

“In the second place, I say it is false that Mr. P. lent his support to the *Review* in order to give credit and currency to its alleged infidel principles.

“And, finally, it is false that the writings which he has contributed to it have had any tendency to support those principles, or are intended to counteract the lessons which he once taught from the pulpit.”

It is much to be regretted that my father's reply to this letter is not extant. What it may have been can only be conjectured. I can have no doubt that he would not attempt to justify the malignant article. But he was not a man to abandon his associates even when he disagreed with them. He had cast in his lot with *Blackwood* and its principles, and was resolved to stand by them at all hazards.

CHAPTER IX.

ANN STREET. — MORAL PHILOSOPHY CHAIR.

1820.

AN eventful life seldom falls to the lot of the man of letters. His vicissitudes and excitements are for the most part confined to an arena in which he figures little before the public gaze. In this sense Wilson's life was uneventful; but the constitution of his nature, both physical and mental, made it impossible that it should ever become uninteresting or monotonous. It may be said that he threw himself into the very heart of existence, and found in the lowliest things on earth a hidden virtue that made them cease to be vulgar in his eyes. For fundamentally, though that I know is not the general opinion, he was as much a philosopher as a poet, and had that true instinct, that electric rapidity of glance, that enables a man to penetrate through the forms of things to their real meaning and essence. And when free from the bias of passion or prejudice, his judgment was most accurate. Caprice or change in regard to principles, or persons, or tastes, was no part of his character.

Faults of temper and intolerance sometimes glared forth, finding utterance, it might be, both violent and unreasonable. Thus his highly-strung nervous organization made him keenly alive to all outward impressions, loud laughter, sudden noises, rudeness, affectation, and those offences against minor morals that are generally regarded with indifference or passing disgust, affected him painfully; and if but for a short time exposed to any such annoyances, no self-control prevented him from giving expression to his feelings. But such outbursts, whether manifested in spoken or written words, were as summer storms, that leave the air purer and the sky brighter than before. He was, in fact, too large a man to be unamiable. His natural temper was, in mature life, as it had been in boyhood and youth, sweet and sunny, and, with all his enjoyment of activity and excitement, he never liked any company half so well as that which he found at his own fireside. To that quiet and simple home, in which his happiness was summed up, we now turn for a short time.

Towards the end of the winter of 1819, my father, with his wife and children, now five in number, two boys and three girls,* left his mother's house, 53 Queen street, and set up his household gods in a small and somewhat inconvenient house in Ann street (No. 20). This little street, which forms the culminating point of the suburb of Stockbridge, was at that time quite "out of town," and is still a secluded place, overshadowed by the tall houses of Eton terrace and Clarendon Crescent. In the literary "Ledger," already referred to, which contains all sorts of memoranda in my father's handwriting, there is a page taken up with an estimate of the cost of furniture for dining-room, sitting-room, nursery, servants' room, and kitchen, making up a total of £195, with the triumphant query at the end, in a bold hand, "Could it be less?" Truly, I think not. This little entry throws an interesting light on the circumstances of this devoted pair, who, eight years previously, had started in life so differently under the prosperous roof-tree of Elleray. But the limitation of their resources had, from the beginning, brought with it neither regret nor despondency, and now that they were for the first time fairly facing the cares of life, they took up the burden with hope and cheerfulness. My father felt strong in his own pow-

* Their names, in the order of their ages, were as follows:—John, born April, 1812; Margaret, July, 1813; Mary, August, 1814; Blair, April, 1816; Jane Emily, January, 1817.

ers of work, and his deep affection for his wife and children was a mighty stimulus to exertion. My mother, on the other hand, along with a singular sweetness of disposition, possessed great prudence and force of character; she entered, as her letters indicate, into all that concerned her husband with wife-like zeal, and her sympathy and counsel were appreciated by him above all else that the world could bestow.

In withdrawing from the more fashionable part of Edinburgh, they did not, however, by any means exclude themselves from the pleasures of social intercourse with the world. In Ann street they found a pleasant little community that made residence there far from distasteful; the seclusion of the locality made it then, as it seems still to be, rather a favorite quarter with literary men and artists. The old mansion of St. Bernard's, the property and dwelling-house of Sir Henry Raeburn (the glory of Scotland's portrait-painters) offered them its hospitality and kindly intercourse. No one can forget how, in the circle of his own family, that dignified old gentleman stood, himself a very picture, his fine intellectual countenance lightened by eyes most expressive, whose lambent glow gave to his face that inward look of soul he knew so well to impart to his own unsurpassed portraits. Genius shed its peculiar beauty over his aspect, yet memory loves more than aught else the recollections of the benevolent heart that lent to his manner a grace of kindness as sincere as it was delightful. The place in Scottish art which he had so long occupied without a fellow was soon to become vacant. But a worthy successor was at that time following his footsteps to fame.

Sir John Watson Gordon lived with his father (then Captain, afterwards Admiral Watson) and a pleasant group of brothers and sisters, in the house adjoining that of Professor Wilson, in whom this rising artist found a warm and kind patron. Not a few of his early pictures were painted under the encouragement and advice of his genial friend. Almost the first subject that brought him into prominent comparison with the best English painters of the day was a portrait of my sister, when seven years of age—a beautifully colored and poetically conceived picture. This gentleman has long since reaped the reward of his industry and talent, and now wears the honor of knighthood, along with the important position of President of the Royal Scottish Academy, continuing still, from

