurt or offended at hearing his poetry extolled, or my remarks upon it arraigned as unjust or erroneous; only I hope you will not set them down as sure proof of moral depravity, and utter want of all good affections. I should be sorry that any good man should think this of me as an individual; as to the opinion that may be formed of my critical qualifications, it is impossible for any one to be more indifferent than myself. I am conscious of being quite sincere in all the opinions I express, but I am the furthest in the world from thinking them infallible, or even having any considerable assurance of their appearing right to persons of good judgment.

“I wish I had more leisure to talk to you of such matters; but I cannot at present afford to indulge myself any further. I think we now understand each other in a way to prevent all risk of future misunderstanding. Believe me always, dear sir, very faithfully yours,

“F. JEFFREY.

“92 GEORGE STREET, *Saturday Evening.*”

The pleasant relations thus established between these two men led to a still closer intimacy, which, though unhappily interrupted by subsequent events, was renewed in after years, when the bitterness of old controversies had yielded to the hallowing influences of time.

Whether there was any work done during this year in poetry or prose, I cannot say; but in the way of acquiring materials for future “Recreations of Christopher North” there was undoubtedly a good deal. All the other memorials at least that I have of this year, and a good part of the next, are connected almost entirely with angling, and extensive “raids” into the Highlands. It would almost seem as if there was an unwillingness fairly to cast anchor and remain steadily at work. The stimulus to literary exertion had not yet come with imperative force, and in the interval, before he fairly girded himself up to regular work, he sought strength for it in his love of nature and pedestrian wandering. These excursions, it is but fair to observe, however, appear to have been confined to the proper vacation time of his profession.

Again and again he roams over country he had so often trod before, and in the year following that in which he introduced Mrs. Wilson to the beauties of his native land, he returned to the neighborhood of Loch Awe, extending his tour into Inverness-shire, as we find from the following letters written in the spring and autumn of 1816:—

“ACHLIAN, 29th April, 1816.

“DEAR JANE:—I have risen at six o'clock to write to you. Your letter, I find, will not be here till Tuesday morning, I know not why. Curse all country posts!

“To be brief, James Fergusson\* and I reached Glasgow on Monday; he went to the play; I did not. On Tuesday, I was tempted to stay in Glasgow, and saw Kean as Zanga in ‘The Revenge.’ It is heavy work, and he acted poorly, and is in every respect inferior to Kemble. On Wednesday, I went to Greenock by steamboat, of which the machinery went wrong, and blew up part of the deck, on which myself and two fattish gentlemen were sitting. This stopped us, and after a long delay we got into another steamboat, and arrived at Greenock. It was four o'clock. I found that I could only cross the water that night, so I thought it was needless; dined with Bissland, and went to the play, when I again saw Kean. I was too near him; he acted with occasional vigor, and his action is often good, but he rants abominably, and on the whole is no actor at all. On Thursday, I hired a boat and got to Ardentinn—distance eight miles; there fished a few miles, and got six dozen; then walked to Strachur, but on the way cut my foot severely, and awoke on Friday morning dog-lame. With great difficulty I reached, on Friday, the waterfall above Inverary, and was obliged to stop in a small cottage there. On Saturday, I fished up the stream (as when with you), and killed eighteen dozen. When evening came I was eight miles from Achlian, and so lame that I could not walk a step. I procured, therefore, a cart to drag me there, where I arrived at eleven o'clock, and found a warm welcome. Yesterday I rested, and to-day intend going out in the boat for a little fishing. This wound in my heel will render my visit to Megerney impossible, for there is no horse-road, so I will write to-day informing Menzies of my mishap. Is not this a severe trial to one's temper?

\* A member of the Scottish bar, who married a sister of my father's friend, William Dunlop.

“The wound is in itself insignificant, but is just on the sole of my heel, and is much festered, about the size of a shilling, so that I cannot walk a single step without the greatest difficulty and pain.

“I shall ride from this, back to Greenock if possible. Immediately on getting this (which I expect will be Thursday forenoon), write that moment—directed to me at Achlian, *by Inverary*. On Wednesday the 8th, write to me at Miss Sym’s, Glasgow, where I will be on the 10th, and at Edinburgh, on Saturday the 11th, probably about six o’clock. Your other letters, of course, become useless. I will write again first opportunity.

“Thine with heart and soul till death,

“J. WILSON.”

