

every respect similar. I find that my remarks upon several of your other poems must be reserved for another letter. If you think this one deserves an answer, a letter from Wordsworth would be to me a treasure. If your silence tells me that my letter was beneath your notice, you will never again be troubled by one whom you consider as an ignorant admirer. But, if your mind be as amiable as it is reflected in your poems, you will make allowance for defects that age may supply, and make a fellow-creature happy, by dedicating a few moments to the instruction of an admirer and sincere friend,

“JOHN WILSON.

“PROFESSOR JARDINE'S COLLEGE, GLASGOW,
24th May, 1802.

“WILLIAM WORDSWORTH, Esq.,
Ambleside, Westmoreland, England.” *

CHAPTER III.

LOVE AND POETRY.—LIFE AT OXFORD.

1803-'08.

“THEN, after all the joys and sorrows of these few years, which we now call transitory, but which our BOYHOOD felt as if they would be endless—as if they would endure forever—arose upon us the glorious dawning of another new life,—YOUTH, with its insupportable sunshine and its agitating storms. Transitory, too, we now know, and well deserving the same name of dream. But while it lasted, long, various, and agonizing, as, unable to sustain the eyes that first revealed to us the light of love, we hurried away from the parting hour, and looking up to moon and stars, invocated in sacred oaths, hugged the very heavens to our heart.”

These sentences contain one among many references in my father's writings to an episode in his early life, of which, had we only these incidental and sometimes imaginative allusions to guide us, no more

* The answer to this letter will be found at page 192, vol. i., of *Memoirs of W. Wordsworth*, by C. Wordsworth, D. D., 1851. For the foregoing letter I am indebted to Mr. W. Wordsworth, son of the poet, who kindly sent it to me, and also pointed out the reply, which is introduced in the *Memoirs*, without a hint as to whom it was addressed.

could be said by the veracious biographer, than that, at the age when nature so ordains, this ardent and precocious youth was passionately in love. So brief and general a statement, however, would but very poorly express the realities of the case, or indicate the depth of the influence which that first overwhelming passion exerted on the whole nature of John Wilson. As he has himself said, "What is mere boy-love but a moonlight dream? Who would weep—who would not laugh over the catastrophe of such a bloodless tragedy? . . . But love affairs, when the lovers are full-grown men and women, though perhaps twenty years have not passed over either of their heads, are at least tragi-comedies, and, sometimes, tragedies; closing, if not in blood, although that too when the Fates are angry, yet in clouds that darken all future life, and that, now and then, lose their sullen blackness only when dissolving, through the transient sunshine, in a shower of tears." Such a love affair was this, now for the first time to be made known beyond a circle consisting of some three or four persons that are alive.

In that note-book, already made use of, the names of two ladies frequently are noted. It may be seen that his visits to them were not paid after the fashion of formal courtesy, and that Miss W. and Miss M. had made Dychmont to him a charmed place. Towards autumn, when walks along the banks of the Clyde begin to be delightful, these notices are of almost daily occurrence. One day he calls at Dychmont; then he drinks tea with Miss W. and Miss M.: he rides to Cumbernauld with Miss W.: "Very pleasant and agreeable ride;" again, "drank tea at Dychmont;" then for the next three days at home, and begins his essay "On the Faculty of Imagination;" next evening it is again, "Drank tea at Dychmont;" and so on through the month,—nothing but Dychmont, walking, riding, breakfasting, dining, supping "at Dychmont," or "with Dychmont ladies" somewhere.

This attractive place was but a simple farm-house, unadorned and almost homely, but the country around it was delightful. The hill, from which it takes its name, is part of the dukedom of Hamilton, and from its summit the valley of the Clyde, from Tinto to the mountains of the west, presents a view of great beauty. No portion of the Clyde is without beauty; for the most part, more noble than the Rhine, with a sweep of water quite as majestic, it flows through a variety of country ever embellished by its presence. Along the

banks of the Clyde and Calder were all the favorite walks of John Wilson, for there were "Ha lside," "Calder Bank," "Millheugh," "Calderwood," and "Torrance," which, in later years, carried from Dychmont its attraction, and became the scene of joy and sorrow, deep as ever moved a young poet's heart.

The occupants of Dychmont were two ladies, Miss W. and Margaret, as I may simply name her; the one the guardian of the other, an "orphan-maid" of "high talent and mental graces," with fascination of manners sufficient to rivet the regard of a youth keenly alive to such charms. At the time of Wilson's residence in Glasgow these ladies were the most intimate friends he had beyond the circle of his youthful companions. During winter they lived in the College buildings, and were frequent visitors at Professor Jardine's, so that every opportunity existed for the cultivation of a friendship that gradually ripened into love, "life-deep" and passionate on the one side; on the other sincere and tender, but tranquil and self-contained, as if presaging, with woman's instinct, the envious barriers that were to keep their two lives from flowing into one.

At the date when their acquaintance began, John Wilson had that composed and perfected manner which is acquired intuitively by the gentler sex, and gives them an advantage in society rarely possessed by boys at the same age. Thus Margaret, though no longer a school-girl, was delighted to find a companion so congenial as to excite at once her interest and friendship; while young Wilson saw in the "orphan-maid" a creature to admire and love, with all that fervor which belonged to his poetical temperament. Their occupations encouraged the growth of graceful accomplishments; nor were their rides and walks merely pastimes of pleasure; sterner matter arose from those early hours, and we have words of the past that make every line of this love-passage a tale of sorrow, sad enough for tears. A few years of this bright spring-tide of youth pass away, and one heart feels the gentle quiet of its womanly interest gliding insensibly and surely into something more deep and agitating, as does the dewy calm of daybreak into the fervent splendor of noon. The love of a poet is seldom so submissive as that which long ago wrote its touching confession in these words:—

"Brama assai, poco spera, e nulla chiede."