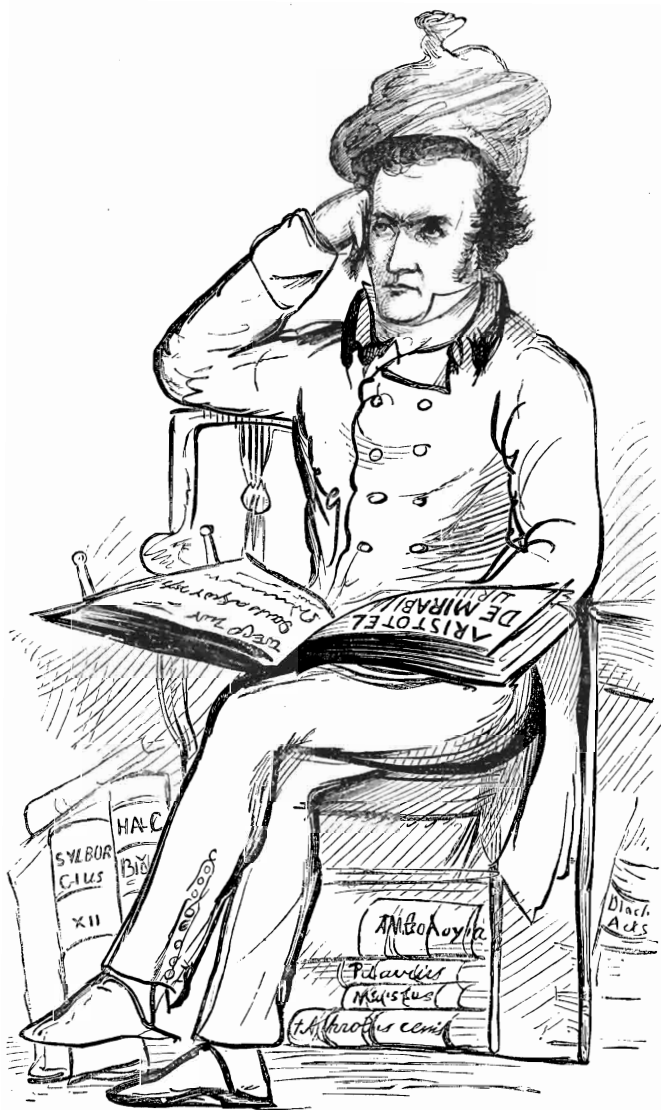
time to time, to give evidence to the world, by the admirable vigor and truthful individuality of his portraits, that his eminence is increasing with his years.

Another illustrious name is to be numbered in that coterie of artists. William Allan (who also attained the honor of knighthood and presidentship) was a frequent guest in my father's house. He had not long returned from a residence of some duration in the East. His extended travel and fresh experience of foreign lands, made his society much sought after. He had the advantage of an intimate friendship with Sir Walter Scott, in itself an introduction to intercourse with the best people of the time. Mr. Allan was a man whose intelligence, power of observation, quaint humor, gentle and agreeable manners, made him welcome to all. Many were the pleasant reunions that took place in those days under Professor Wilson's roof, where might be seen together Lockhart, Hogg, Galt, Sir William Hamilton, his brother, Captain Thomas Hamilton, Sir Adam Ferguson, Sir Henry Raeburn, Mr. Allan, and Watson Gordon. In such meetings as these, it may easily be imagined how the hours would pass, the conversation and merriment perhaps continuing till sun-rising.

Wilson had now apparently committed himself to literature as his vocation; and when he removed to Ann Street there seemed no great probability of his being soon called to any more definite sphere of exertion. His professional prospects were not much to be calculated on, for, though fitted in some respects to achieve distinction at the bar, he appears never to have seriously contemplated that as an object of ambition. His aspirations were in a very different direction. Though his pursuits and acquirements had been of a very general and eclectic sort, he had given early proof of his love and capacity for philosophic studies. He had not, it is true, made philosophy his special pursuit, like his illustrious friend Sir William Hamilton, for poetry and literature divided his allegiance. But the science of mind, and more particularly Moral Philosophy, had for him at all times high attraction. Human nature had been in fact his study *par excellence*, and when the prospect opened to him of being able to cultivate that study, not merely as a field of analytical skill, but as a means of practically influencing the minds of others with all the authority of academic position, he eagerly grasped at it as an object worthy of his highest ambition. That prize was not

to be won without a desperate struggle, to the history of which a few pages must now be devoted.

In April, 1820, the chair of Moral Philosophy in the University of Edinburgh became vacant by the lamented death of Dr. Thomas Brown. The contest which ensued has had few parallels even in the history of that University, whilst the patronage lay with the Town Council, whose members had to be canvassed personally like the voters in a rotten borough. My father announced himself as a candidate in the course of the month, and so did Sir William Hamilton. Other distinguished men were mentioned as possible competitors, such as Sir James Mackintosh and Mr. Malthus; but it soon became apparent that between these two alone the struggle was to lie. Then came the tug of war. The rivals were intimate personal friends, and between them, happily, no unpleasant word or thought arose during the time that their respective friends were fighting for and against them, like Greek and Trojan. Both had been brilliant Oxonians; but the one was known to have devoted himself to philosophy, with a singleness of aim and a specialty of power, that seemed to his friends, and certainly not without reason, to throw the pretensions of his rival utterly into the shade. Happily for him, too, he had, as became a philosopher, abstained from any interference in public questions, either openly or in secret; and his retired and studious life afforded no possible mark for censure or insinuation even to the most malicious enemy. The other, though reckoned by men well fitted to judge, as a person singularly gifted with philosophic as well as poetic faculty, was better known in the outer world as a daring and brilliant *littérateur*; one of a band of writers who had excited much admiration, but also much righteous censure, and personally as a somewhat eccentric young man of very athletic and jovial tendencies. How these qualities affected his position as a candidate will speedily appear; but all other distinctions were lost sight of in the one great fact of political creed. Sir William was a Whig: Wilson was a Tory. The matter all lay in that. Wilson, too, was not only a Tory, but a Tory of the most unpardonable description; he was one of the leading hands, if not the editor, of that scandalous publication, *Blackwood's Magazine*, a man therefore who needed no further testimonial of being at least an assassin and a reprobate. He, forsooth, a Professor of Moral Philosophy, a successor of Dugald Stewart! The thing was mon-



Sir William Hamilton, at Oxford.—From a sketch by Mr. Lockhart.

strous; an outrage on decency and common sense. Such, without exaggeration, was the view taken by the Whig side in this contest, and strenuously supported publicly in the columns of the *Scotsman*,* and privately in every circle where the name of *Blackwood* was a name of abomination and of fear.

How the proceedings of this election interested my mother may be seen best from her own true womanly feelings expressed without reserve, in a letter to her sister:—

“My mind has been anxiously occupied on Mr. Wilson’s account, by an election in which he has, amongst other literary men, started as a candidate. It is for a Professor’s Chair in the University here. The Professorship of Moral Philosophy is the situation, which became vacant about six weeks ago, by the death of Dr. Brown. The gift of the Chair is in the power of the Magistrates and Town Council, and I have no doubt there will be a great struggle between the two political parties here. The *Whigs* hitherto have had every thing their own way; and the late Professor was one, as well as the well-known Dugald Stewart, who resigned the situation from bad health, and who has it in his power to resume lecturing if he chooses, and which I fear he will do from party spirit, if he thinks there is any chance of Mr. Wilson’s success. Mr. Wilson has been assured of all the support that Government can give him, and Sir Walter Scott has been particularly kind in his exertions for his success. The testimonials which he has received from the Professors at Glasgow, as to his powers for such a situation, are most gratifying and flattering; indeed, his prospects are at present favorable; but I will not allow myself to be sanguine, though I must say that if Mr. Wilson was to

* A single specimen of the rhetoric used may suffice, being the peroration of a long and angry leading article which appeared immediately before the election. The electors were, in conclusion, thus solemnly adjured:—“Again we call upon those members of Council who are fathers of families; who respect the oaths they have taken; who have some regard for religion, morals, and decency, to read the Chaldee MS.; the pilgrimage to the ‘Kirk of Shotts;’ the attacks on Messrs. Wordsworth, Pringle, Dunbar, Coleridge, and others; to weigh and consider the spirit and character of many other articles in the Magazine, which are either written by Mr. Wilson, or published under his auspices; and if they can possibly excuse him as a private individual, we still put it to them how they can justify it to their conscience, their country, and their God, to select him as the man to fill the chair of Moral Philosophy, and to confide to him the taste, the morals, and the characters of the rising generation.”

