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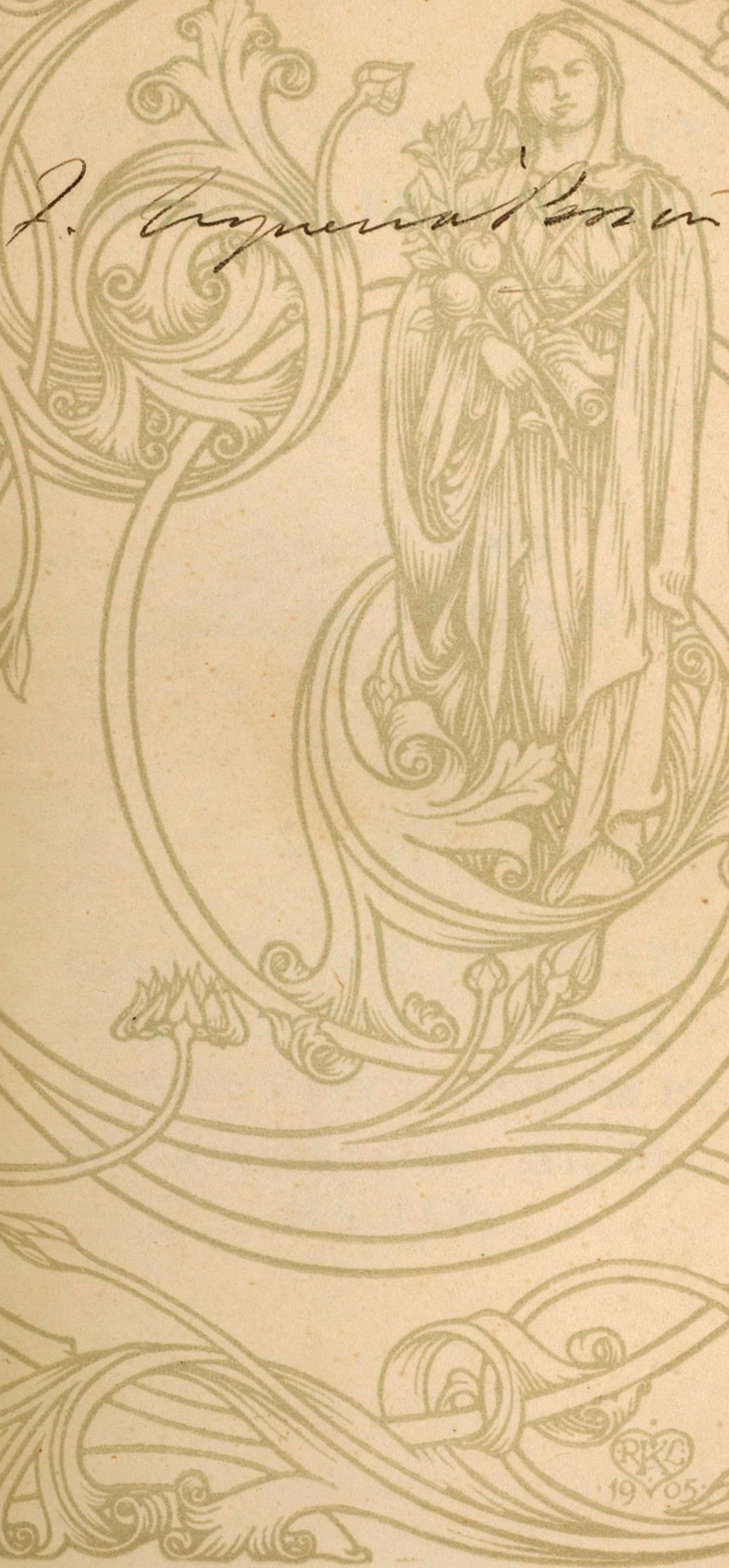

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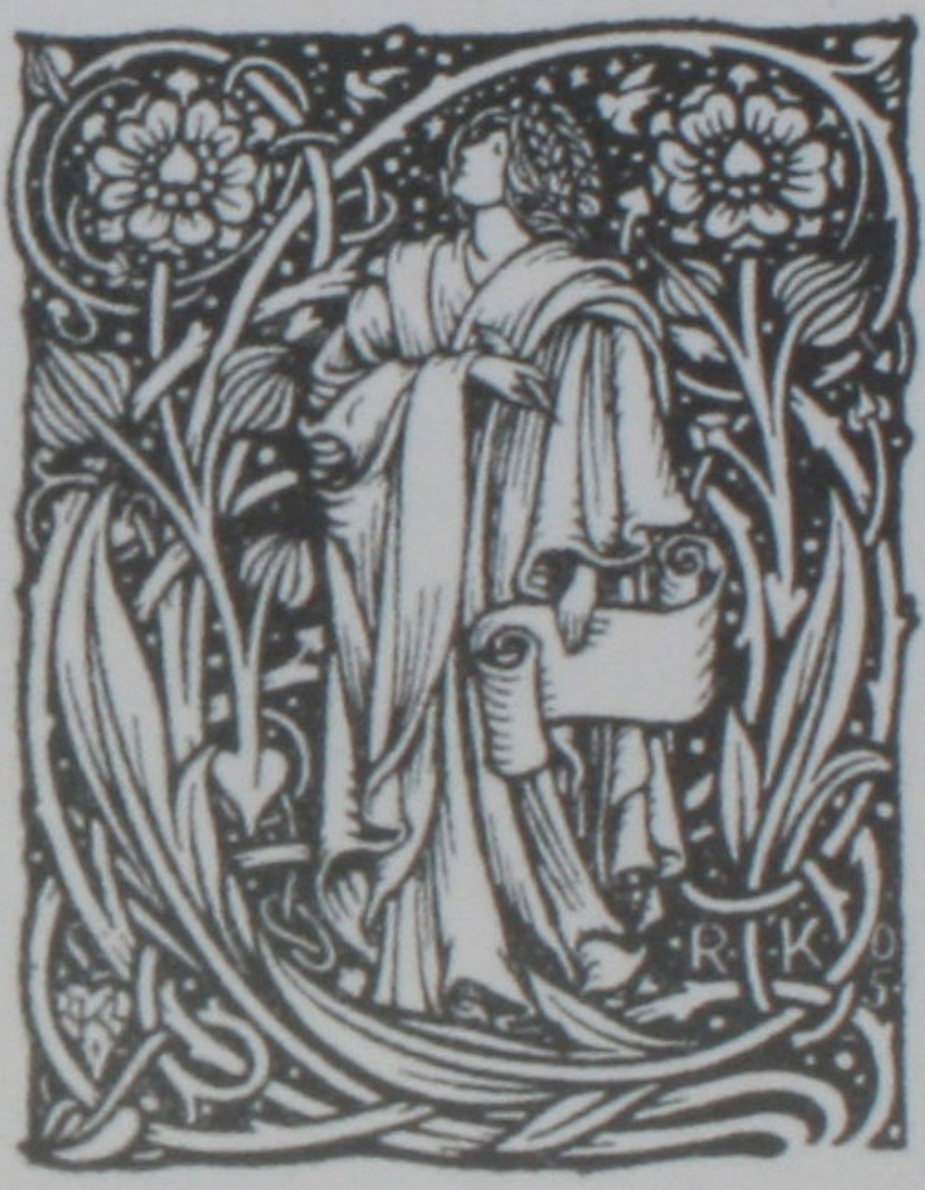
ESSAYS AND BELLES LETTRES

GILFILLAN'S LITERARY PORTRAITS EDITED WITH INTRODUCTION BY W. ROBERTSON NICOLL M.A., LL.D.

POST
CURRENT
FOR THAT
THEY COME
HOME TO
MEN'S
BUSINESS
& BOSOMS
LORD BACON

A GALLERY *of* LITERARY PORTRAITS *by* GEORGE·GILFILLAN

EVERY MAN I WILL GO WITH THEE & BE THY GVIDE



IN THY MOST NEED TO GO BY THY SIDE

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INTRODUCTION

For about five years (1849-1854) George Gilfillan's position as a critic was one of very great influence. It may be doubted whether even Carlyle had more power over young minds. These years were the period of a movement. There was a thrill in the air, a belief that the new world was at hand. This was felt beyond his immediate circle; it stirred in the books of the Brontës, the socialism of Kingsley, and the passionate preaching of Kossuth and Mazzini. Of course it appealed chiefly to young minds.

> Still are they equal—fit for weeping or for laughter.
> The flight they still admire; the flash with pleasure see.

There was something, perhaps much of fever in it, but it helped Gilfillan to break into the depths of his genius. Almost every literary aspirant in the country sent his manuscripts to the Dundee critic; wherever he went to lecture or preach he was followed by admiring crowds. Such moods cannot last; their tension was manifest in Kingsley with his steady "ambition to die," and in Gilfillan and Dobell with their anticipation of the speedy return of Christ. Aytoun's *Firmilian: a Spasmodic Tragedy* was the literary death-blow to the movement, but even if that brilliant satire had never been written, the movement would have gone the way of dreams. It ended as a matter of fact with Thackerayism in literature and with Palmerstonianism in politics. Mr. Gilfillan went on writing till the last, and he never wrote better than in the closing years of his life; but his empire was over. Since his death his books have been almost forgotten, and he is not so much as named by Professor Saintsbury in his *History of Criticism*. Still he can never be ignored in any full record of Victorian literature.

George Gilfillan was the son of a Secession minister at Comrie, where he was born in 1813. When he was thirteen years old his father died, and he entered Glasgow College, where he became a class fellow of Archibald Campbell Tait, afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury. Among his professors were Sir Daniel Sandford, Robert Buchanan, and James

Milne. At that time the Glasgow students elected Thomas Campbell the poet to the office of Lord Rector, and Gilfillan always remembered with delight the day when Campbell came to be installed, and to deliver his inaugural address. Gilfillan did not distinguish himself as a student, but he attracted attention as an essayist. When he read a paper on the "Association of Ideas" in Buchanan's class room, the first words of the professor's criticism were: "We have got a young Chalmers among us." His mind was intensely active, and he read very widely. The first man to influence him was Christopher North, and he never was free from that spell. His desire was to be a literary man, but he proceeded to study for the ministry in the Theological Hall of his church. This took him to Edinburgh, where he came in contact more or less with many eminent men, including Wilson, Chalmers, and Jeffrey. From Wilson he received some indirect encouragement, and his interest in poetry was greatly stimulated. In 1836, when he was only twenty-four, he was appointed minister of the School Wynd Congregation, Dundee, with a stipend of £220 a year, and a manse. A year later he was married to Margaret Valentine. He threw himself into preaching, and his bold and unconventional style attracted large congregations, though he was by no means without his troubles. He continued to be minister in the same sphere till his life closed in 1878, and his power and his eccentricity kept round him many admirers, and made him perhaps the most outstanding figure in Dundee. It was through Thomas Aird, the poet, that he found opportunity for literary work. In 1837 Aird visited Dundee to attend the funeral of a brother who had been a member of Gilfillan's church, and then their friendship began. Aird's poem, "The Devil's Dream," is still remembered, and he was a close friend of Thomas Carlyle and of Christopher North. He wrote much in *Blackwood*, and was editor of the *Dumfriesshire and Galloway Herald*. Aird, though he was not in a position to pay Gilfillan for his contributions, allowed him to write in his paper the literary sketches afterwards published as *A Gallery of Literary Portraits*. He began in 1840. The articles, though printed in a provincial paper, attracted considerable attention. The first portrait in this volume was read by Carlyle, who thought it was written by Aird. Carlyle wrote to Aird: "It is a noble panegyric—a picture painted by a poet, which means with me a man of insight and of heart; decisive, sharp of outline,

in hues borrowed from the sun. It is rare to find oneself so mirrored in a brother's soul." Writing in January 1844 to Emerson, Carlyle said: "Did you receive a Dumfries newspaper with a criticism (of me) in it? The author is one Gilfillan, a young Dissenting minister in Dundee, a person of great talent, ingenuousness, enthusiasm and other virtues; whose position as a preacher of bare old Calvinism under penalty of death sometimes makes me tremble for him. He has written in that same newspaper about all the notablest men of his time: Godwin, Corn-Law Elliott, and I know not all whom; if he publish the book I will take care to send it you. I saw the man for the first time last autumn at Dumfries. As I said, his being a Calvinist Dissenting minister economically fixed and spiritually with such germinations in him, forces me to be very reserved with him." But the two men met both in Dumfries and in London, and had much friendly intercourse. Carlyle, with characteristic kindness, endeavoured to help on his book. He wrote in November 1840 to Lockhart, then editor of the *Quarterly*: "A poor meritorious Scotchman, a burgher minister in Dundee, of the name of Gilfillan, has published a book—I believe at his own expense too, poor fellow—under the title *Gallery of Literary Portraits* or some such thing; and is about sending, as in duty bound, a copy to the *Quarterly*. I know not whether this poor book will in the least lie in your way; but to prevent you throwing it aside without so much as looking at it, I write now to bear witness that the man is really a person of superior parts; and that his book, of which I have read some of the sections, first published in a country newspaper that comes to me, is worthy of being looked at a little by you,—that you may decide then, with cause shown, whether there is anything to be done with it. I am afraid not very much. A strange, oriental, Scriptural style; full of fervour, and crude, gloomy fire,—a kind of opium style. However, you must look a little, and say.