The manner in which he wounded his foot is not a little characteristic. He does not mention the real cause of it to his wife, but curiously enough a story communicated by Dr. Smith, of Inverary, whose reminiscences have been already quoted from, explains this circumstance, the date of the occurrence he relates agreeing with that of the above letter :—

“At a point on the road near to the house which I now occupy, and close by the river-side, as he was on his way to Achlian, a large party of tinkers were pitching their tents. There were men, women, and children—a band—some preparing to go to fish for their supper in the adjoining pool, and some, more full of action, were leaping. They were tall, powerful young men, ready for any frolic, and all the *bonhomie* of Mr. Wilson’s nature was stirred in him. He joined the group; talked with them and leaped with them. They were rejoicing in their sport, when he, finding himself hard pressed, stripped off coat and shoes; but the river had had its channel once on the spot; it had left a sharp stone, which was only concealed by the thin coating of earth over it; his heel came down on that stone; it wounded him severely; and, unable to bear a shoe on, he had to go to Achlian. The tinkers would rather that the accident had happened to one of themselves, and they procured a cart in the neighborhood in which he was conveyed to Achlian. The heel was carefully dealt with there by all but himself. Mrs. Smith,\* then a little girl, tells me that her mother remonstrated often, but in vain; for he would fish, though scarcely able to limp;

\* Then Miss Campbell, daughter of Mr. Campbell, of Achlian.

and one day, as he was fishing from the shore, a large trout, such as Loch Awe is remarkable for, was hooked by him. His line was weak, and afraid to lose it, he cast himself into the loch, yielding to the motions of the strong creature until it became fatigued and manageable. Then he swam ashore with his victim in subjection, and brought it home; but he was without the bandage, and his heel bleeding copiously."

This was no unusual mode of fishing with my father. As the Shepherd remarked: "In he used to gang, out, out, out, and ever sae far out, frae the point o' a promontory, sinking aye further and further doon, first to the waist-band o' his breeks, then up to the middle button o' his waistcoat, then to the verra breist, then to the oxters, then to the neck, and then to the verra chin o' him, sae that you wunnerd how he could fling the flee; till last o' a' he would plump richt oot o' sight, till the Highlander on Ben Cruachan thoct him drooned. No he, indeed; sae he takes to the sooming, and strikes awa wi' ae arm, for the tither had haud o' the rod; and could ye believe't, though it's as true as Scripture, fishing a' the time, that no a moment o' the cloudy day might be lost; ettles\* at an island a quarter o' a mile aff, wi' trees, and an auld ruin o' a religious house, wherein beads used to be counted, and wafers eaten, and mass muttered hundreds o' years ago; and getting footing on the yallow sand or the green sward, he but gies himself a shake, and ere the sun looks out o' the clud, has hyucked a four-pounder, whom in four minutes (for it's a multiplying pirn the cretur uses) he lands, gasping through the giant gills, and glittering wi' a thousand spots, streaks, and stars, on the shore."†

With him the angler's silent trade was a ruling passion. He did not exaggerate to the Shepherd in the *Noctes* when he said that he had taken "a hundred and thirty in one day out of Loch Awe," as we see by his letters that even larger numbers were taken by him.

After the lapse of a week he again writes:—

"DEAREST JANE:—The Devil is a letter-sorter at the Edinburgh Post-Office, so your Glenorchy letter of Thursday has not been sent to the place of his birth. The Inverary one I got on Saturday, which told me of your welfare, and the brats, which is enough. Where the other is gone is known only to the old gentleman, who will assuredly be hanged one day or other.

\* Directs his course.

† *Noctes*.

"I promised not to write any more; but thinking you will not be angry with me, I have ventured to scribble a few lines more.

"My heel is in *statu quo* (two Latin words which Robert will explain to you).

"I tried a day's fishing in Loch Awe, and killed a dozen fine ones. Yesterday I rode Achlian's charger to Craig. All here are well, and desire their love to you. Miss Campbell has been poorly, but mends apace. I have received most hospitable welcome. I slept last night in our old room. To-day I limped up to Molloy with my fishing-rod. Mrs. M'Kay there has just been brought to bed of a son, who is doing well. They inquired most kindly for you, and were delighted to see me. What a fishing! In one pool I killed twenty-one trouts, all of them about two pounds each, and have just arrived in time for dinner at Craig, loaded so that I could hardly walk. I have dispatched presents to all around. Miss M'Intyre, with whom we dined, desires her love. Dr. M'Intyre is from home. I shall stay here all night, being tired. On Wednesday, I leave Achlian on horseback, so depend on seeing me on Saturday. That is our marriage-day. In you and in my children lies all my bliss on earth. Every field here speaks of thee. Thine forever,

"J. WILSON."