When the election was over, the public were informed, through the same channel, that the conduct of the electors had “stamped indelible disgrace on the Town Council,” and that though it was a prevalent opinion that they were already as low as they could be in the estimation of their fellow-citizens, the proceedings of that day had shown this conclusion to be erroneous, and demonstrated that there is in the lowest depth a lower still.

get such an honorable situation, it would indeed be truly gratifying to me; and I think he is well calculated to fill, with respectability and credit, such a Chair. All the principal men here on the *Government* side are most anxious for his success; and even if he should be disappointed, the handsome manner in which they have come forward, may be as useful to him at some future time as it is satisfactory at the present. The emolument of the situation in itself is nothing, but depends on the number of students who may attend the class. Dr. Brown had about a thousand a year from it. He was brother of the Miss Brown whom you may remember seeing here, and the authoress of *Lays of Affection*.

“If I have any thing to say with regard to Mr. Wilson’s affairs, I will let you know soon, but the matter will not be ultimately decided for some time; his *opponents* at present are *few*, and the most formidable is Sir William Hamilton, who is not a Government man, but others may start more appalling. Malthus is one talked of, and Sir James Mackintosh. The latter is an elderly man, who ranks very high in the literary world, and a *Whig*.”

This letter is dated 29th April, 1820. She writes again in July: “I know that you take an interest in all our concerns, or I should not again bore you with the old story of the election, which, when I last wrote to you, I thought was concluded; indeed, the report that Dugald Stewart meant to resume his lectures, came from such good authority that Mr. Wilson set off immediately to Peebles to recover his fatigue. He was no sooner gone than he was sent for back again; for the very next day Dugald Stewart sent in his resignation, and the canvass began instantly in the most determined manner. You can form no idea with what warmth it is still going on, and the Whigs are perfectly mad. The matter is to be decided next Wednesday, and as yet Mr. Wilson has greatly the majority of votes, and I trust will continue to have them, and that his friends will prove stanch. They have been uncommonly active indeed in his behalf, Sir Walter Scott in particular, who says there are greater exertions making by the Whigs now, than they ever made in any political contest in Scotland. The abuse lavished upon Mr. Wilson by them is most intemperate; his greatest crime is that he is a contributor to *Blackwood’s Magazine*, that notoriously Tory journal. But I trust all will end well. I shall not write again till the 19th, when our suspense will be at an end.”

Hostility on grounds purely political would have been, in the singular state of feeling which then prevailed, more or less excusable. But as the contest deepened, and my father's prospects of success grew stronger, the opposition took a form more malignant. When it was found useless to gainsay his mental qualifications for the office, or to excite odium on the ground of his literary offences, the attack was directed against his moral character; and it was broadly insinuated that this candidate for the Chair of Ethics was himself a man of more than doubtful morality; that he was, in fact, not merely a "reveller" and a "blasphemer," but a bad husband, a bad father, a person not fit to be trusted as a teacher of youth. These cruel charges touched him to the quick. It is difficult now to realize that they could have required refutation; but so far, it appears, did the strength of party bitterness carry men in these angry days. My father found it necessary, therefore, to adduce "testimonials" to his moral character, as well as to his intellectual acquirements. How painfully he felt these malicious attacks may be judged from the following letter to his friend the Rev. John Fleming, of Rayrig, Windermere: its manly spirit and noble tone, under circumstances so trying to the temper, are worthy of remark:—

" 53 QUEEN STREET, EDINBURGH,

July 2d.

"MY DEAR SIR:—I owe you many thanks for your most kind and friendly letter, which I laid before the electors, along with many others from persons of whose good opinion I have reason to be proud. The day of election is at last fixed, after many strange delays, all contrived by my opponents, who have struggled to obtain time, during which they contrived to calumniate me with a virulence never exceeded and seldom equalled. The election will take place upon Wednesday, the 19th of July, and the contest lies between Sir William Hamilton, Bart., a barrister here, and myself; other four candidates being supposed to have little or no chance of success. I am, unfortunately, opposed by all the Whig influence in Scotland; but, on the other hand, I have the most strenuous support of Government, as far as their influence can be legitimately exercised, and of many of the most distinguished independent men in Scotland. My friends are all sanguine; many of them confident; and I myself entertain strong, and I think well-grounded hopes of success. My enemies have attacked my private character at all

points, and within these few days, have not scrupled to circulate reports that I am a bad husband and a bad father. I confess that this has affected me greatly; as, whatever my faults or errors may have been, it is true as holy writ that I do tenderly love my wife and children, and would willingly lay down my life for their sakes. I need not say that such base insinuations have roused the indignation of my friends; but though calumny is in general ultimately defeated, it often gains its ends for the time being; and in this case it is likely to operate to my disadvantage with some of the electors whose minds are not yet made up. Now you, my dear sir, married me to one of the most sinless and inoffensive of human beings, whom not to love would indeed prove me to be a wretch without a soul, or a heart, or a mind, and to treat whom otherwise than kindly and tenderly would be an outrage against nature. God has blessed me with six innocent children, for whom I pray every night; and all my earthly happiness is in the bosom of my family. But to you I need say no more on such a subject. As an answer to all such calumnies, I fear not that my future life will be satisfactory; but, meanwhile, you will be doing me another friendly office by writing to me another letter, containing your sentiments of me as a man,—such a letter as you would wish to address to a friend who has ever loved and respected you, on understanding that he has been basely, falsely, and cruelly calumniated. The electors are satisfied with my talents, and even my enemies have ceased now to depreciate them; but the attack is now made on my moral character, and they are striving to injure me in the public estimation by charges which, at the same time, cannot, in spite of their falsehood, fail to give me indescribable pain. I am, my dear sir, ever yours affectionately,

JOHN WILSON."