"This testimony I have volunteered to send, having seen the man as well as his writing; and now this is all I have to say. The antecedents to this step, and the corollaries that follow from it on your part and on mine are not needed to be written. I believe you will do me the honour (a very great honour as times go) to believe what I have written; and the helping of a poor fellow that has merit, when he can be helped —this, I take it, is at all times felt to be a pleasure and a

blessing by you as by me. And so enough of it." Lockhart does not seem to have taken any notice of this appeal, but when the *Gallery of Literary Portraits* was published Gilfillan did not want for friends. The book had a hearty reception both in this country and in America. It was published by William Tait, the proprietor of *Tait's Magazine*. *Tait* was the Radical rival to the Conservative *Blackwood*. Though by no means on the literary level of *Blackwood*, it had a proportion of good articles, including many contributions from Thomas De Quincey. The first *Gallery of Literary Portraits* had the high distinction of being reviewed elaborately by De Quincey in papers that are to be found in his collected works. Gilfillan became a frequent contributor to *Tait*, and he found an outlet also in a popular and meritorious Edinburgh magazine of the time which bore the singular title of *Hogg's Instructor*. His writings were acceptable among the English Nonconformists, and he contributed to their leading periodicals, the *British Quarterly Review*, edited by Dr. Robert Vaughan, and the *Eclectic Review*, edited by Dr. Thomas Price. He was invited immediately to lecture at the Edinburgh Philosophical Institution, in London, and in many places throughout the country. To a very large class the combination of literary with religious interests was very attractive. Sydney Dobell wrote: "Here is an orthodox divine who proclaims that 'a powerful cause of our recent refined scepticism may be found in the narrow, bigoted, and unworthy notions of Christianity which prevail, in the obstinacy with which they are retained, and in the contrast thus presented to the liberal and fluent motion of the general age.' . . . Here is a philosopher, the friend of Carlyle, the panegyrist of Emerson, sitting and in his right mind at the feet of Christ. Here is a man burning in zeal, adamantine in faith, but who steps out to spiritual combat with the difficulties of the day, crying, 'It will not do now to skulk from the field under a flight of nicknames. It will not do to call our opponents miscreants and monsters. While we state their doubts, let us pity the pain and sorrow, amounting almost to distraction and despair, which attend them; and let us inquire, if we have no difficulties, may it not be because we have never thought at all?'"

Gilfillan found close friends among some of the most brilliant men of the day. David Scott, the painter, was one; Samuel Brown, the famous chemist, was another, and a third was Professor J. P. Nichol of Glasgow, the father of the late

Professor John Nichol. Another friend was Emerson, who visited him in Dundee. Longfellow was also a frequent and cordial correspondent.

But perhaps the most substantial recognition was that which Gilfillan received from young men with literary ambitions. They sent him their manuscripts and their books. Generous and warm-hearted to a degree, Gilfillan took endless troubles for his young admirers. He criticised; he praised when he could; he found publishers in many cases; and he was so lavish in the gifts he bestowed out of his small means that his wife had practically to deprive him of money. Two at least of the associations thus formed deserve to be somewhat fully described. I refer to his "discovery" of Sydney Dobell and Alexander Smith.

The biographer of Sydney Dobell says: "An extract from the 'Roman' published in *Tait's Magazine* had excited a good deal of attention, and was probably the first motive of a correspondence between its author and the Rev. George Gilfillan." I have reason, however, to believe that it was through Mr. Gilfillan that the extract from Dobell's manuscript poem was printed in *Tait*. Dobell wrote to him under date May 3, 1849: "I am not ashamed to tell you that your words have given me great happiness—whoso has been in great doubt can fancy how lively—and it is due to that free philanthropy which has thrown such largess to an importunate stranger, to say that happiness is, I believe and trust, the poorest part of the alms. If in after years I should ever be called 'Poet' you will know that my success is, in some sort, your work. And in that knowledge I feel that such a nature as yours will be best thanked." When the first edition of the *Roman* was published by Mr. Bentley at the beginning of April 1850, it was received with universal commendation. Gilfillan sounded its praises wherever he went, and Dobell was not lacking in appreciation of his friend. In a short-lived Edinburgh magazine, the *Palladium*, edited by a Congregational minister, the Rev. Ninian Wight, Dobell wrote articles on Gilfillan's *Galleries of Literary Portraits*, and on his *Bards of the Bible*. It was to the same periodical that Dobell contributed his magnificent panegyric of *Wuthering Heights*, and he may be said to have been the first writer who truly appreciated the genius of Emily Brontë, though he believed that the books of Emily and Charlotte came from the same hand. In subsequent letters Dobell refers cordiall

to Gilfillan. Writing in 1850 to Dr. Samuel Brown he says: "Our noble friend Gilfillan has spoken with much tender anxiety of you." Gilfillan introduced Dobell to Carlyle, and at Carlyle's request the articles written by Dobell on Currer Bell, on Newman, and on the *Bards of the Bible* were sent to him. Carlyle wrote: "I have read your three articles in the prescribed order with a real pleasure and interest: it is by no means every day one sees such a busy, swift, sharp cutting brain and such an ardent, hoping heart pouring themselves forth in the way of literature as are manifest here." In 1854 Dobell writes: "Gilfillan, who disappointed us on Friday, made his appearance last Tuesday morning, and spent the day with us. He seems to me the very incarnation of force: not power but force." It was in 1854 that Dobell published *Balder*, and the book was on the whole most unfavourably received. As Dobell's biographer says, nothing could have been in greater contrast to the enthusiastic reception given to the *Roman*. Dobell had himself a whole-hearted belief in its quality and in its future. It was his deliberate judgment that there was as much poetry in many a chapter of *Balder* as in the whole of the *Roman*. But while assuredly there are many fine things in *Balder*, it is now practically forgotten. Gilfillan at first praised it, but afterwards recanted and spoke of it as "that hideous spasm of a true poet." Though the intercourse between Gilfillan and Dobell does not seem to have been prolonged much beyond 1855, there remained a very friendly feeling between them.

Alexander Smith had a far more sudden and startling success than ever fell to Sydney Dobell. It may be worth while setting down the facts of the connection between him and Gilfillan with fulness and accuracy, as they are often mis-stated. In that excellent and modest book, *The Early Years of Alexander Smith*, by the Rev. T. Brisbane, published in 1869, most of the particulars will be found. Mr. Brisbane says that before Smith sent his manuscripts to Gilfillan he had been for several years an ardent admirer of the critic. "Everything from the pen of that gifted minister of Dundee was hailed and diligently perused by him; and on every occasion of his visiting Glasgow as a preacher or lecturer Smith was certain to be one of his hearers. No man in Scotland wielded at that time so great an influence over young aspiring minds intent on self-culture as Mr. Gilfillan; and among others Smith was attracted to him by his hearty,

impartial appreciation of genius, and the bold utterance of his convictions. By his writings in *Hogg's Instructor*, the *Eclectic*, the *Critic*, etc., Smith's mind was in no slight degree stimulated. Several of his early friends remember him speaking frequently of two articles especially from Gilfillan's pen , which appeared in *Hogg's Instructor* in July 1845, on 'Genius,' as containing sentences which greatly quickened his latent faculties, and, to use his own words, 'haunted my mind for months.' Hence, at length, emboldened by Mr. Gilfillan's commendations of the *Roman* by Sydney Yendys or Dobell, Smith, after consultation with two of his young friends of the Addisonian Society, resolved to submit a selection of his poems to him whom he had so long admired, and from whose writings he had derived so much benefit. Consequently in April 1851, he sent a small parcel of MS. accompanied by a modest letter, soliciting criticism and advice, to Dundee." After some time Gilfillan sent back a letter so appreciative, encouraging, and eulogistic that Smith was filled with unwonted joy, and stirred to greater activity. In October 1851 Gilfillan wrote a notice of Smith's manuscript poems in the *Eclectic Review*. Immediately after Gilfillan happened to be preaching in Glasgow and met Smith for the first time. He introduced Smith to Professor Nichol and to the professor's son, Mr. John Nichol, then a student, and afterwards Professor of English Literature in the University of Glasgow. Dr. Nichol remained to his death an ardent and steadfast friend.

But the real introduction of Smith took place in 1852. At that time Mr. Edward W. Cox, who attained so marked a success in other fields of journalism, was endeavouring to establish a literary paper called the *Critic*. It was published fortnightly and contained contributions from such men as W. M. Rossetti, William Maccall, and Gilfillan. Francis Espinasse, who is happily still with us, was the life and soul of the paper. It had considerable vigour, but was too irregular and too much made up of extracts to be a serious rival to the *Athenæum*. However, at that time it had a good circulation, and when Gilfillan published a long article on "A New Poet in Glasgow" in which he not only gave copious extracts from several of the manuscripts before him but published some of the poems entire, there was something like a sensation. Mr. Gilfillan accounted for his reviewing poems of a living writer which were still only in manuscript

by saying: "His aim is at present partly to get his poetry printed, but principally to work up his way to a situation more congenial to his mind, more worthy of his powers, and allowing him more leisure for his favourite pursuits." He called "specially on Glasgow friends, ever generous and warm-hearted, to look to it that they neglect not one of the finest poets—perhaps indeed, one promising to be the finest since Campbell—their good city had produced." This brought friends round Smith, and he soon found a publisher in Mr. David Bogue. It ought to be noted that when Gilfillan wrote, heralding a new poet, he had never seen or heard of *A Life Drama*, and could not consequently write about *it*. What Smith sent him was a collection of short poems. Smith resolved to fuse the poems into one by detaching, transposing, piecing, uniting, and supplementing. Mr. Gilfillan expressed doubts as to the feasibility of the plan, but when *A Life Drama* appeared at the close of the year 1852 it had a remarkable reception. Smith immediately became famous. George Meredith wrote a sonnet to Smith in the *Critic*, and nearly all the reviewers were enthusiastic in their praise. Smith obtained the appointment of secretary to the University of Edinburgh, and he never ceased to own his obligations to the man who had helped him into fame.

But the reaction came which greatly and permanently injured George Gilfillan's reputation and influence. It can hardly be doubted that the reaction was largely due to the publication of *Balder*. No doubt reaction was inevitable, but *Balder*, it must be confessed, offered a tempting target. W. E. Aytoun in *Firmilian* inflicted an almost deadly blow on what he called the "Spasmodic School." The name stuck, and the event was remembered. *Firmilian* was partly published in *Blackwood's Magazine*, and appeared in book form under the title *Firmilian, or the Student of Badajoz: a Spasmodic Tragedy*, by T. Percy Jones. It can only be understood by those familiar with the writings of the school. But a specimen may be given of the "Spasms":—

> Let the hoarse thunder rend the vault of heaven,
> Yea, shake stars by myriads from their boughs,
> As autumn tempests shake the fruitage down;—
> Let the red lightning shoot athwart the sky,
> Entangling comets by their spooming hair,
> Piercing the zodiac belt, and carrying dread
> To old Orion, and his whispering hound;—
> But let the glory of this deed be mine!

Gilfillan, who was introduced under his pseudonym "Apollodorus," was treated with special cruelty:—

> Why do men call me a presumptuous cur,
> A vapouring blockhead, and a turgid fool,
> A common nuisance and a charlatan?

The effect was immediate and marked. Sydney Dobell wrote *Keith of Ravelston*, the lyric by which he is remembered; Alexander Smith, through the rest of his short life, wrote much good poetry and prose. Gilfillan continued to produce many critical and biographical essays, but none of the three ever quite regained the ear of the public.

When *A Life Drama* was published the *Athenæum* reviewed it favourably, but on January 3, 1857, when Alexander Smith was about to publish his second book, there appeared an article headed "The Last New Poet," in which he was charged with plagiarism on a large scale. I believe the paper was written by Mr. William Allingham, who by the way had been a correspondent of Gilfillan, and had received encouragement from him. Mr. W. M. Rossetti has said that the charge was urged "with more zeal and success than real cogency of proof." At the time Shirley Brooks took up the cudgels for Smith in *Punch*. He parodied Allingham's parallels thus—

"In Mr. Smith's *City Poems*, he says—

'And *bees* are *busy* in the yellow hive.'

"What says Dr. Watts?—

'How doth the *busy, busy bee.*'

"Mr. Smith—

'The age *demands her hero.*'

"Lord Byron—

'I *want a hero*, an uncommon want.'"

and concluded by saying that "there is no single word in all Mr. Smith's poetry that has not been previously used by somebody else."

It should be said, however, that Sydney Dobell, afterwards a warm friend of Smith's, had written to Gilfillan as early as 1852 as follows: "Truly there are some magnificent things in his (Alexander Smith's) contributions to the *Critic*, but the more I see of his poetry the more I am impressed with a certain dread of plagiarism which seized me, if you remember, the first time I read your extracts. Not so much plariarism *totidem verbis* as . . . that most fatal plagiarism whose

originality consists in reversing well-known medals." Mr. P. J. Bailey, the author of *Festus*, believed that Smith had plagiarised from him, and late in life stated this very strongly, as I know, both in speech and in print. But certainly Smith was unconscious of plagiarism.

Another of Gilfillan's "discoveries" was John Stanyan Bigg, a journalist in Ulverston, the son of a Wesleyan minister. He wrote *Night and the Soul*, but never achieved a vogue. To Gerald Massey Gilfillan was also specially kind. I have printed his essays on Dobell, Smith, Bigg, and Massey as interesting in their way and belonging to literary history. To the end of his life he was a patron of young authors. Robert Buchanan's first volume was dedicated to him, and Mr. Hall Caine wrote to me in 1892 acknowledging his obligations to the critic. He tells how he sent his long poem of 1874 to Gilfillan: "Gilfillan was a man of much mark at that time, writing frequently, lecturing constantly, travelling a great deal, and still preaching every week. Nevertheless he read my poem and wrote me two letters about it of so much warmth and praise, and so much candour of criticism, that my ambition, if it had ever smouldered, must have been fired afresh, and my best energies put on their mettle."

Gilfillan published his *Second Gallery of Literary Portraits* in 1849. In 1850 he issued *The Bards of the Bible*, which has been the most popular of his books. In 1852 he sent out a spirited little volume entitled *Martyrs, Heroes, and Bards of the Scottish Covenant*. In 1854 appeared the third and last *Gallery of Literary Portraits*. In 1856 he published a kind of autobiography entitled *The History of a Man*—part fact, part fiction. *The History of a Man* was very severely criticised, and Hugh Miller, in the *Witness*, came to the rescue "in a paper, for the generous recognition, strong defence, and brotherly sympathy of which I felt then and feel now profound gratitude." So Gilfillan wrote in his later years. He published also several volumes made up of sermons: *Christianity and our Era, Alpha and Omega*, and *Modern Christian Heroes*. In 1867 there appeared *Night: a Poem*. He wrote in 1870 a short life of Sir Walter Scott. But his main work was his Library edition of the *British Poets*. It was published by James Nichol of Edinburgh, brother of Professor Nichol of Glasgow. Six volumes appeared every year, and they were issued by subscription at a guinea for the set. The series began with 7000 subscribers, and continued fairly

successful till the end. At first Gilfillan edited the text, but afterwards that part of the work was committed to Charles Cowden Clarke, and Gilfillan merely contributed introductions. On this part of his work I may quote the judgment of D. G. Rossetti in a letter to Mr. Hall Caine: "I remember your mentioning Gilfillan as having encouraged your first efforts. He was powerful, though sometimes rather 'tall' as a writer, generally most just as a critic, and lastly, a much better man, intellectually and morally, than Aytoun, who tried to 'do for' him. His notice of Swift, in the volume in question, has very great force and eloquence. His whole edition of the *British Poets* is the best of any to read, being such fine type and convenient bulk and weight (a great thing for an arm-chair reader). Unfortunately, he now and then (in the *Less-Read Poets*) cuts down the extracts almost to nothing, and in some cases excises objectionabilities, which is unpardonable. Much better leave the whole out. Also, the edition includes the usual array of nobodies—Addison, Akenside, and the whole alphabet down to Zany and Zero; whereas a great many of the *less-read* would have been much-read by every worthy reader if they had only been printed in full. So well printed an edition of Donne (for instance) would have been a great boon; but from him Gilfillan only gives (among the *less-read*) the admirable *Progress of the Soul*, and some of the pregnant *Holy Sonnets*. Do you know Donne? There is hardly an English poet better worth a thorough knowledge, in spite of his provoking conceits and occasional jagged jargon."