The next letter is two months later, the Court of Session having sat in the interval. Very probably, however, he was not particular in waiting till the last day of the summer sittings to start once more for his favorite Achlian and Loch Awe. I suspect the idea of eighteen dozen of trout out of the Aray would have influenced him more in these fine days than the mere chance of another brief before "the Lords" dispersed.

"ACHLIAN, *Monday, 22d July, 1816.*

"DEAREST JENNET:—Your letter of Thursday I received here on Saturday, and as Sir Richard Strahan said when he fell in with the French fleet, 'We were delighted.'

"The day after I wrote last, namely, Monday, I walked up to the wooden bridge and fished there, killing fifteen dozen. Unluckily the family from home. On Tuesday I dined with Captain Archibald Campbell and his fair daughters at their cottage. We visited on Loch Fyne side, and met a pleasantish, smallish party. On Wednesday I left Inverary at a quarter before four in the morning,



with young James M'Nicol, brother to Miss M'Nicol, and fished some moor farms about eight miles off; sport but moderate; fatigue great; slept like a top. On Thursday I dined with Mr. M'Gibbon, the clergyman, who lives in that nice place beyond the wooden bridge. Passed a most social evening, and stayed all night. On Friday I went to another class of moor farms, about eight miles from the wooden bridge, along with young Mr. Bell; had very bad sport indeed; separated from him by chance, and after wandering among the hills for hours, got to the wooden bridge about ten at night. Found Miss Giles Bell and her sister returned; got supper, and in several hours their brother arrived in despair, thinking I was drowned. On Saturday morning returned to Inverary and packed up. Found a gig going to Dalmally which carried me snugly to Achlian, where I found all the worthy inhabitants well. On Sunday, crossed the Loch to Hayfield, and dined with Mr. M'Neill, of that place.\* In the evening a most terrific thunder-storm.

"To-day fished in Loch Awe; bad day; killed only one dozen, and returned to dinner; hitherto my sport has been but poorish. I feel unaccountably lazy, and doubt if I shall go to Rannoch at all.

"I am quite well, but more fatigued than you can imagine, so my letter is but shortish.

"Immediately on getting this, write me to Achlian, by Inverary, and send Barton's letter. Let thine be put into the Post-office before seven o'clock in the evening. You will please me by not going on board the 'Ramillies' till I return. But I do not countermand you, nor will I be the least angry if you do go. Bless the small creatures. Everlastingly yours,  
J. WILSON."

"ACHLIAN, August 2, 1816.

"MY DEAREST JANE:—Since I last wrote you I have been where there are no posts or post-offices, and till to-day have had no opportunity of sending you a letter. I suppose you are incensed, and so am I. Your letters have reached me safely, but not Barton's, which I have never seen. Therefore hope you have forgotten to send it to the post; if you have, keep it till I see thee. I have been over the moor of Rannoch, in Glencoe, and other glens near it; at the foot of Loch Ericht, and the country round Loch Treig; I have

\* "My poor dear old friend M'Neill, of Hayfield. God rest his soul! It is in heaven. At ninety he was as lifeful as a boy at nineteen." *Noctes*.

seen great scenery, undergone hardships, and am in good health. I returned to Achlian a few days ago, but the post was one day missed, and I sent this by a private hand to Dalmally, and thence to Edinburgh. I have had much good fishing, much bad, and much tolerable—picture of human life. Keep all letters till I see thee. But immediately on getting this write to me, care of Robert Findlay, Esq., Miller Street, Glasgow. I shall be there ere long, day I cannot fix, because conveyances are doubtful, but you will be looking upon me with a pleasant countenance somewhere about the 7th or 8th of this month. Recollect I left you on the 11th, so it is not so long since I went away as you said in your letter.

“I suppose Cadell wished to see me about the *Edinburgh Review*. This is conjecture. What he calls agreeable to me may turn out to be supercilious praise, saying I am not a good boy. Farewell.  
“J. WILSON.”

From Achlian he now worked his way across to Blair Athole, whence he writes to tell how he fares. He is “lame in the knee,” and has “not been in bed,” but he is just starting, at 6.30 A. M., as if under vow or penance, on a journey of thirty-four miles!

“DEAREST JANE:—It is half-past six morning, and I am just setting off to Braemar, anxious for your letter. I will write you at length first moment I have an opportunity, which will be in two or three days; meanwhile I am well, though lame in my knee.