Mr. Fleming's reply is not extant, but the answer to a similar request addressed to Mrs. Grant of Laggan may be given as a curiosity in literature, being, it is to be hoped, the last specimen that will be seen of such a testimonial to any candidate for a professorship. My father wrote to Mrs. Grant as follows:—

"Sunday Afternoon.

"MY DEAR MADAM:—During the course of the canvass in which I have for some time past been engaged, I am sorry to know that

many calumnies have been industriously circulated against my private character. Among others, it has lately been insinuated that I am a bad husband, a bad father, and, in short, in all respects a bad family man. I believe that I may with perfect confidence assert, that whatever may be my faults or sins, want of affection for my wife and children, my mother, sisters, and brothers, is not of the number. My whole happiness in life is centred in my family, whom God in his infinite goodness has hitherto preserved to me in their beauty, their simplicity, and innocence. I am more at home than perhaps any other married man in Edinburgh; nor is there on earth a human being who feels more profoundly and gratefully the blessedness and sanctity of domestic life. This, my dear madam, must be your conviction; and you would now be conferring upon me a singular favor, by expressing to me in such a letter as I could show to my friends in Council, of whom I have many, your sentiments with respect to me and my character. Your own pure and lofty character will be a warrant of the truth of what you write, and a hundred anonymous slanders will fall before the weight of your favorable opinion. I would not write to you thus, if I were conscious of having done any thing which might forfeit your esteem; but whatever may be thought of my talents or of my poetical genius, neither of which I have ever wished to hear overrated, I have no doubt that I am entitled to the character of a virtuous man in the relations of private life. I am, my dear madam, yours, with true respect,

"JOHN WILSON."

Mrs. Grant thus replied:—

"I have known your family for several years intimately; indeed, through intermediate friends, have known much of you from your very childhood; and in the glow of youth, high spirits, and unclouded prosperity, always understood you to be a person of amiable and generous feelings and upright intentions. Since you married, I have known more of you, and of the excellent person to whom you owe no common portion of connubial felicity; and I always believed her to be the tranquil and happy wife of a fond and faithful husband, domestic in his habits, devoted to his children, and peculiarly beloved by his brothers and sisters, and his respectable and venerated parent. Often have I heard your sisters talk

with the warmest affection of you, and praise you, in particular, for your fond and unremitting attention to your wife; and, moreover, remark how quiet and domestic the tenor of your life has been since you left their family, and what particular delight you took in that very fine family of children with which God has blessed you. If you were, indeed, capable of neglecting or undervaluing such a wife and such children, no censure could be too severe for such conduct. But in making an attack of that nature, your enemies have mistaken their point, as your domestic character may be called your strong ground, where you are certainly invulnerable as far as ever I could understand or hear. People's tastes and opinions may differ in regard to talents and acquirements, but as to domestic duties and kind affections, there can be but one opinion among those whose opinion is of any value."

A still higher authority came forward in vindication of his character. The following letter was addressed to the Lord Provost by Sir Walter Scott:—

"EDINBURGH, 8th July, 1820.

"MY LORD PROVOST:—Some unfavorable reports having been circulated with great industry respecting the character of John Wilson, Esq., at present candidate for the Chair of Moral Philosophy, now vacant in this University, I use the freedom to address your Lordship in a subject interesting to me, alike from personal regard to Mr. Wilson, and from the high importance which, in common with every friend to this city, I must necessarily attach to the present object of his ambition.

"Mr. Wilson has already produced to your Lordship such testimonials of his successful studies, and of his good morals, as have seldom been offered on a like occasion. They comprehend a history of his life, public and private, from his early youth down to this day, and subscribed by men whose honor and good faith cannot be called into question; and who, besides, are too much unconnected with each other to make it possible they would or could unite their false testimonies, for the purpose of palming an unworthy candidate upon the electors to this important office. For my own part, whose evidence in behalf of Mr. Wilson is to be found among certificates granted by many persons more capable of estimating his worth and talents, I can only say that I should have conceived myself guilty

of a very great crime, had I been capable of recommending to the Moral Philosophy Chair, a scoffer at religion or a libertine in morals. But Mr. Wilson has still further, and, if possible, more strong evidence in favor of his character, since he may appeal to every line in those works which he has given to the public, and which are at once monuments of his genius, and records of his deep sense of devotion and high tone of morality. He must have, indeed, been a most accomplished hypocrite (and I have not heard that hypocrisy has ever been imputed to Mr. Wilson) who could plead with such force and enthusiasm the cause of virtue and religion, while he was privately turning the one into ridicule, and transgressing the dictates of the other. Permit me to say, my Lord, that with the power of appealing to the labors of his life on the one hand, and to the united testimony of so many friends of respectability on the other, Mr. Wilson seems well entitled to despise the petty scandal which, if not altogether invented, must at least have been strongly exaggerated and distorted, either by those who felt themselves at liberty to violate the confidence of private society by first circulating such stories, or in their subsequent progress from tongue to tongue. Indeed, if the general tenor of a man's life and of his writings cannot be appealed to as sufficient contradiction of this species of anonymous slander, the character of the best and wisest man must stand at the mercy of every talebearer who chooses to work up a serious charge out of what may be incautiously said in the general license of a convivial meeting. I believe, my Lord, there are very few men, and those highly favored both by temperament and circumstances, or else entirely sequestered from the world, who have not at some period of their life been surprised both into words and actions, for which in their cooler and wiser moments they have been both sorry and ashamed. The contagion of bad example, the removal of the ordinary restraints of society, must, while men continue fallible, be admitted as some apology for such acts of folly. But I trust, that in judging and weighing the character of a candidate, otherwise qualified to execute an important trust, the public will never be deprived of his services by imposing upon him the impossible task of showing that he has been, at all times and moments of his life, as wise, cautious, and temperate as he is in his general habits, and his ordinary walk through the world.

“I have only to add, that supposing it possible that malice might have some slight ground for some of the stories which have been circulated, I am positive, from Mr. Wilson’s own declaration, and that of those who best know him, that he is altogether incapable either of composing parodies upon Scripture, of being a member of any association for forwarding infidelity or profaneness, or affording countenance otherwise to the various attacks which have been made against Christianity. To my own certain knowledge he has, on the contrary, been in the habit of actively exerting his strong powers, and that very recently, in the energetic defence of those doctrines which he has been misrepresented as selecting for the subject of ridicule.

“I must apologize to your Lordship for intruding on your time such a long letter, which, after all, contains little but what must have occurred to every one of the honorable and worthy members of the elective body. If I am anxious for Mr. Wilson’s success on the present occasion, it is because I am desirous to see his high talents and powers of elocution engaged in the important task of teaching that philosophy which is allied to and founded upon religion and virtue.