During his later years Mr. Gilfillan was a constant contributor to the *Dundee Advertiser*, then under the care of the late Sir John Leng. Many of his articles showed him at his best as a genial and generous critic. He continued active in the work of his church and in the public life of the city till his sudden death in 1878. He was accorded the honours of a public funeral, and the many testimonies from all sides to his worth showed the place he had made for himself among those who knew him best.

I do not claim for him a permanent place in literature. His faults are on the surface, and they lend themselves but too easily to ridicule and caricature. He had no measure or self-restraint; his work was hasty; he frequently contradicted himself, and he wanted the saving sense of humour which a prose poet needs most of all men. The Scot, it has been truly said, has always been the Scythian of literature, coming in

with barbaric vigour from the out-field, and making short work of forms and conventions. Burns, Wilson, and Carlyle are marked illustrations. From Wilson, Gilfillan mainly drew. But the old story of the Roman and the Goth has been repeated even in Wilson's case, and much sooner in Gilfillan's. The shepherd says in *Noctes Ambrosianæ*: "Wi' respeck to mere literary men, O, dear me, sir! hoo I do gaunt [yawn] when they come out to Mount Benger! They canna shute, they canna fish, they canna loup [leap], they canna warsle [wrestle], they canna soom [swim], they canna put the stane, they canna fling the hammer, they canna even drive a gig." All true, but the Cockney critics have practically wiped out the *Noctes*. "The large succulent Goth, with eyes azure as the heavens, and locks like golden sunbeams," went down before the drilled, dark-eyed little Roman. The want of discipline was fatal.

His warm friend, Samuel Brown, wrote to him: "Do be careful with your second edition. Out with many a little vulgarism of expression. They offend many good judges to the soul, and they add nothing to their effect. Jeffrey was irritated every now and then by this stumbling-stone. Wipe them all clean out; there are hundreds of them. If I were you, I would also put away the mostly ill-founded and unnecessary anecdotes which you have sprinkled your pages withal so liberally. These, I am sure, are sound advices, and they are out of the very core of friendship." Still with all reservations Gilfillan had great merits. No one perceived earlier or more steadfastly the greatness of Shelley. Hazlitt and Lamb were hailed by Gilfillan at a time when many critics miserably under-rated them. Of Macaulay, Gilfillan from the first took his own view undismayed by the clamour of the hour. The justice of one estimate from which he never deviated has yet to be decided. From first to last he unhesitatingly put Tennyson in the second rank of English poets. (George Meredith remembers a Surrey walk with Tennyson in 1851 shortly after a criticism by Gilfillan had appeared in the *Critic*. Every now and then the irate bard paused, drew himself up, and said: "But Apollodorus says I am not a poet.") Above all, he had the saving virtue of enthusiasm.

When he died Dr. Hutchison Stirling wrote to Mrs. Gilfillan: "I most deeply deplore with you the too early loss of this invaluable life. The sad news shocked me and deeply

grieved. The Church has lost its most eloquent and honest pastor; literature its foremost and most genial critic—a man of true genius who could not write a sentence that had not in some way the virtue of his inspiration in it." There are many besides Stirling, and the present writer is one, who can never speak of George Gilfillan with judicial impartiality. They cannot think of what he was without remembering what he was to them.

I have indicated in each of the following essays the source from which it is taken. They are mostly selected on the ground of the author's own preferences.

In 1892 was published *George Gilfillan's Letters and Journals*, with Memoir by Robert A. Watson, M.A., D.D., and Elizabeth S. Watson. This gives a good account of Gilfillan's character and public labours, with many interesting extracts from his letters and journals.

W. ROBERTSON NICOLL.

1909.

The following is a list of his published works:—

Hades, or the Unseen (sermon), 1843; Gallery of Literary Portraits (from the *Dumfries Herald*), 1st series, 1845; 2nd ser., 1850; 3rd ser., 1854; re-issue, 1856-7; Alpha and Omega, or a Series of Scripture Studies, 1850; Book of British Poesy, with an Essay on British Poetry, 1851; Bards of the Bible, 1851; Martyrs, Heroes, and Bards of the Scottish Covenant, 1852; the Fatherhood of God, 1854; Life of Robert Burns, 1856, 1879; History of a Man: a Semi-Autobiographical Romance, 1856; Christianity and our Era, 1857; Remoter Stars in the Church Sky, 1867; Night: a Poem, 1867; Modern Christian Heroes (including Milton, Cromwell, and the Puritans), 1869; Life of Sir Walter Scott, 1870, 1871; Comrie and its Neighbourhood, 1872; Life of the Rev. William Anderson of Glasgow, 1873; Sketches, Literary and Theological, from an unpublished manuscript, 1881.

Lectures and Essays:—Christian Bearings of Astronomy, 1848; Connection between Science, Literature, and Religion, 1849; The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ, 1851; Influence of Burns on Scottish Poetry and Song, 1855; Christian Missions, 1857; The Age of Lead: a Satire, 1858; Life and Works of David Vedder, 1878. He edited The British Poets for James Nichol's series, adding memoirs, between 1853-1860.

Life:—R. A. Watson and E. S. Watson, Letters and Journals, with Memoir, 1892; D. Macrae, George Gilfillan, Anecdotes and Reminiscences, 1891.

CONTENTS

GILFILLAN'S LITERARY PORTRAITS

DR. CHALMERS[1]

THERE are some subjects which seem absolutely inexhaustible. They may be compared to the alphabet, which, after 5000 years, is capable still of new and infinite combinations—or to the sun, whose light is as fresh to-day as it was a million of ages ago—or to space, which has opened her hospitable bosom to myriads on myriads of worlds, and has ample room for myriads on myriads more. Such a fresh ever-welling theme is Chalmers, and will remain so for centuries to come; and we make no apology at all for bidding his mighty shade sit once more for its portrait, from no prejudiced or unloving hand.

We first heard Dr. Chalmers preach on Sabbath, October 9, 1831, when introducing the Rev. Mr. Martin, of St. George's, Edinburgh, to his flock. Through the kindness of a friend who sat in the church, we obtained, although with difficulty, a seat in the very front of the gallery, near a pew in which, on Sabbath, February 8, 1846, we enjoyed a comfortable nap under a sermon from the Rev. Dr. Brunton! There was no napping *that* forenoon. We went, we remember, with excited but uncertain expectations. We had read Chalmers's Astronomical Discourses, and had learned to admire them, but had no clear or decided view of their author, and were not without certain Dissenting prejudices against him. Being near-sighted, and the morning being rather dim, we could not catch a distinct glimpse of his features. We saw only a dark large mass of man bustling up the pulpit stairs, as if in some dread and desperate haste. We heard next a hoarse voice, first giving out the psalm in a tone of rapid familiar energy, and after it was sung, and prayer was over, announcing for text, "He that is unjust let him be unjust still (*stull*, he pronounced it), he that is filthy (*fulthy*, he

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called it), let him be filthy still, and he that is righteous let him be righteous still, and he that is holy let him be holy *stull*." And then, like an eagle leaving a mountain cliff, he launched out at once upon his subject, and soared on without any diminution of energy or flutter of wing for an hour and more. The discourse is published, and most of our readers have probably read it. It had two or three magnificent passages, which made the audience for a season one soul. A burst especially we remember, in reference to the materialism of heaven—"There may be palms of triumph, I do not know—there may be floods of melody," etc.; and then he proceeded to show that heaven was more a state than a place. On the whole, however, we were disappointed, as indeed we were, at the first blush, with all the Edinburgh notabilities. Strange as it may seem, neither Wilson, nor Chalmers, nor Professor Leslie, nor Dr. Gordon, nor Jeffrey, produced, *at first*, on us a tithe of the impression which many country ministers, whose names are extant only in the Lamb's Book of Life, had easily and ineffaceably left. We learned, indeed, afterwards to admire Wilson and Chalmers to the very depths of our hearts; and John Bruce, whom at first, too, we rather disrelished, became ultimately an idol. But, on the whole, our first feeling, in reference to the Edinburgh celebrities, lay and cleric, was that of intense and almost contemptuous disappointment.

This feeling would be forgiven by the men themselves, or even by the warmest of their admirers, if they could have seen us, a year or two afterwards, listening to Wilson on the immortality of the soul, to John Bruce on the text, "The sting of death is sin," or to Thomas Chalmers repeating, at the opening of the General Assembly of 1833, the sermon on "He that is *fulthy* let him be *fulthy* still." That morning opened in all the splendour of May—and the Assembly which met knew that the Reform Bill had passed since its last session, and that it must become perforce a reforming Assembly too. Chalmers rose to the greatness of the occasion. He "laid about him like a man inspired." After delivering, with greatly increased energy, all the original discourse, he added a new peroration of prodigious power, drawing the attention of his "Fathers and Brethren" to the circumstances in which they were placed, and to the duties to which they were called. It told like a thunderbolt. Even the gallery, which was half empty, was absolutely electrified; and the divinity students and young ladies who had been perseveringly ogling each other there, were compelled to

turn their eyes and hearts away towards the glowing countenance and heaving form of the "old man eloquent."

We occasionally heard him, too, in his class-room, always with great interest and often with vivid delight. Our tone of enthusiasm, however, was somewhat restrained, from our frequent intercourse with his students, who in general over-rated him, and were sometimes disposed to cry out, "It is the voice of a god, not of a man," and whose imitations of his style and manner were frequent, and grotesquely unsuccessful. We never but once heard him there rise to his highest pitch. It was at the close of a lecture illustrating the character and claims of Christianity; when grasping, as it were, all around him (like an assaulted man for a sword), in search of a yet stronger proof of his point, he lifted up his own *Astronomical Discourses*, and read—(with a brow flushing like a crystal goblet newly filled with wine—an eye glaring with sudden excitation—a voice "pealing harsh thunder"—and a motion as if some shirt of Nessus had just fallen upon his shoulders—amid dead and almost awful silence)—the following passage:—

"Let the priests of another faith ply their prudential expedients, and look so wise and so wary in the execution of them; but Christianity stands in a higher and firmer attitude. The defensive armour of a shrinking or timid policy does not suit her. Hers is the naked majesty of truth; and with all the grandeur of age, but with none of its infirmities, has she come down to us, and gathered new strength from the battles she has won in the many controversies of many generations. With such a religion as this there is nothing to hide. All should be above-boards; and the broadest light of day should be made fully and freely to circulate through all her secrecies. But secrets she has none. To her belong the frankness and simplicity of conscious greatness."

This is eloquent writing; but where the fiery edge of mighty bardic power which seemed to surround it as he spoke? That is gone; and the number must fast lessen of those who now can remember those strange accompaniments of Chalmers's eloquence —the uplifted, half-extracted eye—the large flushed forehead—the pallor of the cheek contrasting with it—the eager lips—the mortal passion struggling within the heaving breast—the short, fin-like, but furious motions of the arms, and the tones of the voice, which seemed sometimes to be grinding their way down into your ear and soul till you were taken by storm.

We heard Chalmers once, and only once, again. It was in a

large town in the north of Scotland, in the spring of 1839. The audience was crowded, although it was only afternoon. The object of the discourse was to defend church extension. For an hour or so the lecturer was chiefly employed in statistical details. He lifted up, and read occasional extracts from certain dingy, and, as he called them, "delightful ill-spelled letters," from working men in support of the object. Toward the end he became more animated, and closed a brilliant burst of ten minutes' duration by quoting the lines of Burns—

> From scenes like these old Scotia's grandeur springs;
> These make her loved at home, revered abroad.
> Princes and lords are but the breath of kings,
> An honest man's the noblest work of God.

The effect was overwhelming. We happened, in leaving the church, to pass near the orator, and were greatly struck with the rapt look of his face—

> The wind was down, but still the sea ran high.

A certain pallid gleam had succeeded the flushed ardour of his appearance in the pulpit. It was the last time we were ever to gaze on the strange, coarse, but most powerful and meaning countenance of Dr. Chalmers.

And yet when, years later, we saw Duncan's picture of him, he seemed still alive before us. The leonine massiveness of the head, body, and brow—the majestic repose of the attitude—the eye withdrawn upwards into a deep happy dream—the air of simple homely grandeur about the whole person and bearing—were all those of Chalmers, and combined to prove him the Genius of Scotland—the hirsute Forest-God of a rugged but true-hearted land.

It was this air of unshorn power which marked him out from all his ecclesiastical contemporaries, and contributed in some measure to his popularity. Scotland—the land of mountain and of flood—loves that her idols shall be large and shaggy. Think of her worship of the rough John Knox—of the stalwart sons of the Covenant—of Burns and Wilson—the two tameless spirits!—and of her own homely, all-reflecting, and simple Sir Walter Scott. What cares she, in comparison with these, for her polished Robertsons and Jeffreys? Even Edward Irving, with all his power, was rather too fine a pulpit artist, too conscious of himself, too much of a dancing bear for her taste.

It is well remarked by Jeffrey, in vindicating the Scottish language from the charge of vulgarity, that it is not the language of a province, like Yorkshire, but of an ancient independent

kingdom. So Chalmers's peculiarities and roughness of speech were those of the ancient "kingdom of Fife;" and in his "whuches," and his "fulthies," and his bad quantities, after the first blush, there was found a strange antique charm—they were of the earth earthly, and suited the stout aboriginal character of the man. They were but the rough grating of the wheels of the huge and wealthy wain, as it moved homewards amid the autumn twilight, and told of rude plenty and of massive power.