Trace this story further, and we see two years later that deeper

feelings were brought into play; and though the high-minded Margaret gave no assurance to her lover entitling him to regard her heart as bound to him, it is at least apparent that when, at the end of that time, he left Scotland for Oxford, their communings had been such that the heart of the young poet looked back to them as recalling memories of "unmingled bliss." There is in the essay on "Streams" an imaginative episode, manifestly *founded* on reality; but as manifestly designed to be a skilful mystification of his real and unforgotten experience. As he *naïvely* hints at the end, "there is some truth in it;" truth to this extent, undoubtedly, that in "that gloomy but ever-glorious glen," of which he speaks, young John Wilson and Margaret did meet many a time, and hold sweet converse together; that to her sympathizing ear he poured forth the aspirations of as pure and ardent a love as ever dwelt in the breast of youth; and that the recollection of those happy hours, and of her many modest charms, working in a nature of fiery susceptibility and earnestness, drove him afterwards, when clouds came over the heaven of his dreams, to the very brink of despair. The coloring of imagination has transformed the picture in "Streams" into a vision of things that never were; but there is no fiction in the description of that passion as having "stormed the citadel of his heart, and put the whole garrison to the sword," or, elsewhere, as "a life-deep love, call it passion, pity, friendship, brotherly affection, all united together by smiles, sighs, and tears."

Of his life, from the date last mentioned to the time of his leaving Glasgow for Oxford, I have unfortunately no memorial in the shape of letters, his correspondence with his aunt already referred to, who was his confidante and constant correspondent throughout, having been irretrievably lost. There has come to my hands, however, a memorial of his love for Margaret, consisting of an octavo volume of "Poems" in MS., written in that fair and beautiful hand which he wrote up to the time when (it is no fancy to say so) the "fever of the soul" begins to show itself in the impetuous tracings of his pen. It is without date, but must have been written before he left Glasgow. On the title-page, facing which are two dedicatory verses, is the inscription, "Poems on various subjects, by John Wilson," with a poetical quotation below. On the next leaf is this inscription:—

TO
MARGARET,
THE FOLLOWING LITTLE POEMS,
WHICH OWE ANY BEAUTY THEY POSSESS
TO THE DELICACY OF HER FEELINGS,
AND THE EMOTIONS SHE HAS INSPIRED,
ARE, AS A SMALL MARK
OF HIS ESTEEM AND REGARD,
INSCRIBED
BY HER WARMEST FRIEND AND SINCEREST ADMIRER,
JOHN WILSON.*

After this comes an elaborate preface of thirty-eight MS. pages, which, considering that it was the composition of a youth under eighteen, is very remarkable for the ease and grace of the style, the knowledge of poetical literature, the acute critical faculty, and the judicious and elevated sentiments which it displays. This Preface, and the poetical compositions to which it is prefixed, indicate sufficiently that the person to whom they were addressed must have possessed no ordinary mental qualities, and that the relation between her and the writer was founded on a true congeniality of feeling.

The poems are thirty-eight in number, including an "Answer" by Margaret to "Lines" of his. The titles, copied from the table of contents, are given below.† There are few of these compositions

* Then follow on the next page these lines:—

TO MARGARET.

If this small offering of a grateful heart
The thrill of pleasure to thy soul impart,
Or teach it e'er that magic charm to feel,
Which thy tongue knows so sweetly to reveal,
Blessed be the breathing language of the line
That speaks of grace and virtues such as thine;
Blessed be those hours, when, warmed by love and thee,
I poured the verse in trembling ecstasy!
Oh that the music which these lines contain
Flowed like the murmurs of thy holy strain,
When thy soft voice, clear-swelling, loves to pour
The tones of feeling in her pensive hour, etc.

† *Contents.*—Poem on the Immortality of the Soul. Henry and Helen; a Tale. Caledonia, or Highland Scenery. Verses to a Lady weeping at a Tragedy. The Disturbed Spirit; a Fragment. The Song of the Shipwrecked Slave. The Prayer of the Orphan. The Fate of Beauty. Feeling at parting from a beloved object. Lines on hearing a Lady play upon the Harp. Anna; a Song. Love. Florentine. Parental Affection. Elegy on the Death of Dr. Lockhart. Lines suggested by the fate of Governor Wall. Lines addressed to the Glasgow Volunteers. Osmond; an imitation of M. G. Lewis. The Pains of Memory. The Sun shines bright, etc. I know some people in this world, etc. A Wish. The Child of Misfortune. Mary. To a Lady who said she was not

in which there is not some fond allusion to the lady of his love, and the blissful hours spent by her side. The verses are often commonplace enough; but the sentiments are never other than refined. The adoration is unmistakably genuine, and, though fervent, respectful; tinged with a sense of gratitude that touches the sympathies even now. Occasionally the strain rises above mere versification into something of real poetry. I refer to this collection not because of its literary merits, but solely on account of its relation to his "Margaret," of whom, and the story of their love, more authentic accounts will be given from his correspondence.

From these gentle occupations, however, Wilson was called away to new scenes and pursuits, fitted to bring forth the whole energies of his many-sided character, but not of power enough to deaden in his heart the recollection of that beloved glen, of Bothwell Banks and Cruikstone's hoary walls, of Dychmont Hill and "her the Orphan Maid, so human yet so visionary," that made their very names dear to him forever.

"Many-towered Oxford" now summoned the young scholar away from the pleasant companionship of his Glasgow friends; and, in the month of June, 1803, he entered as a gentleman-commoner of Magdalen College. Full of life and enthusiasm, tall, strong, and graceful, quick-witted, well-read, and eloquent, of open heart and open hand, apt for all things honorable and manly, a more splendid youth of nineteen had seldom entered the "bell-chiming and cloistered haunts of Rhedicyna." The effect produced on his mind by the ancient grandeurs of Oxford, naturally stimulated his poetical temperament and heightened the interest of every study. For there hovered constantly around him suggestions of the high and solemn; he felt that he was in an abode fit for great men and sages, and his soul was elevated by the contemplation of his scholastic home. Beautifully does he recall in after days the memory of that inspiring time, when, in the fulness of hope and vigor, the fields of the future opened out before him, stretching upwards to the heights of fame, a-glitter in the dew of life's morning:—