“I have the honor, etc.,

“WALTER SCOTT.”

The day of success at last arrived; and Mrs. Wilson thus communicates the joyful news to her sister:—

“I am sure you will rejoice to hear that Mr. Wilson was yesterday elected Professor of Moral Philosophy, and that in spite of all the machinations of his enemies, the Whigs. He had twenty-one votes out of thirty,—a majority of twelve, which out of so small a number is pretty considerable. Poor ‘Billy Balmer’ took such an interest in the thing that he went yesterday morning and stayed near the scene of action till it was all over, and then came puffing down with a face of delight to tell me that ‘Master was ahead a good deal.’”

A few days later she writes in a strain of high triumph. Like a good and brave wife she regards her husband’s enemies as hers, and under the summary designation of *Whigs* they come in for a proper share of her notice:—

“ANN STREET, *July 27, 1820.*”

“MY DEAR MARY:—The want of a decent sheet of paper shall not deter me from immediately thanking you for your and James’s kind congratulations on our success in the late canvass, which, thank Heaven, is at last at an end, after a most severe struggle, in which I flatter myself Mr. Wilson has conducted himself with a forbearance and a magnanimity worthy a saint, and which, had he been a Catholic, he would have been canonized for. The pertinacity of his enemies was unprecedented, and I suppose they have not done with him yet; but the Tories have been triumphant, and I care not a straw for the impotent attempts of the scum of the defeated Whigs. I must say I chuckle at the downfall of the Whigs, whose meanness and wickedness I could not give you any idea of were I to write a ream of paper in the cause. In the number of *Blackwood’s Magazine* last published they got a rap on the knuckles, just as hints as to what they may expect in future if they persevere in their abuse.*

“Mr. W. is very well, but as thin as a rat, and no wonder; for the last four months he has had no rest for the sole of his foot. He is now as busy as possible studying. His enemies have given him little time to prepare his lectures—one hundred and twenty in number. The class meets the beginning of November, and he has to lecture an hour every day till April. But for the detestable Whigs the thing might have been settled four months ago, and he would have had ample time for his preparations.”

The proceedings at the election need not further be dwelt on. An attempt to rescind the vote at a subsequent meeting of Council was ignominiously defeated. The principal figure in that scene is a certain Deacon Paterson, who appears for once on the stage of history, armed with a “green bag,” the contents of which were to annihilate the new Professor’s reputation and quash the election. But the Deacon and his bag were very speedily disposed of, and

* Here follow sketches of some of Mr. Wilson’s enemies and friends, alluded to in the Magazine, drawn in lively colors, from which we can only find room for that of “The Odontist:”—“The reputed author of the ‘*Testimonium*’ is a good-natured dentist, who lives in Glasgow, whose name is James Scott, and who is the only Scotchman I know, with a very few exceptions, that can understand or relish a joke, and all the *jeux d’esprit* in *Blackwood’s Magazine* he enjoys exceedingly, though, poor man, he could not write a line if his salvation depended upon it. . . . ‘The Jurist,’ who coined the rhymes in praise of *Blackwood*, is one of the great lawyers here, a Mr. Cranstoun.”

forthwith disappeared into oblivion, in the midst of a hearty chorus of hisses.

My father lost no time in addressing himself to his important labors, and applied in all quarters, where help was to be relied on, for advice and assistance in collecting materials to guide him in the preparation of his lectures. Three days after the election he writes to his friend, Mr. John Smith, the Glasgow publisher:—

“53 QUEEN STREET, July 22.

“MY DEAR SIR:—Many thanks for your very kind letter. The contest was, you know, of a most savage nature, but I never feared for the result. A protest was given in by the defeated party, but that means nothing, and I will be Professor to my dying day.

“It is quite impossible for me to visit you at Dunoon, however delightful it would be. My labors are not yet commenced, but they must be incessant and severe; and I do not intend to leave Edinburgh for one single day till after I have finished the course of Lectures. Nothing but perseverance and industry can bring me even respectably through my toils, and they shall not be wanting.

“What works do you know of on Natural Theology? Ask Wardlaw.

“In short, the next month is to be passed by in reading and thinking alone, and all information you can communicate about books and men will be acceptable.”

On the 3d of August he again wrote to Mr. Smith:—

“MY DEAR SIR:—All is now fixed respecting my election, verbally as well as virtually. The Minute of Election is to be read, so says an old and obsolete law, *twice in Council*, and Deacon Pater-son, as you probably know, gave notice on the 19th, that he would move to rescind the election. Accordingly, on the first reading of the minute (Wednesday following election), he rose and declared his intention of opening a bagful of charges against me, which, he said, would cause my friends to rescind the election. This he tried to do yesterday, but my friends would not suffer his green bag to be opened. On this, he made a long prepared speech, full of all manner of calumnies against me, during which he was repeatedly called to order even by some of my opponents. At last, a vote

of censure upon him was proposed and carried by twenty-one to six. On offering to apologize, this censure was withdrawn, and he did apologize. The vote was then put, 'rescind or adhere,' and carried 'adhere' by twenty-one to six, so that all is settled. The sole object, apparently, in all these proceedings has been to annoy me, my friends and supporters, and to give vent to the wrath of party feeling.

"I am anxious to know if you can get me Mylne's* notes. It is with no view, I need hardly say, of using any thing of his, but merely of seeing his course of discussion.

"I am both able and willing to write my own lectures, every word; but before I begin to do so, I am anxious to have before me a vista of my labors, and this might be aided by a sight of his or any other lectures. But all this is confidential, for my enemies are numerous and ready, and will do all they can to injure me in all things. But they may bark and growl, for it will be to no purpose."

The successor of Dugald Stewart was certain to have all eyes upon him, and the circumstances of the election made him feel all the more imperiously the need of acquitting himself well in a place that had been filled by men so famous; above all merely personal considerations, too, he felt, with almost oppressive anxiety, the sacredness of the trust that had been committed to him as a teacher of that science which embraces all the higher truths and precepts which the light of reason can make known. He accordingly set about his preparations with his usual energy, and for the brief period that intervened before the opening of the session in November, appears to have worked incessantly. His portrait in his study is thus playfully sketched by my mother:—"Mr. Wilson is as busy studying as possible, indeed he has little time before him for his great task; he says it will take him one month at least to make out a catalogue of the books he has to read and consult. I am perfectly appalled when I go into the dining-room and see all the folios, quartos, and duodecimos with which it is literally filled, and the poor culprit himself sitting in the midst, with a beard as long and red as an adult carrot, for he has not shaved for a fortnight."