The effects of his eloquence have been often described. Many orators have produced more cheers, and shone more in brilliant individual points: Chalmers's power lay in pressing on his whole audience before him, through the sheer momentum of genius and enthusiasm. He treated his hearers as constituting "one mind," and was himself "one strength," urging it, like a vast stone, upwards. In this he very seldom failed. He might not always convince the understandings—he often offended the tastes; but, unlike Sisyphus, he pushed his stone to the summit —he secured at least a temporary triumph.

This he gained greatly from the intensity of his views, as well as from the earnestness of his temperament, and the splendour of his genius. He had strong, clear, angular, although often one-sided and mistaken, notions on the subjects he touched; and these, by incessant reiteration, by endless turning round, by dint of dauntless furrowing, he succeeded in *ploughing* into the minds of his hearers. Or it seemed a process of *stamping*: "I must press such and such a truth on them, whether they hear or forbear. I shall stamp on till it is fixed undeniably and for ever upon their minds." Add to this the unconsciousness of himself. He never *seemed*, at least, to be thinking about himself, nor very much of his hearers. He was occupied entirely with those big bulking ideas of which he was the mere organ, and he taught his audience to think of *them* principally too. How grand it was to witness a strong and gifted man transfigured into the mere medium of an idea!—his whole body so filled with its light that you seemed to *see it* shining through him, as through a transparent vase!

His imagination was a quality in him of which much nonsense used to be said. It was now made his only faculty, and now it was described as of the Shakspere or Jeremy Taylor order. In fact, it was not by any means even his highest power. Strong, broad, Baconian logic was his leading faculty; and he had, besides, a boundless command of a certain order of language, as

well as all the burning sympathies and energies of the orator. Taking him all in all, he was unquestionably a man of lofty genius; but it very seldom assumed the truly poetic form, and was rather warm than rich. Power of illustration he possessed in plenty; but in *curiosa felicitas*, short, compact, hurrying strokes, as of lightning, and that fine sudden imagery in which strong and beautiful thought so naturally incarnates itself, he was rather deficient. He was, consequently, one of our least terse and quotable authors. Few sentences, collecting in themselves the results of long trains of thinking, in a new and sparkling form—like "apples of gold in settings of silver"—are to be found in his writings. Nor do they abound in bare, strong aphorisms. Let those who would see his deficiency in this respect compare him, not with the Jeremy Taylors, Barrows, and Donnes, merely, but with the Burkes, Hazlitts, and Coleridges of a later day, and they will understand our meaning. His writings resemble rather the sublime diffusiveness of a Paul, than the deep, solitary, and splendid dicta of the great Preacher-King of ancient Israel.

A classic author he is not, and never can become. From this destiny, his Scotticisms, vulgarities, and new combinations of sounds and words, do not necessarily exclude him; but his merits (as a *mere literary* man) do not counterbalance his defects. The power of the works, in fact, was not equal to the power of the man. He always, indeed, threw his heart, but not always his artistic consciousness, into what he wrote. Hence he is generally "rude in speech, although not in knowledge." His utterance is never confused, but it is often hampered, as of one speaking in a foreign tongue. This sometimes adds to the effect of his written composition—it often added amazingly to the force of those extempore harangues he was in the habit of uttering, amid the intervals of his lectures, to his students. Those stammerings, strugglings, repetitions, risings from and sittings down into his chair—often, however, coming to some fiery burst, or culminating in some rapid and victorious climax—reminded you of Wordsworth's lines—

> So have I, not unmoved in mind,
> Seen birds of tempest-loving kind,
> Thus beating up against the wind.

You liked to see this strong-winged bird of the storm matching his might against it—now soaring up to overcome it—now sinking down to undermine it—now screaming aloud in its teeth—now half-choked in the gust of its fury—but always

moving onwards, and sometimes riding triumphant on its changed or subjugated billow! But all this did not (except to those who had witnessed the phenomenon) tend to increase the artistic merit or permanent effect of his works.

No oratory can be printed *entire*. Every speaker, who is not absolutely dull and phlegmatic, says something far more through his tones, or eye, or gestures, than his bare words can tell. But this is more the case with some than with others. About the speaking of Whitfield there was a glare of—shall we say vulgar? —earnestness, which, along with his theatrical but transcendent elocution, lives only in tradition. It was the same with Kirwan, a far more commonplace man. Struthers, a Relief minister in Edinburgh, at the beginning of this century, seems to have possessed the same incommunicable power, and his sermon on the battle of Trafalgar lives as a miraculous memory on the minds of a few—and nowhere else. The late Dr. Heugh of Glasgow, possessed a Canning-like head, as well as a certain *copperplate charm* in his address, which have not, as they could not, be transferred to his printed sermons. And so, in perhaps a still larger degree, with Dr. Chalmers; the difference being, that while in the others the manner seemed to fall out from the man, like a gay but becoming garment, in Chalmers it was wrapped convulsively around him, like the mantle of a dying Cæsar. It is but his naked body that we now behold.

Finer still it was, we have been told, to come in suddenly upon the inspired man in his study, when the full heat of his thought had kindled up his being into a flame—when, in concert with the large winter fire blazing beside him, his eye was flaming and speaking to itself—his brow flushing like a cloud in its solitude —his form moving like that of a Pythoness on her stool—and now and then his voice bursting silence, and showing that, as often in the church he seemed to fancy himself in solitude, so, often in solitude, he thought himself thundering in the church. Those who saw him in such moods had come into the forge of the Cyclops; and yet so far was he from being disturbed or angry, he would rise and salute them with perfect politeness, and even kindliness; but they were the politeness and kindliness of one who had been interrupted while forming a two-edged sword for Mars, or carving another figure upon the shield of Achilles.

It is curious, entering in spirit into the *studies* or retirements of great authors, in the past or the present, and watching their various kinds and degrees of excitement while composing their

productions. We see a number of interesting figures—Homer, with his sightless eyes, but ears preternaturally open, rhapsodising to the many-sounding sea his immortal harmonies—Eschylus, so agitated (according to tradition), while framing his terrible dialogues and choruses, that he might have been mistaken for his own Orestes pursued by the Furies—Dante, stern, calm, silent, yet with a fierce glance at times from his hollow eye, and a convulsive movement in his tiger-like lower jaw, telling of the *furor* that was boiling within—Shakspere, serene even over his tragic, and smiling a gentle smile over his comic, creations—Scott, preserving, alike in depicting the siege of Torquilstone, the humours of Caleb Balderstone, and the end of the family of Ravenswood, the same gruff yet good-natured equanimity of countenance—Byron, now scowling a fierce scowl over his picture of a shipwreck, and now grinning a ghastly smile while dedicating his "Don Juan" to Southey—Shelley, wearing on his fine features a look of perturbation and wonder, as of a cherub only *half* fallen, and not yet at home in his blasphemous attitude of opposition to the Most High—Wordsworth, murmuring a half-articulate music over the slowly-filling page of "Ruth," or the "Eclipse in Italy"—Coleridge, nearly asleep, and dreaming over his own gorgeous creations, like a drowsy bee in a heather bloom—Wilson, as Hogg describes him, when they sat down to write verses in neighbouring rooms, *howling* out his enthusiasm (and when he came to this pitch, poor Hogg uniformly felt himself vanquished, and threw down his pen!)—or, in fine, Chalmers, as aforesaid, agonising in the sweat of his great intellectual travail!

We have spoken of Chalmers as possessed of an idea which drowned his personal feelings, and pressed all his powers into one focus. This varied, of course, very much at different stages of his history. It was, at first, that of a purely scientific theism. He believed in God as a dry demonstrated fact, which he neither trembled at nor loved—whose personality he granted, but scarcely seems to have *felt*. From this he passed to a more decided form of belief, worship, and love for the Great I Am, and is said to have spent a portion of his youth in constant and delighted meditation upon God and his works, like one of the ancient Indian or Egyptian mystics. From this pillar he descended, and, as a preacher, tried to form a compromise between science and a certain shallow and stripped form of Christianity. The attempt was sincere, but absurd in idea and unsuccessful in execution. The *vitality* of Christianity became

next his darling argument, and was pled by him with unmitigated urgency for many years. Christianity must be alive, active, aggressive, or was no Christianity at all. This argument began, by and by, in his mind to strike out into various branches. If alive and life-giving, Christianity ought to give life, first of all to literary and scientific men; secondly, to the commercial; thirdly, to the poor; and fourthly, to governments. And we may see this four-headed argument pervading his book on Astronomy—that magnificent failure—his *Sermons on Commerce*, his *Christian and Civic Economy of Large Towns*, and his innumerable brochures on the questions of Church Extension and of Non-intrusion. Nay, in his penultimate paper in the *North British Review*, we find him, almost with his last breath, renewing the cry for "fruit," as the main answer to that tide of German scepticism which none saw more clearly than he coming over the church and the world. That he always pled this great argument of practicalising Christianity with discretion or success, we are far from asserting; nay, we grant that he committed as many blunders as he gained triumphs. Nor have the results been commensurate. Literary and scientific men, have not, alas! listened to the voice of this charmer, but have walked on their own uneasy way, over the "burning marle" of unhappy speculation; and the Stars and the Cross are as distant from each other as ever. The commercial spirit of the times is far enough yet from being thoroughly Christianised; and the golden rule does not yet hang suspended over our warehouses and dockyards. The poor are, as a mass, sinking every year more and more deeply into the gulphs of infidelity and vice; and the great problem of how the State is to help—if it help at all—the Church, seems as far from solution as in the year 1843 or 1847. Still, Chalmers has not lived in vain. He has left a burning testimony against many of the crying evils of his time, especially against that selfishness which is poisoning almost all ranks alike, and in which, as in one stagnant pool, so many elements, otherwise discordant, are satisfied to "putrify in peace." He has taken up the reproach of the Gospel, and bound it as a crown around his brow. From the most powerful pulpit in the land, he preached Christ and him crucified. He has created various benevolent and pious movements, which are likely long to perpetuate his memory. He has shaken from the pulpit the dust of ages—a dust never to gather again; and he has laid his hand upon, and to some degree, although not altogether, shattered those barriers—either absurd in the folly

of man, or awful in the providence of God—which have too long separated Christian principle from general progress, the Bible from the people, the pulpit from the press, and made religion little else than "a starry stranger" in an alien land. We accept him as a rude type of better things—as the dim day-star of a new and brighter era.

We linger as we trace over in thought the leading incidents of his well-known story. We see the big-headed, warm-hearted, burly boy, playing upon the beach at Anstruther, and seeming like a gleam of early sunshine upon that coldest of all coasts. We follow him, as he strides along with large, hopeful, awkward steps, to the gate of St. Andrews. We see him, a second Dominie Sampson, in his tutor's garret at Arbroath, in the midst of a proud and pompous family—himself as proud, though not so pompous, as they. We follow him next to the peaceful manse of Kilmany, standing amid its green woods and hills, in a very nook of the land, whence he emerges, now to St. Andrews to battle with the stolid and slow-moving professors of that day, now to Dundee to buy materials for chemical research (on one occasion setting himself on fire with some combustible substance, and requiring to run to a farmhouse to get himself put out!), now to the woods and hills around to botanise—ay, even on the Sabbath-day!—and now to Edinburgh to attend the General Assembly, and give earnest of those great oratorical powers which were afterwards to astonish the Church and the world. With solemn awe we stand by his bed-side during that long, mysterious illness, which brought him to himself, and taught him that religion was a reality, as profound as sin, sickness, and death. We mark him, then, rising up from his couch, like an eagle newly bathed—like a giant refreshed—and commencing that course of evangelical teaching and action only to be terminated in the grave. We pursue him to Glasgow, and see him sitting down in a plain house in Sauchiehall Street, and proceeding to write sermons which are to strike that city like a planet, and make him the real King of the West. We mark him next, somewhat worn and wearied, returning to his *Alma Mater*, to resume his old games of golf on the links, his old baths in the bay, and to give an impetus, which has never yet entirely subsided, to that grass-grown city of Rutherford and Halyburton. Next we see him bursting like a shell this narrow confine, and soaring away to "stately Edinburgh, throned on crags," to become there a principality and power among many, and to give stimulus and inspiration to hosts of young aspirants.

With less pleasure we follow the after steps of his career,—the restless and uneasy agitations in which he engaged, which shook the energies of his constitution, impaired the freshness of his mind, rendered him, in fact, "too cheap," and paved the way for his premature and hasty end. With deep interest, however, if not with entire sympathy, we see him sitting at the head of a new and powerful ecclesiastical body, which owed, if not its existence, yet much of its glory, to him; so that the grey head of Chalmers in that Canonmills Hall seemed to outshine the splendours of mitres, and coronets, and crowns. We watch him with far profounder feelings, preaching to the poor outcasts of the West Port, or sitting like a little child beside them, as others are telling them the simple story of the cross. We follow him on his "last pilgrimage" to the south—confronting senates —going out of his way to visit the widows of Hall and Foster—bursting into the studies of sublime unhappy sceptics, and giving them a word in season—preaching wherever he had opportunity, and returning in haste to die! And our thoughts and feelings rise to a climax, as we hear the midnight cry, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh!" raised beside his couch; and, entering in, behold the grand old Christian Giant—the John Knox of the nineteenth century—laid gently on his pillow, asleep, with that sleep which knows no waking, till the trumpet shall sound, and when *he* surely shall be among the foremost to rise to meet the Master, and to go in with him into the eternal banqueting-room.

What divine of the age, on the whole, can we name with Chalmers? Horsley was, perhaps, an abler man, but where the moral grandeur? Hall had the moral grandeur, and a far more cultivated mind; Foster had a sterner, loftier, and richer genius; but where, in either, the seraphic ardour, activity, and energy of Christian character possessed by Chalmers? Irving, as an orator, had more artistic skill, and, at the same time, his blood was warm with a more volcanic and poetic fire; but he was only a brilliant fragment, not a whole—he was a meteor to a star—a comet to a sun—a Vesuvius, peaked, blue, crowned with fire, to a domed Mont Blanc, that altar of God's morning and evening sacrifice. Chalmers stood alone; and centuries may elapse ere the Church shall see—and when did she ever more need to see?—another such spirit as he.