"For having bidden farewell to our sweet native Scotland, and

a good judge of Poetry. Lines written at Bothwell Castle. Lines written at Cruikstone Castle. Lines written in Kenmore Hermitage. Lines written at Evening. Prince Charles's Address to his Army before the Battle of Culloden. Who to the pomp of burnish'd gold, etc. Petition of the Mearns Muir. Lines written in a glen by moonlight. Answer to the above Lines. The Feelings of Love. The Farewell.

kissed, ere we parted, the grass and the flowers with a show of filial tears—having bidden farewell to all her glens, now a-glimmer in the blended light of imagination and memory, with their cairns and kirks, their low-chimneyed huts and their high-turreted halls, their free-flowing rivers and lochs dashing like seas—we were all at once buried not in the Cimmerian gloom, but the cerulean glitter, of Oxford's ancient academic groves. The genius of the place fell upon us. Yes! we hear now, in the renewed delight of the awe of our youthful spirit, the pealing organ in that chapel called the Beautiful; we see the saints on the stained windows; at the altar the picture of one up Calvary meekly bearing the cross! It seemed, then, that our hearts had no need even of the kindness of kindred—of the country where we were born, and that had received the continued blessings of our enlarging love! Yet away went, even then, sometimes our thoughts to Scotland, like carrier-pigeons wafting love-messages beneath their unwearied wings! They went and they returned, and still their going and coming was blessed. But ambition touched us, as with the wand of a magician from a vanished world and a vanished time. The Greek tongue—multitudinous as the sea—kept like the sea sounding in our ears, through the stillness of that world of towers and temples. Lo! Zeno, with his arguments hard and high, beneath the porch! Plato divinely discoursing in grove and garden! The Stagyrte searching for truth in the profounder gloom! The sweet voice of the smiling Socrates, cheering the cloister's shade and the court's sunshine! And when the thunders of Demosthenes ceased, we heard the harping of the old blind glorious Mendicant, whom, for the loss of eyes, Apollo rewarded with the gift of immortal song! And that was our companionship of the dead!"*

Yet these new feelings, and all that fascination which belongs to novelty in "men and manners," could not efface the image of his old familiar Scottish home; and he writes:—

"It is not likely that I will ever like any place of study, that I may chance to live in again, so well as Glasgow College. Attachments formed in our youth, both to places and persons, are by far the strongest that we ever entertain.

"I consider Glasgow College as my mother, and I have almost a son's affection for her. It was there I gathered any ideas I may

* Old North and Young North," *Wilson's Works*.

possess; it was there I entered upon the first pursuits of study that I could fully understand or enjoy; it was there I formed the first binding and eternal friendships; in short, it was there I passed the happiest days of my life.

“I may even there have met with things to disturb me, but that was seldom; and I would, without hesitation, enter into an agreement with Providence, that my future life should be as happy as those days. I dare say I left Glasgow at the time I should have left it; my dearest companions had either gone before me, or were preparing to follow me; and had I stayed another year, perhaps my last best friends, Miss W. and Miss M., would not have been in College buildings; in that case I might as well have been at Japan.”

In this honest and unaffected language may be traced that power of local attachment, that clothed every home he found with a sacred interest, interweaving into all the dreams of his memory associations that recalled either some day of unalloyed joy, or some moments of sorrow, hallowed in memory with the “tender grace of a day that is dead.”

Of his studies and manner of life at Oxford I have no very minute or extensive memorials. That he was a hard student is sufficiently proved, both by the relics of his industry and by the manner in which he passed his final examination. That he also tasted of the pleasures and diversions open to a lively young Oxonian, possessed of abundant resources,* is only to say that he *was* a young man, and lived at Oxford for three years and a half. But the general impression that he led what is called a “fast life,” and was not a reading man, is by no means correct. His wonderful physical powers gave him indeed great advantages, enabling him to overtake a larger amount of work in a short time than weaker frames could attempt, and to recover with rapidity the loss of hours spent in depressing gloom or hilarious enjoyment. But with all his unaffected relish for the delights of sense, his was a soul that could never linger long among them, without making them “stepping-stones to

* His father had left him an unencumbered fortune of £50,000. I find the following calculation in one of his memorandum-books, apparently made soon after his coming to Oxford:—“Expenses necessary for an Oxford life for five months amount to about £170; that doubled, to £340; and for the other two months, £50, makes £400 the very least possible.” I am afraid the “necessary” expenses turned out to be very far short of the actual. The book contains an account of expenditure somewhere up to the month of October 1803, amounting to about £150, which may be considered moderate. But not long after there occurs this significant note:—“I find that I cannot balance my accounts, therefore will henceforth keep only general ones.”

higher things." Many, doubtless, were his wild pranks and jovial adventures, and for a brief space, as we shall find, he gave himself up, in the agony of blighted hopes, to "unbridled dissipation," if so he might drown the memory of an insupportable grief. All such excess, however, was alien to his nature, which from childhood to old age, preserved that freshness and purity of feeling imparted by Heaven to all true poets, and in few instances utterly lost.

His life at Magdalen College, and his arrangements in regard to his studies, were marked by the same attention to order as had directed his daily course when in Glasgow. It was not till some time after he had left Scotland, that the agitation of harassing thoughts caused a change in the steadiness of his habits, leading him into strange eccentricities in search of peace. But the restlessness and occasional deep depression of his spirit were never of long continuance, otherwise the result might have been destructive. Fortunately, the strength and buoyancy of his nature were too great to be overcome, and he passed naturally from one condition of feeling to another, according as his spirit was soothed or agitated by outward circumstances. Thus, in the midst of all his sorrows, he is found throwing himself not unfrequently into the full tide of the life that surrounds him, as if he had no other thought; while again he springs off upon some distant walk that takes him miles away, to seek solace in the solitude of the valleys, or drown care among the crowds of a city. Nothing, however, damped his ardor in acquiring knowledge, or in expressing admiration for those who inspired it by their writings. The heroes he worshipped were numerous; and those he loved best have had their beauties recorded in essays of much discriminating power and taste.