“Obey all your directions, but, in addition to them, write on Friday (this day week) to me, care of Alexander M’Kenzie, Esq., Millbank, Dingwall. I have not been in bed, and am just setting off thirty-four miles. God bless and preserve thee and ours everlastingly!  
“J. WILSON.

“BRIDGE OF TILT, BLAIR ATHOLE,  
*Friday, August, 1816.*”

So northward he goes with his lame knee, as one burdened with some great exploring quest, which must be fulfilled at all hazards, and through all fatigues. Through the loneliest glens, up the highest mountain-tops, careless of weather, and finding “adventures” in the least likely places, he holds on to the north, and again to the west, till we light on him, after twenty-five miles’ walk, sitting down to address his wife from the hospitable abode of his friend Mr. M’Kenzie:—

“MILLBANK, DINGWALL,  
Wednesday, 13th August.

“MY DEAREST JANE :—I wrote you last from Abergeldy, and I am afraid you may have been longing for a letter before this reaches you. Such, I hope, is not my vanity, but mutual kind love; may it be our only blessing here and hereafter, and I am satisfied.

“From Abergeldy I started (I think the day after I wrote you) and proceeded to the head of the Don river. My burden was truly insupportable. The same evening I got to Inchrorry on the river Aven or Avon, a most lovely place, perhaps the most so in Scotland, where I slept. Next day (Thursday) I got to Tomintoul,\* where I slept, a wild and moorland village. Next day was the annual market, and it rained incessantly. My adventures there I will give you afterwards, and they were not to my discredit. On Saturday morning (still most rainy) I proceeded to Grantown, fourteen miles, where I arrived at night, and slept comfortably; the country most wild and desolate. About five miles from this live the Miss Grants, of Lifforchy. Thither on Sunday morning I repaired, and found them all at home and well, with a brother lately arrived from the East Indies. On Monday morning at three o’clock, he and I started to the top of Cairngorm, one of the highest mountains in Scotland, and returned at eight o’clock in the evening; I tired, and he sick even unto death. On Tuesday morning, I left the house and walked on towards Inverness, to a place called Craga, distance twenty-seven miles. It rained incessantly, and I had both toothache and earache. On Wednesday morning I started from Craga, and this same Wednesday reached Millbank, Mr. M’Kenzie’s house, from which I now write after a walk of twenty-five miles. So much then for a general sketch, which I will fill up when I am once more with you.

“I find from your letter that our sweet ones are all unwell, and likely to be so. That last letter was dated Friday, August 8th. I am miserable about them. To-morrow, that is, Thursday, August 14th, and that one day, I must rest here, for the fatigue I have lately undergone has been beyond any thing I ever experienced. On Friday, the 15th, I shall start again, and hope to be at Achlian,

\* Of this place he says in the *Noctes* :—“Drinking, dancing, swearing, and quarrelling going on all the time in Tomintoul, James, for a fair there is a wild rendezvous, as we both know, summer and winter; and thither flock the wildest spirits of the wildest clans.”

Dugald Campbell's, by Inverary, in a week from that time. So *immediately* on receiving this, which I think will be on Saturday, 16th, write to me to that direction. Say you write on the day after you receive mine, whatever that day may be, and I will immediately write you on my arrival there; I will lose no time in getting there, and I think in about a fortnight I shall see you. I trust in God the accounts will be good when I reach Achlian. But to that point I will go as soon as I can. I have undergone great fatigue, and much bad weather, and long for your kind bosom, so help me God! Inverary is nearly 150 miles from this, and no carriages, so I must walk all the way. Once more, I pray to God to take care of our beloved children, and to make them well to us. To take a chance of hearing from you, write one line to Post-Office, Fort-William, the moment you receive this, telling me about the children. But write as above mentioned to Achlian, as I may be at Fort-William before your letter reaches. In short, I will go to Achlian as soon as possible, and from your letter there will judge if I am instantly to return home. No delay will take place. I am most anxious about the children. God bless you! and may the Almighty recover to us all our sweet ones! The chicken-pox is not a bad complaint, so we need not fear; poor Johnny fainting! But they are all dear. So farewell, yours tenderly,

JOHN WILSON."