JAMESON OF METHVEN[1]

MANY years have elapsed since we first saw and heard the venerable and gifted man whose character we are now about to sketch. It was at Stirling, we think, that we first heard him—at least, our first impression of his peculiar genius was received there. We well remember, on an autumnal Saturday evening, somewhere about the year 1825, being despatched into the room where he was alone, preparing for the labours of the morrow, with a candle! There he sat, in the half-darkened apartment, no notes or books beside him, but with a look of rapt contemplation which, on our entrance, changed into a smile of the most perfect benignity, as he said, "Thank you, my dear boy." On the morrow, he preached from the words in Micah, "Feed thy people with thy rod, the flock of thine heritage, which dwell solitarily in the wood, in the midst of Carmel: let them feed in Bashan and Gilead, as in the days of old." We remember nothing of the discourse, except the lingering emphasis with which he repeated the words, "solitarily in the wood," which seemed to him unspeakably dear and suggestive, and our amazement and delight at the grotesqueness of his delivery, which certainly (we shall describe it by and by) was the *queerest* we ever witnessed. Afterwards we met him often, and heard him perhaps ten times; and all our interviews, and some of the sermons he preached, are as fresh in our memory as the events of yesterday. He admitted us, at Crieff, to the communion of the church; we preached for him the last Sabbath we had to spare ere our ordination, and enjoyed one of the most delightful evenings with him we ever spent; and we parted with him, in September, 1836, at the quay of Dundee—he on his way to the ordination of his son, as a missionary for Jamaica, in the highest spirits, with a smile (*the* smile, we should say, for it was unalterable) on his cheek, and a joke in his mouth; and in four months he was no more, having gone "the nearest way to the celestial gate."

We have been fortunate enough to meet some of the finest and noblest of our contemporaries; but we never met a man,

[1] From *A Third Gallery of Literary Portraits*, 1854.

taking him all in all, in native genius, in amiability, in humility, in untaught gentlemanhood, in warm and wide sympathies, in meekness, piety, and childlike simplicity, in holiness, and in charity, equal to Jameson. He reminded you of the "beloved disciple." You wondered that he was not translated. Indeed, his death at last seemed like a translation. He had been visiting a sick member of his church. On his return, repairing to his study, he sat down to write a letter, the purport of which was to request a favour for one of his flock from the M.P. of Perthshire. He had begun a word commencing with the letter *o*, when he sank down from his seat, and died. The members of his family, who had been waiting dinner for him, coming in, found him fallen as if he had deliberately lain down to sleep—a coal-scuttle near him not displaced, the fire-fender avoided, and *the* smile shining all radiant on his face, having defied and survived death. "Surely," said one of his children afterwards, "the angels had *straikit* him."

His own wish had been, we have heard, to die slowly, to taste the dark draught drop by drop, to "know all about death." But it was not granted him. His father, too, the Antiburgher minister of Kilwinning, had died in a moment. His son John was conducting family worship. When he ceased his prayer and opened his eyes, he found the old man away! Let those who ponder the last tremulous tracings of the hand of genius, or the last muttered accents of its touched lips, the "But" of Frederick Schlegel, or the "It is getting dark—you may go home, boys," of poor Adam of the High School, not forget the "*o*" of Jameson, nor fail to find in it an emblem of the yearning earnestness and pathetic poetry which were the essence of his nature.

A poet assuredly Jameson was, although he wrote very little verse, and that little was not worthy of his genius, nay, was singularly poor, and should never have seen the light of publication; but he was so thoroughly imaginative, that he could not preach a sermon or think a thought without rushing, or at least seeking to rush, into the poetical. The want of thorough culture and an extreme inequality of spirits often enfeebled his flights; but the natural motion of his mind was flying; his tendency was ever upwards, and his flights were often transcendent in ease, beauty, and power.

Speculative intellect he either entirely wanted, or, in reverence for the Word of God, had effectually curbed; consequently, we cannot call his genius one of that subtlest and most profound

order which combines with, and includes, the philosophic element. Nor was his taste quite equal to his genius. He was the mere creature of heart and fancy. Not that his other powers were originally feeble—they were, on the contrary, strong—but they had not received the same cultivation, and had yielded without a struggle to the overbearing influence of his favourite faculties. He was essentially a painter, and the best passages in his sermons were graphic, bold, or tender pictures of incidents in Scripture history, in which he sometimes contented himself with filling up the outline of the story, but often, too, threw in strokes and figures entirely his own. He had a magnificent lecture on Christ's entering into Jerusalem, in which he describes those who had been miraculously healed running in the train of their deliverer, the dumb singing his praise, the lame leaping as a hart, and the risen dead loudest in the glad hosanna. It was the very thought of Haydon (whose celebrated picture, however, he had not seen), and he was pleased when told of the coincidence. We heard him once lecture for two hours on the "Gift of tongues at Pentecost," in a succession of the finest pictures and illustrations, to which all his audience listened in rapt attention. He had a number of similar discourses on the Serpent in the wilderness, the Flood, the Lily among Thorns, various incidents in the Acts, which, as they were never written fully out, are now irrecoverably lost. One sermon worthy of him is extant. It is entitled "True Fame," and was conceived in rather singular circumstances. Crossing, on the morning of the Monday of a sacrament, from Methven to the Broom of Dalreoch, he saw a woodman felling a tree. It reminded him of the words in the Psalm—"A man was famous according as he had lifted up axes upon the thick trees;" and straightway the sermon *came* upon his mind in a burst; the subject fell down before him like the tree before the axe; and, arrived, he mounted the pulpit, and preached it with great power. Soon afterwards the substance of it was printed in a collection of discourses by the ministers of his church, and has been much admired. A gentleman who heard it on its first delivery assured us that he never heard anything superior, and that it was even better in its preached than in its printed form.

No man, indeed, was more dependent upon moods and moments than Jameson. It became a proverb, that he was either the best or the worst of preachers. Nervous to a very extraordinary degree, fluctuating in spirits, extremely sensitive

of the slights and coldness of a non-appreciating audience, intensely conscious of the defects of his delivery, and shrinking from every mode and occasion of display, he very often became the dullest, the most tiresome, the most unprogressive of preachers. He sometimes gaped, gasped, bungled, and repeated himself, till strangers thought him an idiot, but *not* an inspired one. He required favourable circumstances to develop his powers, and some of these were singular enough. He liked a small audience of good plain Seceder materials; he loved better to preach on a week-day than on the Sabbath, chiefly because the hearers are then more fit and few; weather, private circumstances, and public events, all influenced his preaching; a striking anecdote, or even a harmless jest, recounted to him ere he mounted the pulpit, generally produced a good sermon; and if he failed in his first sermon from a text, in a sort of rebound of generous revenge at himself, the second was sure to be successful. His manner was certainly far from graceful. It was now slow and now violent, now drawling and now fierce. When depressed, he almost groaned; and when vehemently excited, he roared and yelled out his words of fire. And yet, whenever he rose to his true power, you felt, as in the case of all men of genius, that his manner gave a truer emphasis to his writing than the mere mellifluous and studied rhetoric of an actor could have given. Like Chalmers, Burke, and Wilson, when thoroughly roused, all his faults of action and pronunciation were drowned in the flood of thought and poetry which poured from his lips, and the "contortions" of the sibyl only increased the momentum of the inspiration. His appearance neither added to nor detracted much from the effect. The figure was tall and slightly bent; his eye small and somewhat dull; his brow rather lofty than broad; the features coarse, but rendered amiable by the perpetual presence of a gentle smile, and interesting by a look of far-stretching and delighted contemplation. There was much in his face that resembled John Hunter's, the great anatomist. Like him, you saw a man dwelling in a world of his own, and occupied by some fine and original train of thought.

He was never, we have heard, half so eloquent as in his prayer meetings and classes of young people. "Oh, that class," he said once; "I sometimes feel as if heaven were opening on me there." In such scenes he felt perfectly at ease, and spoke out of the abundant fulness of one of the warmest of hearts and most ingenious of minds; and, as he spake, many hearts, we

doubt not, burned within them with a fervour which shall survive life, and mingle congenially with the raptures of eternity.

And yet we must admit that he was far from being generally popular. A hundred anecdotes recur to us in proof. We have heard spruce cits of the east or west, overflowing the while with praises of some D.D. or other of their respective cities, speaking of him with contempt and pity: "Yes, a good but weak man; would never do in a town; what a different man is our wonderful Dr. So-so!" This is almost a literal transcript of a sentence uttered by a worthy commercial traveller from Glasgow, who once drove us in his gig to Perth, as we were passing the village of Methven. At tent-preachings, he was often left almost alone, preaching to the green grass and the summer flowers. But the most amusing case in point is a story he used to tell with glee himself. He was preaching one day, at great length, at the Broom of Dalreoch. A member of his family was to come to church at a certain hour to give away a child. When she reached the door, a countryman, who did not know her, was coming forth, slapping the door behind him in huge wrath. "Is the sermon done?" she inquired. "Dune!" he replied; "the havering ass, he'll no be dune the nicht!"

But, apart from *such* "havering asses," Jameson, in his better moods, had not a few admirers. Some plain but sensible people, in all congregations, hung upon his lips; the majority of his own charge adored him; and his brethren, with one accord, delighted to do him honour.

This latter fact proceeded not entirely from his pre-eminent genius, which might have bred envy in many of their minds, but from the perfect meekness, gentleness, and tenderness of his character, which was free, almost to a fault, and to a weakness, from those sterner and fiercer qualities which some honest men almost require for the thorough establishment of their independence and individuality, in a world so hollow and conventional as this. He was a man of peace, and, along with a powerful, discerning intellect, there was, as Carlyle says of a very different person, "a generous incredulity in his heart." He could hardly believe or speak ill of a human being; and this quality served to colour unduly his estimate of inferior intellects —to induce him sometimes to praise the common-places of others above his own inimitable gems of genius, and to sit at the feet of men who were hardy fit to act as his amanuenses.

Indeed, around Jameson's mind there ever hung a fine floating atmosphere of enthusiasm, which magnified and beautified

all he saw. Nature he loved to a passion. A friend of ours talks with delight of a grace uttered by him on the top of Ben Voirlich, 3300 feet above the level of the sea. Literature was very dear to him. His blood rose when he talked of Campbell's poetry or Scott's novels; and his cheek flushed a deep red, we remember, when we repeated to him Blake's "Lines to a Tiger," which he had till then never heard. Himself the purest of men, he had yet a wide charity for offenders. In his *Letters*, he calls Burns that "strange man Burns." He has not the heart to utter one harsh or angry word. For the nobler specimens of humanity, for children, for the young generally, for his brethren in the ministry, he overflowed with good wishes and unaffected warmth of love. And the same excess of kindliness was manifested in his religious views and feelings. If ever man idolised the very *letter* of the Bible, it was Jameson. He fancied that he had found all modern inventions anticipated in it. "Gas! What was the cloud of fire by night but gas? Think of a whole wilderness lighted up with gas!" The modern soiree was just the ancient love-feast revived. Nay, he did not despair of finding out the steam-engine in the Bible! And while this discovers a certain weakness, united to great strength, it is a weakness so characteristic and so harmless, that we cannot but say, Blessings on the kind-hearted Bibliolater!

And what has such a man done? What has he left to justify the praise which, in unison with the opinions of all who really knew him, we have thus sincerely bestowed? It is so little, although so fine and true, that we must draw largely upon whatever credit we may have acquired for speaking the truth, as we ask such of our readers as were strangers to his very name to accept our statements.

Many things prevented Jameson from doing justice to his powers, either in preaching or by the press. Eminently faithful in his pastoral calling, he was yet constitutionally indolent, and fond, we suspect, of reverie and day-dreams. Then he lacked ambition, or was in a position where it had never met with adequate nourishment. His habit of mental composition was somewhat pernicious to the compression and carefulness of his style. His culture was liberal, and his knowledge extensive, but he had never strictly trained or thoroughly furnished his mind. He became thus rather a child of genius—mutable, impulsive, uncertain—than a spiritual potentate ruling others through the power by which he had first mastered himself. Such causes, united to the non-appreciation of the general

public—the "want of honour in his own country," common to prophets—prevented him from asserting and taking the place for which his gifts and graces had pre-fitted him—a place, we hesitate not to say, not far from that of Hall and Chalmers, although, like theirs, very considerably below that of Foster and Coleridge, the two mightiest Christian intellects of the nineteenth century in Britain.

Still, as no subject could he touch without beautifying it with a portion of the lustre of the wings of his dove-like genius, so he has left some fragmentary revelations of himself which are interesting, especially to those who can associate with them the look, and voice, and manner of the gifted and amiable man. His first and only separate production was a pamphlet, entitled, "Observations on the Present State of Theological Tuition in the United Secession Church"—a pamphlet containing the germ of a plan which has since, in part, been adopted. Previous to that period, the tuition of the students was committed to one professor; but afterwards two were appointed—Dr. Dick, who (although he clipped the wings of Pollok, and treated with proper severity the silly *twaddling imitations* of imagination and fine writing which abounded in the sermons of some of his aspiring students) was usually as just a critic as he was an able divine; and the amiable Dr. Mitchell, who, next to the subject of our present sketch, approached nearer moral perfection than any clergyman we ever knew. And then (and greatly owing to Jameson's curious pamphlet, the first sentence of which was—"In England, it requires ten men to make a pin; in Scotland it requires only one man to make a minister, and hence it is that, in polish and point, a batch of Scotch parsons is so far inferior to a batch of English pins!") three others were added to their number.

"True Fame" we have already characterised. It is not a finished, but it is far better—a bold, striking, earnest, and original discourse. We extract the introduction:—"The scene of the 74th Psalm is Jerusalem lying in heaps; the poet, the child of holy inspiration, appears on the ruins, and, in notes of desolation and woe, strikes his harp to the fallen fortunes of his country. It was not that the pleasant land now lay waste, and it did lie waste; it was not that the daughters of Jerusalem were slain, and her streets ran red, and they did run red; but it was the temple, the temple of the Lord, with its altars, its sanctuary, its holy of holies, levelled to the ground, rubbish where beauty stood, ruin where strength was—its glory fled,

its music ceased, its solemn assemblies no more, and its priesthood immolated, or carried far away. These had shed their glory over Israel, and over all the land; these, in their turn, were Israel's glory, and it was the destruction of these which gave its tone of woe to the heart of the Israelite indeed. In the verses succeeding our text, the prophet is about to represent the destruction of the temple; at that instant his imagination flies back to far-distant times, and, in the retreat, the bard, heart-throbbing, gathers strength, from the recollection of their prosperous and happier state, to pour a deeper swell of interest on the desolations which lay before him."