One of his first steps for methodizing the results of his study, and improving his mind, was the commencement of a commonplace-book, a valuable exercise which he had already begun on a small scale in Glasgow, probably by the advice of Professor Jardine. Of these commonplace-books several volumes more or less complete are still extant, giving evidence of an industry and a systematic habit of study very inconsistent with the notion that the writer was an idle or desultory student.*

* "Volume I." is prefaced in the following philosophical style, a few days after his arrival in Oxford: the elaborate plan of study indicated was not, of course, rigidly adhered to:—

"In the following pages I propose to make such remarks upon the various subjects of polite literature as have been suggested to my mind during the course of my studies, by the perusal of

It will be observed, from the extracts I have subjoined, that he writes of the manner in which his work is to be arranged with considerable confidence; a tone observable in all he says, not the result of mere youthful self-complacency, but of that consciousness of power which accompanies genius, quickened by the freshness of new studies, and an increasing capacity to discern and appreciate the beauties and difficulties of the subjects laid before him. The various compositions resulting from the above plan, which have been preserved, give the same impression of easy power and well-balanced judgment, combined with a sensitiveness keenly alive to delicacy of thought, and a ready sympathy with those feelings which are excited by natural causes. Unlike most juvenile essays, they display no affected or maudlin sentiment; there is no exaggeration or "fine writing;" the characteristic qualities, in fact, are clearness and sagacity, the true foundations of good criticism; forming, in conjunction with wide knowledge and sympathies, the *beau-idéal*, afterwards in him exemplified, of what a critic should be, whose judgments will live as *parts* of literature, and not merely talk *about* it. As an example of the qualities now indicated, I may mention

writers upon the different branches of human knowledge; reflections upon law, history, philosophy, theology, and poetry, will be classed under separate heads; and if my information upon the useful and interesting subject of political economy can be reduced to any short discussions upon disputed or fundamental principles, or to a collection of maxims, such as form the groundwork of wider inquiries, observations upon the different theories of economists will form part of my projected plan. In following out this general view, it will frequently happen that I shall have occasion to enter fully into the discussion of questions that have been merely suggested to me by the allusion of authors; and, accordingly, essays of some length will constitute a considerable part of my plan.

"With regard to the department of poetry, original verses of my own composition will be frequently introduced, sometimes with the view to illustrate a principle, and often with no other end than self-gratification.

"If, in the course of my epistolary correspondence, any interesting subjects of literature should be discussed, thoughts thus communicated to me will be inserted in the words of the writer, under the head to which they may belong, and accompanied by my own remarks upon them.

"Should any reflections upon men and manners occur to my mind, even with regard to the general characters of mankind, or the particular dispositions of acquaintances and friends, they shall be written down as they occur, without any embellishment.

"In short, this commonplace-book, or whatever else it may be called, will contain, as far as it goes, a faithful representation of the state of my mind, both in its moments of study and retirement. I will endeavor to concentrate the different radii of information upon literary topics, impressions with regard to human life, and feelings of my own heart, in cases when that can be done with good effect. In referring to these pictures of my mind at different periods, I shall be able to estimate the progress I have made in intellectual acquirements, and the various changes that have taken place in my modes of thinking and feeling.

"I shall learn to know myself. In future times it will be pleasing to behold what I once was and what I once thought; and if I contemplate the acquirements of my youth with any thing like contempt, it will, I trust, proceed from a conviction of real superiority and virtue.

"MAGDALEN COLLEGE, June 8, 1803."

an essay out of the first of these two commonplace-books, "On the Poetry of Drummond," showing a most discriminating appreciation of a poet whose genius, as he justly says, has never received due acknowledgment. This essay is followed by a very elaborate and ingenious dissertation on the question, "Why have the Egyptians never been remarkable for poetry?" a curious question, which, so far as I am aware, has never formed the subject of special observation. A considerable portion of the volume is occupied with a translation of Sir William Jones's Observations on Eastern Poetry, and of the specimens, which are very happily rendered. Under date June 27th is the sketch of a proposed poem on the flight of the Israelites out of Egypt, which does not appear, however, to have been entered on. A volume seems to have been set aside for each of the chief branches of study, which from time to time engaged his attention. Some of these are probably lost; and those which remain want a good many leaves in some places. One bears the heading **LAW**, and contains a survey of the municipal law of England, apparently founded on Blackstone. Another is headed **THEOLOGY**, and contains a careful review and summary of the evidences of Christianity, based on the study of Paley. Another was intended for **HISTORY**, but contains, besides some general observations on the study of History, only an essay "concerning Ireland." Another, devoted to his miscellaneous subjects, contains a considerable number of essays and reflections, some pretty elaborate, and displaying a remarkable grasp and comprehensiveness of mind as well as vivacity and grace of style. The following are some of the subjects treated of: The Fear of Death; Female Beauty; Dissipation; Chastity; Religious Worship; The Old Ballad Mania; The Edinburgh Review; The Study of History; The Neglect of Genius in Britain; The Present State of Europe; Longinus as a Critic; The Tendency of Little's Poems; Duelling; Modern Poetry; The Martial Character of the Danes; The Decline of the Moorish Power in Spain; The Influence of Climate. These interesting volumes indicate altogether a very extensive range of study, and thorough mastery of particular topics. It must be remembered, too, that these were but the occasional exercises which filled up the intervals of a complete and successful course of classical study. The various poetical effusions and sketches for proposed poems, with which some of the volumes are to a great extent filled, belong manifestly to a

later period. The most important among these are the original draught of several cantos of the "Isle of Palms," which will call for due notice in a subsequent chapter.

The choice of friends is one of those things which most bring out a man's character and power of discrimination. On this topic I find the following sentences addressed to Margaret:—

"— is a being in whom I have been most grievously disappointed. When I was first introduced to him, I was prejudiced in his favor, for three reasons:—*First*, He was grave, and did not take great part in the conversation, which turned chiefly upon dogs and horses! *secondly*, He was, as I thought, something like Alexander Blair; and, *thirdly*, I was informed he studied a great deal. I accordingly thought that I had fallen upon a good companion. For some time I believed that I had formed a right judgment, thought him a sensible fellow, and, from obscure hints that he dropped, took it into my head that he was a poet. Having, however, one day got into an argument with him concerning the meaning of a line in Homer, I observed an ignorance in him which I was sorry for, and a degree of stupid obstinacy that I despised. This passed; and speaking one day of the Prince, commonly called the 'Pretender,' he thought proper to remark that his title to the throne was no greater than mine.