The adventures of which he says "they were not to my discredit," were doubtless made known to Mrs. Wilson, but never came to the ears of the younger generation, being considered either too trivial, or after many years forgotten. They were not forgotten, however, in the North, for in a recent letter from Mr. Alexander McKenzie, Dingwall, this very adventure is thus narrated:—

"I am the person specially honored by that visit. Mr. Wilson came to me (then living at Millbank near Dingwall) in such peculiar circumstances as leads me to think he would have made some memoranda about it. He had been fishing in the Dee, and by accident came to a fair at Tomintoul, where he saw a poor man much oppressed and ill-used by another, who was considered the bully of the country, and whose name, I think, he said was Grant. Circumstances led to Mr. Wilson putting off his coat and giving this fellow a thrashing, but on picking up the coat he found it rifled of his pocket-book, containing all his money but a very few shil-

lings! In this state he left for Carrbridge, where he passed the night without more than enough of refreshment. In the morning he left for Inverness, and calling at the Post-Office he found many letters to his address; but not having money to pay the postage, the person in charge declined trusting him! He then crossed Kessock Ferry with only a few pence, and arrived at Dingwall about midday, where I happened to be at the time, and was quite overjoyed at seeing him. He was dressed in white duck trousers covered with mud, and his white hat entirely so with fishing gear!

“As he proceeded to my house, distant about a mile, he shortly detailed his late adventure, and said he was almost famished. My first work was to send to Inverness for his letters, after which we enjoyed one of the most delightful evenings of my life. He kindly rested himself for several days, and I accompanied him through the most romantic and impassable parts of the country to Kintail, where I parted with him at the house of a worthy mutual friend, George Laidlaw.

“In our rambles, which included some curious incidents, and which occupied several days, he fished wherever a loch or stream presented itself. We avoided all *roads* entirely, and lived with the shepherds.”

Such stories as these might, to a certain extent, justify that excellent old lady, Mrs. Grant of Laggan, in making the following observations, when, in writing to a friend, she burst forth upon the eccentricities of the young poet:—

“Did I ever tell you of one of the said poets we have in town here—indeed, one of our intimates—the most provoking creature imaginable! He is young, handsome, witty; has great learning, exuberant spirits, a wife and children that he doats on (circumstances one would think consolidating), and no vice that I know of, but, on the contrary, virtuous principles and feelings. Yet his wonderful eccentricity would put anybody but his wife wild. She, I am convinced, was actually made on purpose for her husband, and has that kind of indescribable controlling influence over him that Catherine is said to have had over that wonderful savage the Czar Peter.

“Pray look at the last *Edinburgh Review*, and read the favorable article on John Wilson’s ‘City of the Plague.’ He is the person in question.”

In the month of September he again visited Elleray, accompanied by the eldest of his little girls. On his way he wrote to his wife:—

“PENRITH, *Friday, September 20th,*  
*Evening, Nine o'clock, 1816.*”

“DEAREST JANE:—We got safely to Hawick about ten o'clock; found a comfortable room and fire; supped, and went to bed. Maggy and Mary Topham\* drank tea at the fireside in the same room with us, and were in bed by eleven. Maggy stood her journey well; made observations on the moon, and frightened me with the beast several times. We left Hawick in a chaise at ten next morning, and proceeded to Knox's, where we dined. We left that by eight o'clock, and reached Longtown by eleven.

“I supped the ladies and bedded them in half an hour. We left Longtown after breakfast, at ten o'clock; came through Carlisle, and dined at five o'clock. Maggy drank tea at seven, and immediately after retired to bed with Mary Topham, and I believe they are both sound asleep at this moment.

“To-morrow morning at six o'clock we leave this for Patterdale, and I think most probably will remain all night at Bowness. On Sunday will reach Hollow Oak to dinner. Nothing can excel Maggy's behavior—she is perfect; all eyes that looked on her loved her, and Miss Knox, I understand from Mary Topham, cut off a lock of her hair to keep. Merit is sure of being discovered at last.

“She has sat on my knee almost the whole way, and I feel I love her better than ever I did before. She will be an angelic being like her gentle mother. I will write from Hollow Oak on Monday, so you will hear on Tuesday or Wednesday. Write to me on Tuesday, care of Mrs. Ullock, Bowness.

“Give me all family and other news. Love Johnny for my sake, and teach him some prayers and hymns before I return.

“Thy affectionate husband,

“JOHN WILSON.”

In another letter a few days later, dated from Elleray, he gives rapid notes of his doings; how he attended a ball which was “most dull, though it gave universal satisfaction;” how next day he “lay in bed all day,” and the next “crowed all day like a cock at Elleray, to

\* Nursery-maid.