Such is a specimen of the style and spirit; but it ought to be read as a whole; and those who do this cannot fail, besides the general manliness and power, to notice here and there glimpses of deep insight. Thus, speaking of infidelity as it appeared after the Reformation, he says, " the bait was eagerly and widely caught by the *feeble* infancy of the rising science of Europe;" thereby expressing the true idea, that infidelity is the child of sciolism, and that more perfect knowledge may tend to bring men back to a child-like belief, and ultimate wonder again.

But by far the most characteristic and remarkable memorial of this good man is to be found in that little volume of letters published posthumously. These are chiefly addressed to afflicted friends, and are exquisitely adapted to instruct, as well as to console. Some of them, we hesitate not to say, are equal to any letters in the English language; nay, Cowper alone has equalled their *naïveté*, pathos, and occasional humour. Such sentences as the following abound in them. Speaking of a young girl, whom we remember well, who died suddenly, and in the very bloom of her early promise, he says: " It seems she was at the class on Monday; how would her youthful spirit be surprised, ere Thursday, to find herself in a land of light and brilliancy, where she had only to open her eyes to read all knowledge, and to take her place among the accomplished spirits of the just made perfect!" Again, addressing the same amiable, but sorely-afflicted and bereaved father on the death of a lovely boy —the most beautiful boy we ever saw—he says: " When death breaks in amongst our children, there is made a great gulf, and we, poor parents! can only look, and feel, and weep. The place well known amongst the rest is empty, the place at the table is empty, their place *in your prayers* is empty, and the face which met you at the door, with *all its little news*, meets you no more. Bitterness gathers on my heart, and I must stop." Hear once

more this fine and strange burst: "Ay, commend me to the resurrection of the dead! Why, here is a knot of old chaps—Noah, and Shem, and Abraham, and Jacob—met on a fine sunny morning at breakfast, all *canty*, and shaking hands at the meeting for *auld langsyne*. Noah has quite forgot the terrible pother he was put into at the first roar of the breaking up of the fountains of the great deep; Abraham, the anguish he felt when he received the command to offer up his son Isaac; and Jacob—poor Jacob!—his tears over his lost Joseph are now all wiped away; all their misdeeds, honest men, for ever put out from the book of remembrance by the love, the precious blood of Him who has forgiven them all their trespasses. The loftiest imagination, in its finest hours, has not even touched the threshold of the happiness of such a group, with all the tenderness of the past, and all the brightness of the future, mingling in the newness, the safety, the joy, the triumph, and the assurance of the present."

Wordsworth asks concerning old Matthew, in the *Lyrical Ballads*—

> Are these two lines of glittering gold
> All that must remain of thee?

Alas! a few golden sentences, beautiful, and scattered as the light yellow clouds of a bright but broken evening sky, are all that must remain of the gifted John Jameson. Nevertheless, he sleeps well, careless of the sneer of those beings who, before and after his death, called him *mad* (yes, he and all such *are*, and their asylum *is* heaven!)—uninjured, too, by the fearful earthquakes which are seeking to shake the simple-minded belief which (like the name of Calais on Queen Mary's heart) was written on *his*, and in the "sure and certain hope" of a blessed resurrection. He was taken away in time, for he was not a man either to brave, or to master, or to yield to the current of an age like this, where, one on the side, we find an earnest, fierce, and aggressive one-eyed Denial; on another, a half-belief seeking to drown its doubts amid the clatter of a well-organised machinery; on a third, an impudent dishonesty, which affects to deny the testimony of its own eyes, and cries out, "Peace, peace," when it knows full well that peace there is none; on a fourth, a vague eclecticism, which seeks to blend elements which are utterly unreconcilable, and would make Christianity only an "idea," and here and there a few (among whom now Jameson would probably have been numbered), who, sick of systematising, and refining, and compromising, and winking at plain and palpable facts, and of cowardly retreat

into the past, are looking upward and forward to the hills and the heavens, and expecting new life to religion from its old source. But better for him, and perhaps also for us, that he lies quiet and calm near his dear wife, and some of his children, in the kirkyard of Methven; for, although one of the gentlest and most gifted of the taught at the feet of Jesus, he wanted many of the elements the world now demands from its teachers, from those whose voices would pierce with authority through the clamours of an age "when the nations are angry," and when, it may be, the time, too, of the "dead, that they may be judged," is drawing near.

We like to recall little traits and looks of the dear old man; his grey hairs—the benevolence struggling in every feature—the tenderness of his private tones—the loud energy with which he *sang* at family worship, especially when the sentiment was peculiarly poetic—his gentleness to his children—the funny stories he delighted to tell—the "hints to painters" he often gave in the course of conversation, sometimes ending in the wish, "If I had but the finger!"—his recital of his own experiences, adventures, and *dreams*—his generous bursts of admiration for books and men—are all carefully treasured in our heart, "to go no more out." And, when "sick of the present, we turn to the past," or, at least, feel that we have fallen among a race of little men, with little objects, little successes, *little* sorrows, and *little* sins, his image rises to our memory as that of one of the uncrowned princes and unappreciated moral giants among our kind.

Note.—Since this was written, we have prefaced a third edition of Jameson's *Remains*, rendered valuable by two additional sermons, of much merit, from his pen, on the "Conversion of Paul."

PROFESSOR WILSON[1]

In our paper on Alexander Smith, we said that there was something exceedingly sweet and solemn in the emotions with which we watch the uprise of a new and true poet. And we now add, that exceedingly sad and solemn are the feelings with which we regard the downgoing and departure of a great old bard. We have analogies with which to compare the first of these events, such as the one we selected—that of the appearance of a new star in the heavens. But we have no analogy for the last, for we have never yet seen a star or sun *setting for ever*. We have seen the orb trembling at the gates of the west, and dipping reluctantly in the ocean; but we knew that he was to appear again, and take his appointed place in the firmament, and this forbade all sadness except such as is always interwoven with the feeling of the sublime. But were the nations authentically apprised that on a certain evening the sun was to go down to rise no more, what straining of eyes, and heaving of hearts, and shedding of tears would there be!—what climbing of loftiest mountains to get the last look of his beams!—what a shriek, loud and deep, would arise when the latest ray had disappeared!—how many would, in despair and misery, share in the death of their luminary!—what a "horror of great darkness" would sink over the earth when he had departed!—and how would that horror be increased by the appearance of the fixed stars,

Distinct, but distant—clear, but ah, how cold!

which in vain came forth to gild the gloom and supply the blank left by the departed king of glory! With some such emotions as are suggested by this supposition, do men witness the departure of a great genius. His immortality they may firmly believe in; but what is it to them? He has gone, they know, to other spheres, but has ceased to be a source of light, and warmth, and cheerful genial influence to theirs for ever and ever. Just as his life alone deserved the name of *life*—native, exuberant, overflowing life—so his death alone is worthy of the name—the blank, total, terrible name of death. The place of the majority of men can easily be supplied, nay, is never left

[1] From *A Third Gallery of Literary Portraits*, 1854

empty; but his cannot be filled up in *sæcula sæculorum.* Hence men are sometimes disposed, with the ancient poets, to excuse the heavens of envy in removing the great spirit from among them. But the grief becomes profounder still when the departed great one was the last representative of a giant race—the last monarch in a dynasty of mind. Then there seem to die over again in him all his intellectual kindred; then, too, the thought arises, who is to succeed?—and in the shadow of his death-bed youthful genius appears for a time dwindled into insignificance, and we would willingly pour out all the poetry of the young age as a libation on his grave.

Such emotions, at least, are crossing our minds as we contemplate the death of Christopher North, and remember that he was one of the last of those mighty men—the Coleridges, Wordsworths, Byrons, Campbells, Shelleys—who cast such a lustre on the literature and poetry of the beginning of the century. They have dropped away star by star, and not above two or three of the number continue now to glimmer: they can hardly be said to shine.

Wilson's death had been long expected, and yet it took the public by surprise. It seemed somehow strange that such a man could die. The words, "Death of Professor Wilson," seemed paradoxical, so full was he of the riotous and overflowing riches of bodily and of mental being; and the exclamation "Impossible," we doubt not, escaped from the lips of many who could not think of him except as moving along in the pride of his magnificent personality—a walking world of life.

We propose, while his grave is yet green, throwing a frail chaplet upon it, in addition to our former tribute, which, we are proud to say, was not rejected or despised by the great man to whom it was paid. We mean, first, to sketch rapidly the events of his history, and then to speak of his personal appearance, his character, his genius in its native powers and aptitudes, his achievements as a critic, humorist, writer of fiction, professor, poet, and periodical writer; his relation to his age; his influence on his country; and the principal defects in his character and genius.

We may premise, that in the following outline of his life we pretend to do nothing except state a few facts concerning him which are generally known. His full story must be told by others; if, indeed, it shall ever be fully told at all.

John Wilson was born in Paisley in the year 1785. We once, indeed, heard a sapient bailie, in a speech at a Philosophical

soiree in Edinburgh, call him a "native of the Modern Athens," but, although the statement was received with cheers, and although the worthy dignitary might have had sources of information peculiar to himself on the subject, we are rather inclined to hold by the general notion that he was a Paisley *body*, with a universal soul. In Paisley they still show the house where he was born, and are justly proud of the chief among their many native poets. No town in Scotland, in proportion to its size, has produced more distinguished men than Paisley—Tannahill, Alexander Wilson, Motherwell (who spent his boyhood and youth, at least, in Paisley), and Christopher North, are only a few of its poetic sons. Wilson's father was a wealthy manufacturer in the town; his mother was a woman of great good sense and piety, and he imbibed from her a deep sense of religion. Paisley is a dull town in itself, but is surrounded by many points of interest. Near it is the hole in the canal where poor Tannahill drowned himself; farther off are the Braes of Gleniffer, commemorated in one of the same poet's songs. The river Cart—a river sung by Campbell—runs through the town, after passing through some romantic moorlands. Mearns Muir is not far away—a muir sprinkled with lochs, which Wilson has often described in his articles in *Blackwood*, and on the remoter outskirts of which stands the farmhouse where Pollok was born, and whence he saw daily the view so picturesquely reproduced by him in the *Course of Time*, of

> Scotland's northern battlement of hills.

All these were early and favourite haunts of Wilson, who appears to have been what is called in Scotland a "royd" boy (roystering), fond of nutting, cat-shooting, fishing, and orchard-robbing expeditions; the head of his class in the school, and the leader of every trick and mischief out of it. At an early age he was sent to the Highlands, to the care of Dr. Joseph MacIntyre of Glenorchy, an eminent clergyman of the Church of Scotland, who, besides multifarious labours as a minister and a farmer, found time to superintend an academy for boarders. Our worthy father knew him well, and told us some curious traits of his character. He was a pious, laborious, intelligent, and, at the same time, a shrewd, knowing, somewhat close-fisted old *carle*. To his care Wilson, then a loose-hanging, tall, thin, bright-eyed boy, was sent by his father, and the doctor was very kind to him. He spent his holidays in rambling among the black mountains which surround the

head of Loch Lomond, sailing on the lake, conversing with the shepherds, and picking up local traditions, which, on his return to the manse, he used to repeat to the doctor with such eloquence and enthusiasm, that the old man, his eyes now filled with tears, and now swimming with laughter, said again and again, "My man, you should write story-books." Wilson told us that this advice rang in his ears till it set him to writing the *Lights and Shadows of Scottish Life*. So let us honour the memory of the good old Oberlin of Glenorchy, whenever we read those immortal sketches. MacIntrye also (who, though an eccentric and pawky, was a truly good man) did, we believe, not a little to rivet on the poet's mind the religious advices and instructions of his mother. It was probably owing to this, too, that Wilson displays in all his writings such a respect for the clerical character, and uniformly uses the word "manse" as if it were the word *home*.

From the school at Glenorchy he was sent to the University of Glasgow, which then mustered a very admirable staff of professors, as well as a noble young race of rising students. There was (a relative of our own, by the way) Richardson, Professor of Latin, a highly accomplished scholar and elegant writer, but whose works seem now in a great measure forgotten. There was Jardine of the Logic, a man of great industry, method, communicative gift, and fatherly interest in his students; in fact, as Lord Jeffrey and many others of his eminent pupils confessed, one of the best of conceivable teachers. There was Millar, the eminent writer on the Laws of Nations. And there was Young of the Greek chair, a man of burning enthusiasm, as well as of vast erudition, whose readings and comments on Homer made his students thrill and weep by turns. Our readers will find a glowing picture of him in *Peter's Letters*. The prelections of these men must have tended mightily to develop the mind of Wilson. He was benefited, too, by intimacy with many distinguished contemporary students. There was—a little later in the classes, but still contemporaneous—Lockhart, afterwards his associate in many a fair and many a foul-foughten field of letters. There was Michael Scott, author of *Tom Cringle's Log*, who became a West Indian merchant, but returned to his native city, Glasgow, and wrote those striking naval narratives, under an assumed name in *Blackwood*, without being discovered, till some little allusions to early days in one of the chapters betrayed the secret to Wilson, who cried out. "Aut Michael aut Diabolus!" his old college companion standing detected. There was a man,

since well known in Scotland, and assuredly a person of very rare gifts of natural eloquence and humour—Dr. John Ritchie, late of Potterrow, Edinburgh—who used to contend with Wilson at leaping, football, and other athletic exercises, at which both were masters, and nearly matched. And there was Thomas Campbell, with whom Wilson passed many a joyous hour, both in Glasgow, and in frequent excursions, on their holidays, or in the summer vacation, into the near Highlands, and who, in spite of diversities of taste and of politics, continued on friendly terms with him to the last.