"With this I did not altogether agree, and having stated my reasons for dissenting from him, discovered that he was entirely ignorant of the history of his own country. Ignorance so gross as this is at all times pitiable, but more so when disguised under pretended knowledge. I accordingly gradually withdrew from his acquaintance, always preserving strict civility and politeness. At last, having judged it proper to be witty towards me, I wrote an epigram upon him, which it seems he did not like; so he now keeps a very respectful distance. He is a compound of good-nature, obstinacy, ignorance, honor, and conceit, but the bad ingredients are strongest."

The next portrait is of a more pleasing nature:—

"— is a youth of such reserved manners, that although I was first introduced to him, I scarcely spoke twenty words to him to which I received any other answer than Yes, or No, for the first twenty days. Now, I know him rather better, and begin to like him.

"He sometimes condescends to laugh at a joke, but never to make one. He is a very close student, and I believe the first scholar in

the College among the gentlemen-commoners. His father is the best Greek scholar in England, and I have given this youth the surname of Sophocles, a famous Greek tragedian. He has a taste for the Fine Arts, and paints, and plays upon the piano; but he is the worst hand at both I ever saw or heard. He is good-natured, and a gentleman."

Another still more genial companion is spoken of in the same letter:—

"— is a young man of large fortune, and still larger prospects, so he does not think it worth his while to study much; but he is naturally very clever; is an elegant classical scholar, writes good verses, and has very amiable dispositions. He lives in the same stair with me, so we are often together, and I am very fond of him. His cousin is also a clever fellow, has lived long in dashing life in London, and is intimate with Kinnaird, Lamb, Lewis, Moore, and other wits in London; 'a merrier man, within the limits of becoming mirth, I never spent an hour's talk withal.' He delights in quizzical verses, and we are writing together a poem called *Magdalen College*, which, should we ever complete, I will send to you."

The journal breaks off here, and we find no more such familiar sketches of "men and manners," but more serious matter, for whatever bears upon work is treated with earnest respect. His obviously methodical study obtained for him that clearness of perception and correctness of knowledge, without which no mind perfectly performs its work. Accuracy may in fact be called the foundation and the stronghold of all properly directed mental energy. There is no fault more common than want of accuracy, and none that might be so easily cured. Great intellect never has it, though cleverness may; and there was no fault of which my father was more intolerant. He often used to say to his children, in a spirit of fun, "You know I am never wrong? Whatever I state is correct; whatever I say is right." It was truly the case with regard to his information.

The early efforts of genius are always interesting, and in his case they are enhanced in value, when it is considered with what they were combined. Very rarely does it happen that the same individual possesses an equal proportion of mental and bodily activity, of intellect and imagination; and the seductions that lie in the way of a youth so gifted, whose path of life is smoothed by fortune, must be taken into account in estimating the use made of his powers. No

doubt conscious strength is in itself a spur to high achievements, and the enviable possession of great gifts of mind and body gives, as it were, two lives, fitting a man for a Titan's work. It was this combination of gifts that made Wilson singular among the men of his time; and the preservation of their harmony was proof that, amid the various influences tending to overthrow the balance, a healthy moral nature reigned supreme. The hard-working intellect was not led astray by the fertile imagination; the indefatigable bodily energy and exuberant sportiveness were still subservient to reason; and all worked healthily together, despite the recurring gloom of cheerless days, and the restless wanderings that hardly brought repose.

Judged by his poems alone, Wilson was to be classed with the most refined and sensitive of idealists; tested by some of his prose writings and his professional reputation, he was one of the most acute and eloquent of moralists. That such a man should have delighted in angling and in boating, in walking, running, and leaping, is not extraordinary; but that he should also have practically encouraged and greatly enjoyed the ruder pastimes of wrestling, boxing, and cock-fighting, may appear to some people anomalous. For the notion is not yet wholly extinct, that a poet should be a delicate and dreamy being, all heart and nerves, and certainly destitute of muscles; while the philosopher is held bound to be solemn and dyspeptic, dwelling in a region of clouds remote from all the business and pleasures of men. It is unnecessary, I presume, to show the absurdity of such views. But neither is it necessary to say a word in favor of the cock-pit or the prize-ring. Suffice it, that at the time when my father studied at Oxford, there were few young gentlemen, with any pretensions to manliness, by whom these now proscribed amusements were not zealously patronized. The fashions change with the generations, and the fox-hunter may ere long be considered a barbarian, and the deer-stalker a kind of assassin. Certain it is, that literary men do not now patronize cock-fighting, and the world would probably be scandalized to hear of Mr. Dickens inviting a party of friends to "a main."* Yet about this time there

* Although it has been said that the sage and refined Henry Mackenzie did not consider it inconsistent with his character to patronize this amusement, I must omit his name from the number. He was very fond of field-sports, but I am assured, on the best authority, that there is not a word of truth in the tradition, nor in the following capital story, quoted from Burgon's *Life of Tytler*:—"Drinking tea there (at Woodhouselee) one evening, we waited some time for Mr. Mackenzie's appearance; he came in at last, heated and excited: 'What a glorious evening I have had!' We thought he spoke of the weather, which was beautiful; but he went on to detail the intense en-

was a regular cock-pit in Edinburgh, patronized by "many gentlemen still alive," says the editor of Kay's *Biographical Sketches* in 1842, who would not, perhaps, relish being reminded of "their early passion for the birds."* John Wilson was a keen patron of this exciting, though, to our eyes, cruel amusement; so much so, that at Elleray he kept, as we shall presently find, a most extensive establishment of cocks, whose training and destinies evidently occupied no small share of his attention. While unable to appreciate fully the merits of this ancient but now almost extinct amusement, I would observe that, in his case, the mere pleasure in the exhibition of animal courage was connected with a more deep and comprehensive delight in the animals themselves. For, from those earliest days, when he made the acquaintance of peaseweeps in the midst of lightning and rain, he had been a keen observer of the habits of all kinds of birds; and he never ceased to take a special interest in them and their ways. I would also remark, that even in those years of student life, when he mixed with all sorts of company, and took his pleasure from the most diversified sources, the study of human nature was truly a great part of his enjoyment. He went among the various grades of men and character much as a geologist goes peering among the strata of the earth; and as a naturalist is not blamed who has his pet beasts and insects, to us repulsive, so perhaps may such a student of men and their manners be rightly fulfilling his vocation, even when he descends to occasional companionship with the stranger types of humanity.