Of all the friends to whom he applied for counsel in this time of anxiety, there was none on whom he so implicitly relied, or who

* Professor of Moral Philosophy in Glasgow, under whom he had studied in 1801.

was so able to assist him, as Alexander Blair. To him he unbosomed himself in all the confidence of friendship, and in several long and elaborate letters—too long to be given entire—entered minutely into his plans for the course, asking for advice and suggestions with the eagerness and humility of a pupil to his master. He gives a list of the books he has got, and asks his friend to tell him what others he should have; what he thinks of this and that theory; how many lectures there should be on this topic and on that. He sketches his own plan; how he is to commence with some attractive and eloquent introductory lectures “of a popular though philosophical kind,” so as to make a good impression at first on his students, and also on the public. Here he purposes to give eight or ten lectures on the moral systems of ancient Greece, which Sir Walter Scott approves of; and which he hopes Blair will also approve of. “The subject is a fine one, and not difficult to write on. These lectures, it might be hoped, would give great pleasure.”* Then will commence his own course in good earnest; six or more lectures on the physical nature of man; then twelve more, “though for no cause known,” on the intellectual powers. On this he wishes to have Blair’s opinion, for at present he sees nothing for it but to tread in the steps of Reid and Stewart; “which to avoid, would be of great importance.” “Surely,” he says, “we may contrive to write with more spirit and effect than either of them; with less formality, less caution; for Stewart seems terrified to place one foot before another.” Then might come some lectures on taste and genius before coming to the moral being. “I believe something is always said of them; and perhaps in six lectures, something eloquent and pleasing might be made out.” Let Blair consider the subject. That brings us up to forty lectures. Then comes the moral nature, the affections, and conscience, or “whatever name that faculty may be called.” Here seems fine ground for descriptions of the operations of the passions and affections, and all concerned with them. That requires twelve lectures at least; “indeed that is too few, though, perhaps, all that could be afforded.” Then comes the Will and all its problems, requiring at least six lectures. “But here I am also in the dark.” One more lecture, on man’s spiritual nature, gives us

* That anticipation was correct. No part of the course, I am informed, was more valued by his students. His lecture on Socrates, in particular, was considered one of his masterpieces in eloquence and pathos.

fifty-eight in all. The rest of the course will embrace fifty lectures respecting the duties of the human being. "I would fain hope that something different from the common metaphysical lectures will produce itself out of this plan." He will read on, and "attend most religiously to the suggestions" of his friend. Let his friend meantime consider every thing, and remember how short the time is; and that unless he does great things for him, and work with him, the Professor is lost. "I am never out of the house," he adds, "and may not be till winter." He is very unwell, and has just got out of bed; "but the belief that you will certainly be here at the time I fixed, and that you certainly will get me through, has enabled me to rise." So the letter ends that day with a "God bless you!" and the next begins with a recommendation to Blair to read Stewart's argument against the Edinburgh Reviewer's assertion, that the study of Mental Philosophy has produced nothing, and imparted no power. He thinks "that both Jeffrey and Stewart are wrong, probably, however, Stewart most so;" but Blair must examine it, "for it is a subject on which you could at once see the truth." Let him also see what Stewart says on the origin of knowledge, "which seems worth reading;" "indeed," he adds, "these essays, though, I believe, not generally so highly thought of, seem to me to be the best of all Stewart's writings. But I am a miserable judge."* He then goes on with the sketch of the course. "Man's relations to God—Natural Theology, will require say eight lectures. Then his relations to man, and first, the natural relations, say twelve lectures; then the relations of Adoption and Institution, not less than fifteen; this department to embrace discussions about Government, Punishments, and Poor-laws. This gives us thirty-three lectures, leaving seventeen for the discussion of Virtues and Vices, the different Schemes of moral approbation, and other important questions; little enough space." These make up in all one hundred and eight lectures, which he thinks will be about the number required. "I have got notes," he says, "of Stewart's lectures, but they are dull; they are but feeble shadows of his published works, on which he bestowed incredible pains." He inquires about Mylne's lectures.

* This is one of many illustrations of the Professor's genuine humility. The egotism and self-complacency of Christopher North were as ideal as that personage himself. He appears in truth to have been, in metaphysics as in literature, a most acute critic; and some papers by him in *Blackwood*, on Berkeley's Philosophy, were, I believe, referred to by Sir William Hamilton as admirable specimens of metaphysical discussion.

“I believe he followed the French, for he hated Reid. But though an acute man, I cannot think he had any wisdom; he was continually nibbling at the shoe-latchets of the mighty.” He again recurs to Stewart’s Essays, which Blair is to read and consider, “but only in the conviction that it is necessary for us, which it seems to be. The truth is, that metaphysics must not be discarded entirely, for my enemies will give out that I discard them because I do not understand them. I want, on the contrary, in the midst of my popular views, and in general, to show frequently a metaphysical power, of which, perhaps, Stewart himself does not possess any very extraordinary share. In the first lecture on the Physical Being of Man this must be kept in view.”

This letter is dated August 7th, so that it would appear that already, in the course of a fortnight, the Professor-elect had gone pretty deep into his subject, and even got the length of having a complete outline of his proposed course nearly matured. His good friend Blair was not found wanting in this crisis, and appears to have faithfully complied with his wishes, sending a regular series of letters, embodying, in the form of answers and suggestions, the results of his profound and varied study of philosophy, ancient and modern. Of these letters I have no specimen to give; but there is another of my father’s sufficiently interesting to be quoted entire. He is at this time apparently (for it is without date) far advanced in his preparations, and has reached that part of his course where the inquiry passed from the region of morals into that of religion.

“MY DEAREST BLAIR:—I would fain hope that your useful and enabling letters do not interfere too much with your own pursuits, whatever these may be. The morning that brings me a legible sibylline leaf, is generally followed by a more quiet-minded day.