At college, Wilson was, we believe, distinguished, as he had been at school, by irregular diligence, and by frequent fits of idleness, by expertness, when he pleased, at his studies, and by expertness at all times in games, frolics, and queer adventures. From Glasgow, he was sent to Magdalene College, Oxford, and there his character retained and deepened all its peculiar traits. He now read, and now dissipated hard, as most Oxford students of that day did. He took several college honours, and was the first boxer, leaper, cock-fighter, and runner among the students. He gained the Newdegate prize for poetry, and became in politics a Radical so flaming, that it is said he would not allow a servant to black his shoes, but might be seen—the yellow-haired, glorious savage—of a morning performing that interesting operation himself! He was contemporary with De Quincey, but they never met, at least wittingly; although we imagine the little bashful scholar must have sometimes seen, and rather shrunk, from the tall athlete, rushing like a tempest on to the yards, or parading under the arches of the old Mediæval University.

At Oxford, Wilson became acquainted with Wordsworth's poetry. It made a deep and permanent impression upon his mind. He imagined that he found in it a union of the severe grandeur of the Grecian, with the wild charm of the romantic school of poetry. It determined his bias toward subjective instead of objective song; materially, as we think, to his disadvantage. Wilson was by nature fitted to be, as a poet, a great compound of the subjective, and the subjective with the objective somewhat preponderating, but the influence of Wordsworth, counteracted only in part by that of Scott, made the subjective predominate unduly in his verse; and he who might have been almost a Shakspere, had he followed his native tendency, became, in poetry, only a secondary member of the Lake School.

When he left Oxford, he betook himself to the Lake country,

where his father had purchased the estate of Elleray, situated upon the beautiful shores of Windermere; and there became speedily intimate with Wordsworth, Southey, Coleridge, and De Quincey. This last describes him as being then a tall, fresh, fine-looking youth, dressed like a sailor, and full of frankness, eccentricity, and fire. He was at that time vibrating between various schemes of life, all more or less singular. He was now projecting an excursion into the interior of Africa, for he had always a strong passion for travel, and now determining to be, for life, a writer of poetry. He contributed some fine letters to Coleridge's *Friend*, under the signature of Mathetes. A misunderstanding, however, arose between them, and they became estranged for a season. Wordsworth's overbearing dogmatism, too, was rather much for Wilson. In truth, he felt himself somewhat overcrowded, and knew in his heart that he had no right to be so, yet he continued to admire both these Lake Demiurgi, and became their most eloquent interpreter to the public.

While at Elleray, but considerably later than this (in the year 1810, we think), he met and married his amiable wife. His life previous to this had been a very romantic and adventurous one. We might recount a hundred floating stories about it, but were assured a little before his death, upon his own authority, that they were, in general, a "pack of lies;" so that we refrain from more than alluding to them. He was always, gipsy, or no gipsy —waiter, or no waiter—the gentleman, the genius, and the kind-hearted, affable man. His first poem was the "Isle of Palms," which was welcomed as a very promising slip of the Lake poetic tree, and criticised with considerable favour by Jeffrey, who showed in the article a desire to wean the young bard from his favourite school of "pond-poets." In 1814 he came to reside in Edinburgh, and was called, nominally, to the bar. We are not certain, however, if he ever had a single brief, or pled a single case. But what an apparition among the lawyers of that day, who, if Carlyle may be credited, "believed in nothing in earth, heaven, hell, or under the earth," must have been this wild-eyed and broad-shouldered enthusiast, with his long flowing locks! In 1817 *Blackwood's Magazine* was started, and shortly after, Wilson, who was now dividing his time between Edinburgh and Elleray, was added to its staff, and began that wondrous series of contributions, grave and gay, satiric and serious, mad and wise, nonsensical and profound, fierce and genial, which were destined to irradiate or torment its pages for a quarter of a century. Lockhart became his principal coadjutor, and they

both set themselves to write up Toryism, to write down the *Edinburgh Review*, to castigate the cockney school, and to illustrate the manners, and maintain the name among the nations of the earth, of "puir auld Scotland." The success of *Blackwood* was not, as seems now generally thought, instantaneous and dazzling; it was slow and interrupted; it had to struggle against great opposition, and many prejudices. It got into some disgraceful scrapes, particularly in the case of the melancholy circumstances that led to the death of poor John Scott—circumstances still somewhat shrouded in mystery, but which certainly reflected very little credit on either of the editors of "Ebony." "*Blackguard's* Magazine" was its sobriquet for many a long year, and not till Lockhart and MacGinn had left it for England, did the kindlier and better management of Wilson give it that high standing, which, under the coarse and clumsy paws of his son-in-law—the "Laureate of Clavers"—it is again rapidly losing.

Between the starting of *Blackwood* and Wilson's election to the Moral Philosophy chair, we remember nothing very special in his history, except his writing his first and last paper in the *Edinburgh Review*, which was a brilliant article on Byron's fourth canto of *Childe Harold*, and the appearance of his *City of the Plague*. From this much was expected, but it rather disappointed the public. It had beautiful passages, but, as a whole, was "dull, somehow dull." It aspired to be both a great drama and a great poem—and was neither. Two or three pages of it are still remembered, but the poem itself has gone down, or, rather, never rose.

Galled at its reception, the author mentally resolved, and he kept his resolution, to publish no more separate poems. In 1820 Dr. Thomas Brown died, and Wilson was urged by his friends, especially by Sir Walter Scott, to stand a candidate for the vacant chair of Moral Philosophy. It was desirable, they thought, that that should be filled by one who was a Conservative (Wilson had long ago renounced his Radicalism), and who had genius and mettle besides. It was thought good, too, that such a man should now have a settled position in society. His pretensions were fiercely opposed. When a boy, we fell in with a file of old *Scotsmans*, dated 1820, and assure our readers that they could scarcely credit the terms in which Wilson was then assailed. (And yet why say this, after the recent brutal assaults on his dust by the creatures of the "*Ass*-enæum," and others of the London press?) He was accused of

blasphemy, of writing indecent parodies on the Psalms, of being a turncoat, of having no original genius, of having written a bad bombastic paper in the *Edinburgh Review*, etc., etc. The *Scotsman* did not then seek to "damn with faint praise," but spoke out loud and bold. It had then, too, some *critical*, as well as much political, power. The fact was, party spirit was at that time running mountains high in Scotland, fomented greatly by the Queen's case; Wilson, besides, was as yet very little known; his poetry was not popular; his powers as a periodical writer were yet in blossom, and only his early eccentricities seemed to mark him out from the roll of common men. His opponent, Sir William Hamilton, too, was known to have devoted immense talent and research to the study of moral and mental science, while Wilson, it was shrewdly suspected, required to *cram* himself for the office. Through dint of party influence, however, he was elected; and certainly none of the numerous clan of *Job-sons* has ever done more to redeem the character of the tribe. He cast a lustre even upon the mean and rotten ladder by which he had risen.

Scott had told Wilson (see *Scott's Life*), that when elected to the chair he must "forswear sack, purge, and live cleanly like a gentleman." And on this hint he proceeded to act. He commenced to prepare his lectures with great care; and his success in the chair was such as to abash his adversaries, and astonish even his friends. He became the darling of his students; and the publication of his *Lights and Shadows*, and the *Trials of Margaret Lindsay*, contributed to raise his reputation, not only as a writer, but as a man.

He continued still to write in *Blackwood*, and when Lockhart, in 1826, went to London to edit the *Quarterly Review*, Wilson became the unrestricted lord, although not the ostensible editor, of that magazine, with the history of which for ten years he was identified. How the public did, in these days, watch and weary for each First of the Month! for sure it was to bring with it either a sunny and splendid morning of poetic eloquence, or a terrible and sublime tornado of invective and satiric power. "Who is next," was the general question, "to be crowned as by the hand of Apollo, or to be scorched as by a wafture from the torch of the Furies?" The *Noctes Ambrosianæ* especially intoxicated the world. They resembled the marvels of genius, of the stage, and of ventriloquism united to produce one bewitching and bewildering whole. The author seemed a diffused Shakspere, or Shakspere in a hurry, and with a printer's

"devil" waiting at his door. Falstaff was for a season eclipsed by the "Shepherd," and Mercutio and Hamlet together had their glories darkened by the blended wit and wisdom, pathos and fancy, of Christopher North. The power of these dialogues lay in the admirable combination, interchange, and harmonious play of the most numerous, diverse, and contradictory elements and characters. Passages of the richest and most poetical eloquence were intermixed with philosophical discussion, with political invectives, with literary criticism, with uproarious fun and nonsense, with the floating gossip of the day, and with the sharpest of small talk. The Tragedy, the Comedy, and the Farce were all there, and the farce was no *after-piece*, but intermingled with the entire body of the play. The author interrupts a description of Glencoe or Ben Nevis, to cry out for an additional sausage, and breaks away from a discussion on the origin of evil, to compound a tumbler of toddy. While De Quincey is explaining Kant's "Practical Reason," the Shepherd is grunting "glorious" over a plate of hotch-potch; and from under North, who is painting a covenanting martyrdom, Tickler suddenly withdraws the chair, and the description falls with the old man below the table. Each dialogue is in fact a miniature "Don Juan," jerking you down at every point from the highest to the lowest reaches of feeling and thought; and driving remorselessly through its own finest passages, in order to secure the effects of a burlesque oddity, compounded of the grave and the ludicrous, the lofty and the low. Each number in the series may be compared to a witch's caldron, crowded and heaving with all strange substances, the very order of which is disorganisation, but with the weird light of imagination glimmering over the chaos, and giving it a sort of unearthly unity. Verily, they are Walpurgis Nights, these *Noctes Ambrosianæ*. The English language contains nothing so grotesque as some of their ludicrous descriptions, nothing so graphic, so intense, so terrible, as some of their serious pictures; no dialogue more elastic, no criticism more subtle, no gossip more delightful, no such fine diffusion, like the broad eagle wing, and no such vigorous compression, like the keen eagle talon; but when we remember, besides, that the *Noctes* contain *all* these merits combined into a wild and wondrous whole, our admiration of the powers displayed in them is intensified to astonishment, and, if not to the pitch of saying, "Surely a greater than Shakspere is here," certainly to that of admitting a mind of cognate and scarce inferior genius.

Thus, for ten years did Wilson continue, in *Noctes*, in reviews, in pictures of Scottish scenery and life, in criticisms on Homer, and Spenser, and the other great poets of the world, with undiminished freshness and force, to disport his leviathan powers. Sport, indeed, it was, for he seldom, it is said, employed more than three or four days in the month in the preparation of his articles. When magazine-day approached, his form ceased to be seen on Princes Street, except at the stated hour when he walked to his class. He shut himself up, permitted his beard to grow, kept beside him now a tea-pot, and now a series of soda-water bottles, and poured out his brilliant extemporisations, page after page, as fast as his broad quill could move, till perhaps the half of a "Maga" is written, and for another month the lion is free. In this improvisatore fashion, it is said, he wrote his Essay on Burns within a single week. Such irregular Titanic work, however, brought its penalties along with it, and he began by and by to "weary in the greatness of his way." His gentle wife was removed, too, about this time by death from his side, and the shock was terrible. It struck him to the ground. It unstrung a man who seemed before to possess the Nemean lion's nerve. He was found at this time, by a gentleman who visited him at Lasswade, feeble, almost fatuous, miserable, and unable to do aught but weep and moan, like a heart-broken child. But the end was not yet. He recovered by a mighty bound his elasticity of mind and energy of frame. He carried on his professional labours with renewed vigour and success. He bent again the Ulysses bow of *Blackwood*, but never, it must be admitted, with the same power. His *Dies Boreales*, compared to the *Noctes Ambrosianæ*, were but as the days of Shetland in January, compared to the nights of Italy or of Greece in June.

We may here appropriately introduce the reminiscences of our own intercourse with him, which indeed was very slight and occasional. We had often gone in to hear him in his class, although our curriculum of study had taken place in another university; had not been fascinated at first, but had ultimately learned enthusiastically to admire his manner of teaching—of which more afterwards. In 1834, anxious to gain a verdict from a critic so distinguished, we ventured on an experiment, at the recollection of which we yet blush. We sent him in some essays, professing to be by another. The result was of a sort we had not in our wildest dreams imagined. Suffice it that he spoke of them (without knowing their author) in a manner

which not only bound us to him for life, but cheered and encouraged us mightily at that early stage of our progress. When, years afterwards, the papers of the "First Gallery" appeared *seriatim* in the *Dumfries Herald*, Wilson was no niggard encomiast, and it was greatly owing to his kindly words that we were induced to collect them into a volume. To himself, however, we had all this while never spoken, except for a few minutes in his class-room, till we called on him in 1844, along with a friend. At first the servant was rather shy, and spoke dubiously of the visibility of the professor, but, upon our sending up our names, we heard him on the top of the stairs growling out a hearty command to admit us. In a little he appeared, and such an apparition! Conceive the tall, strong, savage-looking man, with a beard wearing a week's growth, his hair half a twelvemonth's, no waistcoat, no coat, a loose cloak flung on for the nonce, a shirt dirty, and which apparently had been dirty for days, and, to crown all, a huge cudgel in his hand. He saluted us with his usual dignified frankness, for in his undress of manner as well as of costume he was always himself; and, after asking us both to sit, and sitting down himself, he commenced instantly to converse on the subject nearest to him at the moment. He had been recently up at Loch Awe, for he loved, he said, to "see the spring come out in the Highlands." He had, besides, been visiting many of his old acquaintances there, "shepherds and parish ministers;" and then he enlarged on the character of his old friend Dr. MacIntyre. There was a full-length picture of Wilson when a boy on one side of the room, representing him as standing beside a favourite horse, and, sooth to say, somewhat "shauchly" he seemed in his juvenile form. The picture, he said, had been taken at the especial desire of his mother, and the terms in which he spoke of her were honourable to both parties. He then launched out on literary topics in his usual free but fiery style. He spoke a great deal about De Quincey, and with profound admiration. To Coleridge as a man, his feelings were less cordial. Altogether, we left deeply impressed with his affability and kindliness, as well as with his great mental powers.

We met him but once more, at Stirling, on occasion of a great literary *conversazione*, held in that town, on January 10, 1849. His coming there had been announced, but was expected by no one, as it was during the session of college. Thither, however, he came, like a splendid meteor, and was received with boundless enthusiasm. We remember, while walking along with him

from dinner to the place of meeting, that some one remarked how singular it was (fact), "that Cholera and Christopher North had entered Stirling the same day." "And I the author of the *City of the Plague*, too," was his prompt rejoinder. Never had there been such a night in Stirling, nor is there ever likely to be another such. His spirits rose, he threw his soul amidst his audience, like a strong swimmer in a full-lipped sea, touched by turns their every passion, and at last, by the simple words, rendered more powerful by the proximity of the spot, "One bloody summer-day at Bannockburn," raised them all to their feet in one storm of uncontrollable enthusiasm. More elaborate prelections from his lips we have heard, but never anything better calculated to move and melt, to thrill and carry away, and that, too, without an atom of clap-trap, a popular assembly.