Of his pugilistic skill, it is said by Mr. De Quincey, that "there was no man who had any talents, real or fancied, for thumping or being thumped, but he had experienced some *preeing* of his merits from Mr. Wilson. All other pretensions in the gymnastic arts he took a pride in humbling or in honoring; but chiefly his examinations fell upon pugilism; and not a man, who could either 'give' or 'take,' but boasted to have punished, or to have been punished by *Wilson of Mallen's*."†

One anecdote may suffice in illustration of this subject, having, I

joyment he had had in a cock-fight. Mrs. Mackenzie listened some time in silence; then looking up in his face, she exclaimed in her gentle voice, 'Oh, Harry, Harry, your feeling is all on paper!'

* A few years earlier a "main" was fought in the kitchen of the Assembly Rooms, then unfinished, between the counties of Lanark and Haddington, of which Kay gives a vivid picture,—photographing the better known cockers who were present on the occasion.

† *Edinburgh Literary Gazette*, vol. i., No. 6.

believe, the merit of being true. Meeting one day with a rough and unruly wayfarer, who showed inclination to pick a quarrel, concerning right of passage across a certain bridge, the fellow obstructed the way, and making himself decidedly obnoxious, Wilson lost all patience, and offered to fight him. The man made no objection to the proposal, but replied that he had better not fight with *him*, as he was so and so, mentioning the name of a (then not unknown) pugilist. This statement had, as may be supposed, no effect in damping the belligerent intentions of the Oxonian; he knew his own strength, and his skill too. In one moment off went his coat, and he set to upon his antagonist in splendid style. The astonished and *punished* rival, on recovering from his blows and surprise, accosted him thus: "You can only be one of the two; you are either Jack Wilson or the Devil." This encounter, no doubt, led, for a short time, to fraternity and equality over a pot of porter.

His attainments as a leaper were more remarkable. For this exercise he had, in the words of the writer already quoted, "two remarkable advantages. A short trunk and remarkably long legs gave him one-half his advantage in the noble science of leaping; the other half was pointed out to me by an accurate critic in these matters, as lying in the particular conformation of his foot, the instep of which is arched, and the back of the heel strengthened in so remarkable a way, that it would be worth paying a penny for a sight of them." After referring to the boastful vanity of the celebrated Cardinal du Perron on this point, he adds:—"The Cardinal, by his own account, appears to have been the flower of Popish leapers; and, with all deference to his Eminence, upon a better assurance than that, Professor Wilson may be rated, at the time I speak of, as the flower of all Protestant leapers. Not having the Cardinal's foible of connecting any vanity with this little accomplishment, knowing exactly what could, and what could *not* be effected in this department of gymnastics, and speaking with the utmost simplicity and candor of his failures and his successes alike, he might always be relied upon, and his statements were constantly in harmony with any collateral testimony that chance happened to turn up."

His most remarkable feat of this kind, the fame of which still lingers round the spot where it took place, is thus referred to by himself:—"A hundred sovereigns to five against any man in England doing twenty-three feet on a dead level, with a run and a leap

on a slightly inclined plane, perhaps an inch to a yard. We have seen twenty-three feet done in great style, and measured to a nicety, but the man who did it (aged twenty-one, height, five feet eleven inches, weight, eleven stone) was admitted to be (Ireland excepted) the best far leaper of his day in England.”*

This achievement, worthy of one of Dr. Dasant’s favorite heroes, took place in the presence of many spectators, at a bend of the Cherwell, a tributary of the Isis, where it glides beautifully through the enamelled meads of Christ Church, the leap being taken across the stream.

To one so full of life, and of the enjoyment of it in its various phases, Oxford was prolific ground for the exercise of his vivacious spirit; and it will naturally be expected that, in connection with this period, there are many curious stories to unfold. But the flight of years soon obliterates the traces of past adventures; very few of the contemporaries of those pleasant days survive; and I am sorry, therefore, to say, that I have been able to gather but few authentic details regarding this portion of my father’s life. Every one knows how a story, when it has passed from its original source, is, in an incredibly short space of time, so metamorphosed, as not again to be recognizable; complexion, manner, matter, all changed—just as if loving and making a lie were a matter of duty. Sensible persons, too, are sometimes found credulous of strange tales; while the world in general is ever ready to pick up the veriest rubbish, and complacently exclaim, “How characteristic; so like the man.” Few men have had more fables thus circulated regarding them than my father. Perhaps the most foolish story that was ever told of him, is one that William and Mary Howitt allude to with wise incredulity, in their pleasant yet somewhat incorrect memorial of him, and which now, to the disappointment of not a few, must be denied *in toto*. It was said that, when wandering in Wales, he joined a gang of gipsies, and married a girl belonging to that nomade tribe, and lived with her for some time among the mountains. That he had acted along with strolling players, and that there was one company to which he was kind and generous, is quite true; but that he lived with them, or any other adventurers, is mere romance, “the baseless fabric of a vision.”

A journal of his wanderings through Wales and the south of

* “Essay on Gymnastics.”