“I wish you to send me two or three letters, if possible, on that division of the passions regarding religion. It is imperfectly done, and altogether the whole subject of Natural Theology and our duties to the Deity is heavy. However, I have remedied that in some measure, and will do so still more this session. What I direct your attention to is the History of Idolatry. Some views of its dreadful, beautiful, reverent, voluptuous character and kind; and some fine things in the mythological system of the Greeks, in as far as feeling, passion, or imagination were concerned. Every thing historical

and applied to nations gives a lecture instant effect. Whatever be the true history of all idolatry (Bryant's or others), still the mind operated strongly, and there was not a passive transmission. The impersonalizing of imagination might be expatiated on here, for it was only alluded to in this respect in the Lectures on Imagination. I wish to see stated an opinion as to the power of religion in the ancient world, *i. e.*, in Egypt and Greece, among men in general. Something of the same kind, whatever it was, must have existed and still must exist in Christian countries among the ordinary people, especially in ignorant and bigoted forms of the faith. The image-worship of Catholics is, I presume, susceptible of the holiest emotions of an abstract piety; certainly of the tenderest of a human religion, and in grosser and narrower minds, of almost every thought that formed the faith of an ancient heathen. Many saints, intercessors, priests, etc., I mean no abuse of the Catholic faith, for I regard the doctrines of penitence and absolution and confession as *moral doctrines*, and I wish you would so consider them in an instructive letter. The burden of guilt is fatal, and relief from it may often restore a human soul to virtue. Confession to a friend, to one's own soul, to an elder brother, to a father, to a holy, old, white-haired man (in short, the best view of it), is surely a moral thing, and, as such, ought to be described. Our religious feelings, when justly accordant with the best faith, may be opposite, but true: the simple, austere worship of a Presbyterian, and the richer one of an Episcopalian, and the still more pompous sanctities of Popery. There are deep foundations, and wide ones too, in the soul, on which manifold religions may be all established in truth. We are now speaking not on the question of bestness, but as to fact. Surely the astronomer may worship God in the stars and the manifest temple of heaven, as well as a Scotch elder in a worm-eaten pew, in an ugly kirk of an oblong form, sixty by forty feet; yet the elder is a true man and pure. Sacraments in glorious cathedrals, or upon a little green hillside, which I myself have seen, but cannot describe, as you could do, who have never seen it;* and, above all, funerals; the English service, so affecting and sublime, and the Scotch service, silent, wordless, bare, and desolate—dust to dust in the speechless, formless sorrow of a soul. In that endless emana-

* He had, however, if I am not mistaken, described such a scene with exquisite fidelity, in *Peter's Letters*, vol. iii., p. 75.

tion of feelings, how can reason presume to dictate any one paramount rule to be observed? No. But when by various causes in any nation one tendency runs the one way, then the heart of that nation runs in that channel; all its most holy aspirations join there, and there the sanctity of walls consecrated by the bishops of God, and the sanctity of walls consecrated by no set forms of words, but by the dedication of the place to regular and severe piety,—as in England, the one; in Scotland, the other.* In Scotland, people on week-days walk hatted into churches. Is that, to your mind, an allowable thing? I have seen it done by very religious old men, and not harsh or sullen. To take off their hats would, I think, be reckoned by many a wrong action. This, I conceive, is allowing the inferior motive to prevail over the superior. For they remember the idolatrous practices of the papists whom John Knox overthrew, and rather than resemble them in any degree, they violate the *religio loci*, which is, in the case, this over belief in God. This may seem a trifling concern to you, but it hurts me.

“In the above you will probably see what I want, and perhaps other points may occur to yourself. With respect to metaphysics, do not fear on any subject to write, provided a *conclusion is arrived at*. No letter of yours, *if filled*, can be otherwise than most useful to me. That metaphysical point to which you referred in one of your letters lately, namely, the pure and awful idea of sanctity and reverence to God, which is probably only an extension of a human feeling, is exactly fit for a letter. There is a book called the *Divine Analogy*, by a Bishop Brown, that I do not understand, on this subject. I think you have seen it; and Copleston, I think, touches on it. I intend to put such pieces of the lectures on the Duties to God, as are good, into this part, so that any metaphysical or otherwise important thoughts on our religious emotions or thoughts will be useful. All human emotion towards human beings is fluctuating, and made up of opposite ingredients, even towards our earthly father: towards God, unmingled and one, and this unmingledness and oneness is in truth a new emotion; it exists nowhere else. Men’s conduct seldom shows this; but it is in the soul of many, most men. I once saw, in a dream, a most beautiful flower, in a wide bed of flowers, all of which were beautiful. But this one flower was especially before my soul for a while, as I ad-

* This subject is beautifully treated by him in the first number of the “*Dies Boreales*,”

vanced towards the place where they all were growing. Its character became more and more transcendent as I approached, and the one large flower of which it consisted was lifted up considerably above the rest. I then saw that it was Light, a prismatic globe, quite steady, and burning with a purity and sweetness, and almost an affectionate spirit of beauty, as if it were alive. I never thought of touching it, although still I thought it a flower that was growing; and I heard a kind of sound, faint and dim, as the echo of musical glasses, that seemed to proceed from the flower of light, and pervade the whole bank with low, spiritual music. On trying to remember its appearance and essential beauty more distinctly, I am unable even to reconceive to myself what it was, whether altogether different from the other flowers, or of some perfectly glorious representation of them all; not the queen of flowers, but the star of flowers, or flower-star. Now, as I did not, I presume, see this shining, silent, prismatic, vegetable creature, I myself created it, and it was 'the same, but, ah, how different' of the imagination, mingling light with leaf, stones with roses, decaying with undecaying, heaven with earth, and eternity with time. Yet the product, nothing startling, or like a phenomenon that urged to inquiry, What is this? but beheld in perfect acquiescence in its existence as a thing intensely and delightfully beautiful; but in whose perception and emotion, of whose earthly and heavenly beauty, my beholding spirit was satisfied, oh! far more than satisfied, so purer than dew or light of this earth; yet as certainly and permanently existing as myself existed, or the common flowers, themselves most fair, that lay, a usual spring assemblage in a garden where human hands worked, and mortal beings walked, among the umbrage of perishable trees! Perhaps we see and feel thus in heaven, and even the Alexander Blair whom I loved well on earth, may be thus proportionally loved by me in another life. Yours forever,

“J. W.”

Among other friends to whom he resorted for advice at this time, was his well-beloved teacher, Professor Jardine. The judicious “Hints” of the old man are given with characteristic method and kindliness, but scarcely call for publication here. So far as the order of the course was concerned, my father preferred to follow his own plan, as sketched in his first letter to Blair. To that plan,

I believe, he adhered ever after, though, in important respects, he completely altered, in subsequent years, the substance of his lectures.