We have, in common with many, seen and heard him in various other of his moods. We have seen him in the street, or in the Parliament House, or in the exhibition, surrounded three deep by acquaintances, male and female, whom he was keeping in a roar of laughter, or sometimes hushing into a little eddy of silence, which seemed startling amidst the torrent of noisy life which was rushing around. We have watched him followed at noonday, through long streets, by enthusiasts and strangers, who hung upon his steps, and did "far off his skirts adore," and have seen him *monstrari digito*, a thousand times; sometimes we have thus followed, and thus pointed him out ourselves. And we have heard him again and again in the Assembly Rooms, and in his own class-room, addressing audiences, whom he melted, electrified, subdued, exploded into mirth, or awed into solemnity, at his pleasure, while he was discovering the secret springs of beauty and sublimity, of delight and of terror, of laughter and of tears.

In 1852 he saw the necessity of resigning his chair, owing to the increasing weakness of his frame. A pension of £200 was granted him by Lord John Russell. About a year ago symptoms of decay in his mental faculties are said to have been observed. From his cottage in Lasswade he was removed to Edinburgh, and after various fluctuations, his spirit was at last mercifully released from that body which had become a "body of death," at twelve on the morning of Monday, April 3.

We come now to the second part of our task—to speak of him critically as a Man and an Author. And in looking to him as a Man, we are compelled, first, to think of that magnificent presence of his to which we have alluded often, and may allude

yet again, which ever haunts us, and all who have seen it. In the case of many, the body seems to belong to the mind; in the case of Wilson, the mind seemed to belong to the body. You were almost tempted to believe in materialism, as you saw him, so intensely did the body seem alive, so much did it appear to ray out meaning, motion, and power, from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot. You thought, at other times, of the first Adam—the stately man of red clay, rising from the hand of the Almighty Potter. Larger and taller men we have seen, figures more artistically framed we have seen, faces more chastely chiselled, and "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought," are not uncommon; but the power and peculiarity of Wilson's body lay in the combination of all those qualities which go to form a model man. There was his stature, about six feet two inches. There were his erect port and stately tread. There was his broad and brawny chest. There was a brow—lofty, round, and broad. There were his eyes, literally flames of fire, when roused. There were a nose, mouth, and chin, expressing, by turns, firmest determination, exquisite feeling, humour of the drollest sort, and fiery rage. And flowing round his temples, but not "beneath his shoulders broad," were locks of the true Celtic yellow, reminding you of the mane worn by the ancient bison in the Deu-Caledonian forests. "You are a man," said Napoleon, when he first saw Goethe. Similar exclamations were often uttered by strangers, as they unexpectedly encountered Wilson in the streets. Johnson said of Burke, that you could not converse with him for five minutes under a shed without saying, "this is an extraordinary man." But Burke had to open his mouth; his presence was by no means remarkable. In Wilson's case there was no need for uttering a single word; his face, his eye, his port, his chest, all united in silently shining out the tidings of what he was—the most gifted, and one of the least cultured of the sons of men.

"Cultured," we mean in the ordinary sense of that word, for unquestionably he had received or given himself an education as extraordinary as was his genius. Yet there was a want of polish and finish about his look, his hair, his dress, and gesture, that seemed *outré* and savage, and which made some hypercritics talk of him as a splendid beast—a cross between the man, the eagle, and the lion. You saw at least one who had been much among the woods, and much among the wild beasts, who, like Peter Bell, had often

> Set his face against the sky,
> On mountains and on lonely moors,

who had slept for nights among the heather, who had bathed in midnight lakes, and shouted from the top of midnight hills, and robbed eagles' eyries, and made snow-men, and wooed solitude as a bride; and yet, withal, there was something in his bearing which showed the scholar, the gentleman, the man of the world, and the waggish observer; and if one presumed on his oddity, and sought to treat him as a simpleton, or semi-maniac, he could resent the presumption by throwing at him a word which withered him to the bone, or darting at him a glance which shrivelled him up into remorse and insignificance. His eye was indeed a most singular eye. Now it glittered like a sharp sunlit sword; now it assumed a dewy expression of the slyest humour; now it swam in tears; now it became dim and deep under some vision of grandeur which had come across it; now it seemed searching every heart among his hearers; and now it appeared to retire and communicate directly with his own. And woe to those against whom it did rouse in anger! It was then Cœur de Lion in the *Talisman*, with his hand and foot advanced to defend the insulted banner of England.

Indeed, we marvel that no critic hitherto has noticed the striking similitude between Wilson, and Scott's portraiture of Richard the Lion-hearted. We are almost inclined to think that Sir Walter had him in his eye. Many of their qualities were the same. The same leonine courage and nobility of nature; the same fierce and ungovernable passions; the same high and generous temper; the same love of adventure and frolic; the same taste for bouts of pleasure and lowly society; the same love of song and music; the same imprudence and improvidence; the same power of concentrating the passions of hot hearts and amorous inclinations upon their wives; and the same personal appearance to the very letter—in complexion, strength, and stature—distinguish the king and the poet. Neither Richard nor Christopher was always a hero. The former enjoyed the humours of Friar Tuck as heartily as he did the minstrelsy of Blondel; and our lion-hearted Laker could be as much at home among peasants and smugglers, as he ever was with Wordsworth and Coleridge.

We have often heard Americans preferring the personal presence of Daniel Webster to that of Wilson. Webster we never saw, but, from descriptions and portraits, we have him somewhat clearly before our mind's eye. He was in appearance a tall, solemn, swarthy, thunderous-looking Puritan clergyman, clad always in black, not unlike James Grahame of the

"Sabbath," Wilson's friend, but with a prodigiously more powerful expression on the eye and brow. He looked, in short, morally the very reverse of what he *was;* he seemed the model of a high-principled and conscientious man. Wilson's face and form were equally massive, far sunnier and far truer to his genial and unlimited nature.

As a man, Wilson was much misunderstood. Not only were his personal habits grossly misrepresented, but his whole nature was belied. He was set down by many as a strange compound of wilful oddity, boisterous spirits, swaggering ostentation, and true genius. Let us hear, on the other side, one who knew him intimately, and loved him as a son a father—our friend Thomas Aird. His words, written since Wilson's decease, are identical with all his private statements to us on the same subject:—"He was singularly modest, and even deferential. His estimates of life were severely practical; he was not sanguine; he was not even hopeful enough. Those who approached the author of the *Noctes* in domestic life, expecting exchanges of boisterous glee, soon found out their mistake. No writing for mere money, no "dabbling in the pettiness of fame," with this great spirit, in its own negligent grandeur, modest, quiet, negligent, because, amidst all the beauty and joy of the world, it stood *waiting and wondering on vaster shores than lie by the seas of time.*"

These words are not only beautiful, but true, although they represent Wilson only in his higher moods. He could, and often did, indulge in boisterous glee, while, like many humorists, his heart within was serious, if not sad enough. And this leads us to the question as to his faith—what was it? He was unquestionably of a deeply religious temperament; but he had not given it a proper culture. He was not, we think, satisfied with any of the present *forms* of the Christian religion; yet there was something in him far beyond nature-worship. His attitude, indeed, was just that described by Aird. Like the spirits of Foster, Coleridge, Arnold, and many others in our strange era, while accepting Christianity as a whole, Wilson's spirit was "waiting and wondering" till the mighty veil should drop, and show all mysteries made plain in the light of another sphere. Had he more resolutely lived the Christian life in its energetic activities, and approved himself more a servant of duty, his views had perhaps become clearer and more consoling. And yet, what can we say? Arnold was a high heroic worker, nay, seemed a humble, devoted Christian, and yet died with a

heart broken by the uncertainties of this transition and twilight age.

Many thought and called Wilson a careless, neglectful man. He was not, indeed, so punctual as the Iron Duke in answering letters, nor could he be always "fashed" with young aspirants. But this arose more from indolence than from indifference. He was to many men a generous and constant friend and patron. Few have had encouraging letters from him, but many have had cheering words, and a word from him went as far as a letter, or many letters from others.

We pass to speak of the constituents of his genius. These were distinguished by their prodigal abundance and variety. He was what the Germans call an "all-sided man." He had, contrary to common opinion, much metaphysical subtlety, which had not indeed been subjected, any more than some of his other faculties, to careful cultivation. But none can read some of his articles, or could have listened to many of his lectures, without the conviction that the metaphysical power was strong within him, and that, had he not by instinct been taught to despise metaphysics, he might have become a metaphysician, as universally wise, as elaborately ingenious, as captiously critical, as wilfully novel, and as plausibly and profoundly wrong, as any of the same class that ever lived. But he *did* despise this science of pretensions, and used to call it "dry as the dust of summer." Of his imagination we need not speak. It was large, rich, ungovernable, fond alike of the beautiful and the sublime, of the pathetic and the terrible. His wit was less remarkable than his humour, which was one of the most lavish and piquant of his faculties. Add to this, great memory, keen, sharp intellect, wide sympathies, strong passion, and a boundless command of a somewhat loose, but musical and energetic diction, and you have the outline of his gifts and endowments. He was deficient only in that plodding, painstaking sagacity which enables many commonplace men to excel in the physical sciences. If he ever crossed the "Ass' Bridge," it must have been at a flying leap, and with recalcitrating heels, and he was much better acquainted, we suspect, with the "Fluxions" of the Tweed, than with those of Leibnitz and Newton.

His powers have never, we think, found an adequate development. It is only the bust of Wilson we have before us. Yet let us not, because he has not done mightier things, call his achievements small; they are not only very considerable in

themselves, but of a very diversified character. He was a critic, humorist, writer of fiction, professor, poet, and periodical writer. And, first, as a critic, criticism with him was not an art or an attainment: it was an insight and an enthusiasm. He loved everything that was beautiful in literature, and abhorred all that was false and affected, and pitied all that was weak and dull; and his criticism was just the frank, fearless, and eloquent expression of that love, that abhorrence, and that pity. Hence his was a catholic criticism; hence his canons were not artificial; hence he abhorred the formal, the mystical, and the pseudo-philosophic schools of criticism; hence the reasons he gave for his verdicts were drawn, not from arbitrary rules, but directly from the great principles of human nature. With what joyous gusto did he approach a favourite author! His praise fell on books like autumn sunshine, and whatever it touched it gilded and glorified. And when, on the other hand, he was disgusted or offended, with what vehement sincerity, with what a noble rage, with what withering sarcasm, or with what tumultuous invective, did he express his wrath. His criticisms are sometimes rambling, sometimes rhapsodical, sometimes overdone in praise or in blame; often you are compelled to differ from his opinions, and sometimes to doubt if they are fully formed in his own mind, and in polish, precision, and depth, they are inferior to a few others; but, in heartiness, eloquence, variety, consummate ease of motion, native insight, and sincerity, they stand alone.

We have alluded to his extraordinary gift of humour. It was not masked and subtle, like Lamb's; it was broad, rich, bordering on farce, and strongly impregnated with imagination. It was this last characteristic which gave it its peculiar power, as Patrick Robertson can testify. This gentleman possesses nearly as much fun as Wilson, but, in their conversational contests, Wilson, whenever he lifted up the daring wing of imagination, left him floundering far behind.

Good old Dr. MacIntyre, we have seen, thought Wilson's *forte* was fiction. We can hardly concur with the doctor in this opinion, for although many of his tales are fine, they are so principally from the poetry of the descriptions which are sprinkled through them. He does not tell a story well, and this because he is not calm enough. As Cowper says, he prefers John Newton, as a historian, to Gibbon and Robertson; because, while they *sing*, you *say* your story; and history is a thing to be said, not sung. Before we met this remark, we had *made* it

in reference to Wilson and Scott. Scott *says* his stories, and Wilson *sings* them. Hence, while Wilson in passages is equal to Scott, as a whole, his works of fiction are greatly less interesting, and seem less natural. Wilson is a northern Scald, not so much narrating as pouring out passionate poetic rhapsodies, thinly threaded with incident; Scott is a Minstrel of the border, who can be poetical when he pleases, but who lays more stress upon the general interest of the tale he tells. Even in description he is not, in general, equal to Scott, and that for a similar reason. Wilson, when describing, rises out of the sphere of prose into a kind of poetic rhythm; Scott never goes beyond the line which separates the style of lofty prose from that of absolute poetry. Wilson is too Ossianic in his style of narration and description; and had he attempted a novel in three or four volumes, it had been absolutely illegible. Even *Margaret Lindsay*, his longest tale, rather tires before the close through its sameness of eloquence and monotony of pathos; only very short letters should be *all* written in tears and blood. And his alternations of gay and grave are not so well managed in his tales as in his *Noctes*. Yet nothing can be finer than some of his individual scenes and pictures. Who has forgotten his Scottish sunset, which seems dipped in fiery gold, or that rainbow which bridges over one of his most pathetic stories, or the drowning of Henry Needham, or the elder's death-bed, or that incomparable thunderstorm, which seems still to bow its giant wing of gloom over Ben Nevis and the glen below? In no modern, not even Scott, do we find prose passages so gorgeous, so filled with the intensest spirit of poetry, and rising so finely into its language and rhythm as these.

We have of late frequently applied, to apparently fine prose writing, the test of reading it aloud, and have judged accordingly of its rhythm, as well as of its earnestness and power. Few authors, indeed, can stand this. MacCall of Manchester's high-wrought paragraphs seem miserably verbose and empty when read aloud; Hamilton of Leeds' sentences are too short and disjointed to stand this test; and even Ruskin's most sounding and laboured passages assume an aspect of splendid disease, of forced and factitious enthusiasm, when thus tried. All the better passages, on the other hand, of Hall, Chalmers, Foster, Scott, Croly, De Quincey, and, we add, of Macaulay, triumphantly pass the ordeal; and so, too, the descriptions in the *Lights and Shadows of Scottish Life*.

"Come back into memory, thou most brilliant and genial