England, the Lake District, the Highlands, and Ireland, would have been more amusing than most books of travel, for we have his own word for it that they were sometimes "full of adventure and scrape." But of these journeys he kept no record, and all that can now be gleaned is an incidental allusion here and there in his works.*

The circle of his acquaintance at Oxford was most extensive, from the learned President of his College, Dr. Routh, with whom, as De Quincey says, "he enjoyed an unlimited favor," down through "an infinite gamut of friends and associates, running through every key, the diapason closing full in groom, cobbler, and stable-boy." But though a universal favorite, his circle of intimate friends was more select. Among these were Mr. Home Drummond (of Blair-Drummond), Mr. Charles Parr Burney, Reginald Heber; Mr. Sibthorpe, brother of the late Colonel Sibthorpe; Mr. N. Ellison, Mr. Charles Edward Grey. None of these gentlemen was of his own college.

An anecdote may here be given, illustrating a somewhat unusual mode of shutting up a proctor. One evening one of these important functionaries was aroused to the exercise of his authority by a considerable noise in the High Street. Coming forth to challenge the authors of the unlawful uproar, he found that "Wilson of Magdalen's" was the prime author of the disturbance. Remonstrance and warning were alike thrown away on the indomitable youth; he had put on his "boldest suit of mirth, for he had friends that purposed merriment." Nothing could be made of him. In vain the proctor advanced; he was received with speeches, and a perfect flood of words. The idea of repose was flouted by this incorrigible youth. Still the proctor protested, until he was fairly driven away by Wilson repeating to him, with imperturbable gravity, nearly the whole of Pope's "Essay on Man."

I am glad to be able to make up, in some respects, for the meagreness of these outlines, by some very interesting reminiscences kindly furnished by one who truly says, that he is "perhaps the only per-

* "The Tipperary shillelaghs came tumbling about his nob as thick as grass." This is a sweet pastoral image, which we ourselves once heard employed by a very delicate and modest young woman in a cottage near Limerick, when speaking of the cudgels in an affray. A broken head is in Ireland always spoken of in terms of endearment; much of the same tender feeling is naturally transferred to the shillelagh that inflicted it. 'God bless your honor!' said the same gentle creature to us while casting an affectionate look of admiration on our walking-stick. 'You would give a sweet blow with it.'—*Blackwood*, vol. v., p. 667.

son now living who could give so many details at the end of half a century."

"I became acquainted with the late Professor Wilson at Magdalen College, Oxford, about the year 1807 or 1808. He had already graduated, taken even (as I best recollect) his Master's degree, when I entered that College as a gentleman-commoner. His personal appearance was very remarkable; he was a powerfully built man, of great muscular strength, about five feet ten inches high, a very broad chest, wearing a great profusion of hair and *enormous* whiskers, which in those days were very unusually seen, particularly in the University. He was considered the strongest, most athletic, and most active man of those days at Oxford; and certainly created more interest among the gownsmen than any of his contemporaries, having already greatly distinguished himself in the schools, and as a poet.

"The difference of our standing in the College, as well as of our ages and pursuits, did not allow of our forming any *close* intimacy, and we seldom met but in our common room, to which the gentlemen-commoners retired from the dining-hall for wine and dessert, to spend the evening, and to sup, etc.

"I am not able to say who were Wilson's intimates in the University; he certainly had none in the College. I rather think he was much with Mr. Gaisford, the celebrated Grecian. I think of *our* men, Mr. Edward Syngé, of the county of Clare, saw the most of him. The fact is we were all *pigmies*, both physically and mentally, to him, and therefore unsuited to general companionship. It was therefore in the conviviality of our common room, to which Wilson so much contributed, and which he so thoroughly himself enjoyed, that we had the opportunity of appreciating this (even then) extraordinarily gifted man, who combined the simplicity of a child with the learning of a sage. He was sometimes, but rarely, silent, abstracted for a time, which I attributed to his mind being then occupied with composition. He never seemed unhappy.

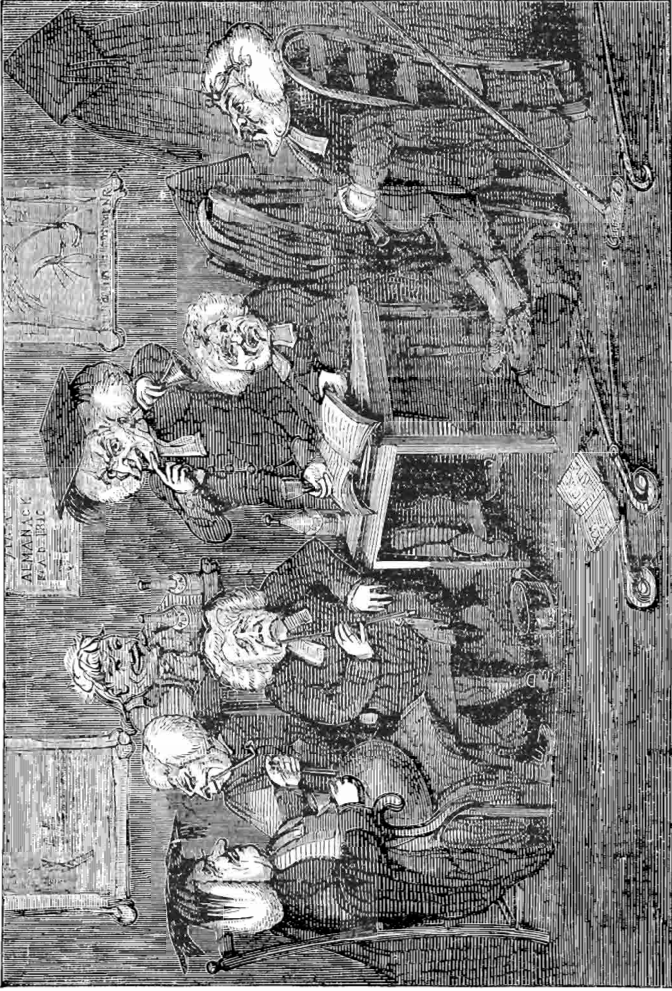
"It was the habit and fashion of those days to drink what would now be considered freely; the observance was not neglected at *Maudlin*, though never carried to excess. Wilson's great conversational powers were drawn out during these social hours. He delighted in discussions, and would often advance paradoxes, even in