The opening of a new session is always an interesting occasion, and when it is the professor's first appearance the interest is of course intensified. The crowd that assembled to hear my father's introductory lecture proved too numerous for the dimensions of the room, and it was found necessary to adjourn to the more capacious class-room of Dr. Monro, the Professor of Anatomy. Wilson entered, accompanied by Principal Baird, Professors Home, Jameson, and Hope in their gowns, "a thing we believe quite unusual," remarked the *Scotsman*, in whose eyes this trifling mark of respect seemed a kind of insult to the audience, composed as it was, to a large extent, of persons prepared to give the new Professor any thing but a cordial greeting. An eye-witness* thus describes the scene:—"There was a furious bitterness of feeling against him among the classes of which probably most of his pupils would consist, and although I had no prospect of being among them, I went to his first lecture, prepared to join in a cabal, which I understood was formed to put him down. The lecture-room was crowded to the ceiling. Such a collection of hard-browed, scowling Scotsmen, muttering over their knobsticks, I never saw. The Professor entered with a bold step, amid profound silence. Every one expected some deprecatory or propitiatory introduction of himself and his subject, upon which the mass was to decide against him, reason or no reason; but he began in a voice of thunder right into *the matter* of his lecture, kept up unflinchingly and unhesitatingly, without a pause, a flow of rhetoric such as Dugald Stewart or Thomas Brown, his predecessors, never delivered in the same place. Not a word, not a murmur escaped his captivated, I ought to say his conquered audience, and at the end they gave him a right-down unanimous burst of applause. Those who came to scoff remained to praise."

Another spectator of the scene tells me that towards the conclusion of the lecture, the commencement of which had been delayed by the circumstance already mentioned, the Professor was interrupted in the midst of an eloquent peroration by the sudden entrance of Dr. Monro's tall figure—enveloped as usual in his long white

* The author of *The Two Cosmos*: MS. letter.

greatcoat—to announce that his hour had come. Pulling out his watch, the unsympathizing anatomist addressed him: “Sir, it’s past one o’clock, and my students are at the door; you must conclude.” The orator, thus rudely cut short, had some difficulty in preserving his self-possession, and, after a few sentences more, sat down.

The first lecture and those which followed amply justified the expectations of friends, and completely silenced enemies. Even the unfriendly critic above referred to, while attempting to disparage this first display of his powers, patronizingly assured the new Professor that if he made the exertions he had promised, and demeaned himself as became the successor of Ferguson, Brown, and Stewart, his past errors might be forgotten, and he might obtain that public confidence which was essential to his success as a teacher. No such exhortations were needed to make Wilson feel the gravity of his position, and stimulate him to maintain the glory of the University, on which for the next thirty-one years he reflected so much lustre. When he uttered the confident prediction, “I shall be professor to my dying day,” it was in no boastful spirit. He had made up his mind to devote his full strength to the duties of the office, and with all his distrust of his own metaphysical capacity, he had a reasonable confidence in his ability to make the Moral Philosophy class-room, as it had been before him, a place of high and ennobling influence. To himself personally the change of position brought with it a consolidation of character and aims which imparted new dignity to his life and at the same time increased his happiness. In assuming the Professor’s gown he did not indeed think it necessary, had that been possible, to divest himself of his proper characteristics, to be less fond of sport, less lively with his pen. His literary activity and influence increased in the years that followed this, for “Christopher North” was as yet but a dimly-figured personage. But from this time “The Professor” is his peculiar, his most prized title; the Chair is the place where he feels his highest work to be. I believe the prejudices and hostility which obstructed his way to it, however triumphantly overcome, threw their shadows forward more than is generally supposed. For, while no one could gainsay the fidelity with which he discharged his duty, and the altogether unrivalled eloquence of his lectures, I believe there were always some people who believed that he was nothing more than a splendid declaimer, and that his course

of lectures contained more poetry than philosophy. He was himself aware of this, and refers to it in a letter to De Quincey, in which he naïvely asks his friend to describe him as "thoroughly logical and argumentative," which, he says, "is true; not a rhetorician, as fools aver." The truth is, his poetical and literary fame injured him in this respect as a lecturer; commonplace people thinking it impossible that a man could be both logical and eloquent, an acute metaphysician as well as a brilliant humorist. But among his own students generally there was but one opinion of "The Professor;" to them he was truly *Der Einzige*. Other professors enjoyed their respect and esteem; Wilson took their hearts as well as their imaginations by storm. They may have before this read and argued about philosophy; they were now made to feel it as a power. "The mental faculties" were no mere names; the passions and affections, and the dread mysteries of conscience, ceased to be abstract matters of speculation, and were exhibited before them as living and solemn realities mirrored in their own kindling breasts; and when they found that that formidable personage, of whom they had heard so much, and whose aspect, as he stood before them (he never sat), did not belie his fame, was in private the most accessible, frank, and kindly of men, their admiration was turned into enthusiastic love. There are few who listened to him, whether in the palmy days of his prime, or in the evening of life, when he came to be spoken of as "the old man eloquent," that do not speak of him with glowing cheek and sparkling eye, as they recall the cherished recollections of his moving eloquence, his irresistible humor, his eager interest in their studies and their welfare, his manly freedom of criticism, and his large-hearted generosity. The readiness with which he grasped at any question put to him gave his manner a quickness and animation of expression that at first was somewhat startling. While he had a terrible faculty for *snubbing* any display of conceit or forwardness, diffident talent was set at ease in his presence by the winning sympathy of his look and manner, which at once infused confidence and hope. But I am anticipating what will form the subject of a special chapter, and shall now close this with a brief letter, addressed to his friend Mr. Smith, on Christmas day, 1820:—

"MY DEAR SIR:—If you can send me *instantly*, *i. e.*, by the re-

turn of mail or coach, Vince's 'Refutation of Atheism,' you will greatly oblige me. It is not in Edinburgh. Unless, however, you can send it immediately, it will be useless to me.

"I have no time to write. We have ten days of vacation, and I resume my lectures on January 2d. I have delivered thirty lectures, and am now advancing to the moral division of my course. As far as I can learn, my friends highly applaud, and my worst foes are dumb or sulky. The public, I believe, are satisfied. I need not say that my labor is intense. Direct to me at No. 53 Queen street, where I send for my letters every day; and if you have time, tell me how you are, and what doing. Yours very truly,
"JOHN WILSON."

CHAPTER X.

THE PROFESSOR AND HIS CLASS.

It was no temporary enthusiasm that glorified the name of "the Professor" among his students, and still keeps his memory green in hearts that have long ago outlived the romantic ideals of youth. One of the most pleasing results of my labor has been to come upon traces everywhere of the love and admiration with which my father is remembered by those who attended his class. That remembrance is associated in some instances with sentiments of the most unbounded gratitude for help and counsel given in the most critical times of a young man's life. How much service of this sort was rendered during an academical connection of thirty years, may be estimated as something more to be thought of than the proudest literary fame. So, I doubt not, my father felt, though on that subject, or on any claims he had earned for individual gratitude, he was never heard to speak. Of his merits as a teacher of moral philosophy I am not speaking, and cannot pretend to give any critical estimate. I leave that to more competent hands. What I speak of is his relation to his students beyond the formal business of the class; for it is that, I think, that constitutes, as much as the quality of the lectures delivered, the difference between one teacher