Robertson's\* infinite delight;" "the next day De Quincey and William Garnet dined with me here, Billy and Mrs. Balmer officiating." He adds, "Party here very agreeable," which one can well believe. "To-morrow," he goes on, "Garnet, Robertson, and self take coach to Keswick, and thence proceed to Buttermere and Ennerdale. I

\* His friend Patrick, afterwards Lord Robertson, one of the most witty and warm-hearted of men. He was born in 1793; called to the Scotch bar in 1815; elected Dean of Faculty in 1842; raised to the bench in 1843; died in 1855. Lockhart wrote many a rhyming epitaph upon him, one of which is quoted elsewhere. On another occasion, he is reported to have written, "Peter Robertson is 'a man'" to use his own favorite quotation, "cast in Nature's amplest mould. He is admitted to be the greatest corporation lawyer at the Scotch bar; and he is a vast poet as well as a great lawyer. Silence, gentlemen, for a song by Peter Robertson:—

"Come listen all good gentlemen of every degree;  
Come listen all ye lady-birds, come listen unto me;  
Come listen all you laughing ones, come listen all ye grave;  
Come listen all and every one, while I do sing a stave.

"One morning, I remember me, as I did lay in bed,  
I felt a strange sensation come a throbbing through my head;  
And I thought unto myself, thinks I, Where was it I did dine?  
With whom? Oh, I recall the name,—'twas Baron Brandywine.

"Let me see: Oh, after turtle we had punch, the spirits' rain,  
And, if I'm not mistaken, we had leed hock and champagne,  
And sundry little sundries, all which go to make one merry,  
An intervening toss, or so, of some superb old sherry.

"Well, then, to be dramatic, we must needs imbibe a dram  
(A very sorry sort of pun—the perpetrator Sam);  
And then to port and claret with great industry we fell,  
Which, sooth to say, appeared to suit our party pretty well.

"Then biscuits all bedevilled we designedly did munch,  
To gain a proper relish for that glorious bowl of punch,  
But after that I cannot say that I remember much,  
Except a hiccup-argument 'bout Belgium and the Dutch.

"Such were my recollections, and such I sing to you,  
Good gentlemen and lady-birds—upon my soul it's true;  
And if you wish to bear away the moral of my song,  
It's this—for all your headaches let the reasons still be *strong*."

I think I detect Mr. Lockhart's hand in the following good wishes:—

"Oh, Petrus, Pedro, Peter, which you will,  
Long, long thy radiant destiny fulfil,  
Bright be thy wit, and bright the golden ore,  
Paid down in fees for thy deep legal lore.  
Bright be thy claret, brisk be thy champagne,  
Thy whiskey-punch a vast, exhaustless main,  
With thee disporting on its joyous shore,  
Of that glad spirit quaffing ever more.  
Keen be thy stomach, potent thy digestion,  
And long thy lectures on 'the general question,'  
While young and old swell out the general strain,  
We ne'er shall look upon his like again."

will write thee on Saturday, fixing my day of return. I go to Ulverstone to see Maggy, etc. Don't hire a servant without seeing and approving her—mind that. Write me on Saturday as before. Put Elleray on the letter, else a surgeon at Bowness will read it. Love to Ung\* and others.

“Eternally yours,  
“J. W.”

From the excursion with Garnet and Robertson he is hurried back to Elleray on business, and writes in haste:—

“ELLERAY, *Sept. 28th*, 1816.

“MY DEAREST WIFE:—I have not half a minute to spare. Immediately on receiving this, send me the inventory of every thing at Elleray. If it is too large to go by post, copy it over in one long sheet, and send it off on Thursday. If it can go by post, write on Tuesday—same day you receive this. On receiving your letter to-morrow, I will write you at length, and tell you when I come home, which will be immediately. It was impossible to leave this hitherto, for reasons I will explain. You will have heard of Maggy since I saw her. I will see her on Wednesday, and tell you all about her. Whatever my anxieties and sorrows are or may be in this life, I have in your affection a happiness paramount to all on earth, and I think that I am happier in the frowns of fortune, with that angelic nature, than perhaps even if we had been living in affluence. God forever bless you, and my sweet family, is the prayer of your loving and affectionate husband,

“J. WILSON.”

There are no more letters or memorials of that year. The next brings us into a new field, which calls for a chapter to itself.

\* A playful soubriquet for his eldest son.





Patrick Robertson, Esq.—From a sketch by the late Professor Edward Forbes.