order to raise a debate. It was evident that (like Dr. Johnson) he had not determined which side of the argument he would take upon the question he had raised. Once he had decided *that* point, he opened with a flow of eloquence, learning, and wit, which became gradually an absolute torrent, upon which he generally tided into the small hours. No interruption, no difference of opinion, however warmly expressed, could ruffle for a moment his imperturbable good temper. He was certainly one of the most charming social companions it has ever been my lot to meet, although I have known some of the most agreeable and witty that Ireland has produced. There was a versatility of talent and eloquence (*not of opinions*) in Wilson, such as I have never seen equalled. I have heard him with equal cleverness argue in favor and disparagement of constitutional, absolute, and democratic forms of government; one evening you would suppose him to be (*as he really was*) a most determined, unbending Tory; the next he assumed to be a thorough Whig of the old school; on a third, you would conclude him to be a violent and dangerous democrat! You could never suppose that the same man could uphold and decry, with equal talent, propositions so opposite: and yet he did, and was equally persuasive and conclusive upon each. In the same manner with religious discussions: to-day there could be no more energetic and able 'defender of the faith;' to-morrow he would advance Voltaireism, Hobbism, and Gibbonism enough to induce those who did not know him to conclude that he was a thorough unbeliever. He was, on the contrary, of a highly pious and religious mind. I may sum up his characteristics, as they appeared to me, in a few words: simplicity, kindness, learning, with *chivalry*; for certainly his views and sentiments were highly chivalrous, and had he lived in those days, he would have been found among the foremost of 'les preux chevaliers.'

"The established rule of our common room was, that no one should appear there without being in full evening dress; non-compliance involved a fine of one guinea, which Wilson had more than once incurred and paid. Having one day come in in his morning garb, and paid down the fine, he asked, 'What then do you consider dress?' 'Silk stockings,' etc., etc., was the answer. The next day came Wilson, looking very well satisfied with himself, and with us all. 'Now,' he cried, 'all is right, I hope to have no more fines to pay; you see I have complied with the rules,' pointing to his

silk stockings, which he had very carefully *drawn over* the coarse woollen walking stockings which he wore usually; his strong shoes he still retained!

“He told us one evening that he imagined he had a taste for, and might become proficient in music, and that he would commence to practise the French horn! which he did accordingly, commencing after we had broken up for the night, which was generally long after twelve. Some days after, old Dr. Jenner, one of the Fellows, accosted me with piteous tones and countenance: ‘Oh, Southwell! do, for pity’s sake, use your influence with Wilson to choose some other time for his music-lessons; I never get a wink of sleep after he commences!’ I accordingly spoke to him; he seemed quite surprised that his dulcet notes could have disturbed his neighbors; but he was too good-natured to persevere, and, as far as I know, his musical talents were no further cultivated. Being a Master of Arts, he was no longer subject to college discipline, and might have, if he wished, accompanied his horn with a big drum! One of his great amusements was to go to the ‘Angel Inn,’ about midnight, when many of the up and down London coaches met; there he used to preside at the passengers’ supper-table, carving for them, inquiring all about their respective journeys, why and wherefore they were made, who they were, etc.; and in return, astonishing them with his wit and pleasantry, and sending them off wondering *who and what he could be!* He frequently went from the ‘Angel’ to the ‘Fox and Goose,’ an early ‘purl and gill’ house, where he found the coachman and guards, etc., preparing for the coaches which had left London late at night; and there he found an audience, and sometimes remained till the college-gates were opened, rather (I believe) than rouse the old porter, Peter, from his bed to open for him expressly. It must not be supposed, that in these strange meetings he indulged in *intemperance*; no such thing; he went to such places, I am convinced, to study character, in which they abounded. I never saw him show the slightest appearance even of drink, notwithstanding our wine-drinking, suppers, punch, and smoking in the common room, to very late hours. I never shall forget his figure, sitting with a long earthen pipe, a great *tie* wig on; those wigs had descended, I fancy, from the days of Addison (who had been a member of our College), and were worn by us all (in order, I presume, to preserve our hair and dress from



"The strictures of the *Edinburgh Review* considered at a private meeting of the Caput, A. D. 1810."

tobacco smoke) when smoking commenced, after supper; and a strange appearance we made in them!

“His pedestrian feats were marvellous. On one occasion, having been absent a day or two, we asked him, on his return to the common room, where he had been? He said, in London. When did you return? This morning. How did you come? On foot. As we all expressed surprise, he said: ‘Why, the fact is, I dined yesterday with a friend in Grosvenor (I think it was) Square, and as I quitted the house, a fellow who was passing was impertinent and insulted me, upon which I knocked him down; and as I did not choose to have myself called in question for a street row, I at once started, as I was, in my dinner dress, and never stopped until I got to the College gate this morning, as it was being opened.’ Now this was a walk of fifty-eight miles at least, which he must have got over in eight or nine hours at most, supposing him to have left the dinner-party at nine in the evening.*

“He had often spoken to me when at Oxford of a protracted foot-tour which he had made in Ireland some years previous, and about which there appeared to me a sort of mystery, which he did not explain.

“R. H. S.”†

CHAPTER IV.

THE ORPHAN MAID.—UNIVERSITY CAREER.

1803-'08.

THE course of true love, whether calm or troubled, whether issuing in sunshine or in storm, is “an old, old story;” but it is one that sums up the chiefest joys and sorrows of men and women, and

* Mr. Southwell's statement may seem an exaggeration; but a reference to Mr. Findlay's account, at p. 24, will show that my father had easily performed six miles an hour in what I take for granted to be a more difficult mode of progression than the ordinary, viz., “toe and heel.”

† As a tail-piece to Mr. Southwell's letter, I take the liberty of inserting here one of Mr. Lockhart's Hogarthian sketches, containing, I have no doubt, correct if not very flattering portraits of some of the Oxford dignitaries of that day. The “strictures of the *Edinburgh Review*,” which appear to have excited so much dissatisfaction, were contained in two articles in the *Review* of July, 1809, and of April, 1810, in which some of the weak points of the contemporary system of education at Oxford were handled with a roughness characteristic of the criticism of that period.