

It was during one of his forced walks of some twenty-four miles in the neighborhood of Stirling, that he injured one of his feet, and he returned home seriously ill. The result was an abscess, disease of the ankle-joint, and long agony, which ended in the amputation of the right foot. But he never relaxed in his labors. He was now writing, lecturing, and teaching chemistry. Rheumatism and acute inflammation of the eye next attacked him, and were treated by cupping, blistering, and colchicum. Unable himself to write, he went on preparing his lectures, which he dictated to his sister. Pain haunted him day and night, and sleep was only forced by morphia. While in this state of general prostration, symptoms of pulmonary disease began to show themselves. Yet he continued to give the weekly lectures to which he stood committed to the Edinburgh School of Arts. Not one was shirked, though their delivery, before a large audience, was a most exhausting duty. "Well, there's another nail put into my coffin," was the remark made on throwing off his top-coat on returning home; and a sleepless night almost invariably followed.

At twenty-seven, Wilson was lecturing ten, eleven, or more hours weekly, usually with setons or open blister-wounds upon him—his "bosom friends," he used to call them. He felt the shadow of death upon him, and he worked as if his days were numbered. "Don't be surprised," he wrote to a friend, "if any morning at breakfast you hear that I am gone." But while he said so, he did not in the least degree indulge in the feeling of sickly sentimentality. He worked on as cheerfully and hopefully as if in the very fullness of his strength. "To none," said he, "is life so sweet as to those who have lost all fear to die."

Sometimes he was compelled to desist from his labors by

sheer debility, occasioned by loss of blood from the lungs; but after a few weeks' rest and change of air, he would return to his work, saying, "The water is rising in the well again!" Though disease had fastened on his lungs, and was spreading there, and though suffering from a distressing cough, he went on lecturing as usual. To add to his troubles, when one day endeavoring to recover himself from a stumble occasioned by his lameness, he overstrained his arm, and broke the bone near the shoulder. But he recovered from his successive accidents and illnesses in the most extraordinary way. The reed bent, but did not break; the storm passed, and it stood erect as before.

There was no worry, nor fever, nor fret about him; but instead, cheerfulness, patience, and unflinching perseverance. His mind, amidst all his sufferings, remained perfectly calm and serene. He went about his daily work with an apparently charmed life, as if he had the strength of many men in him. Yet all the while he knew he was dying, his chief anxiety being to conceal his state from those about him at home, to whom the knowledge of his actual condition would have been inexpressibly distressing. "I am cheerful among strangers," he said, "and try to live day by day as a dying man."*

* Such cases are not unusual. We personally knew a young lady, a countrywoman of Professor Wilson, afflicted by cancer in the breast, who concealed the disease from her parents lest it should occasion them distress. An operation became necessary; and when the surgeons called for the purpose of performing it, she herself answered the door, received them with a cheerful countenance, led them up stairs to her room, and submitted to the knife; and her parents knew nothing of the operation until it was all over. But the disease had become too deeply seated for recovery, and the noble self-denying girl died, cheerful and uncomplaining to the end.

He went on teaching as before—lecturing to the Architectural Institute and to the School of Arts. One day, after a lecture before the latter institute, he lay down to rest, and was shortly awakened by the rupture of a blood-vessel, which occasioned him the loss of a considerable quantity of blood. He did not experience the despair and agony that Keats did on a like occasion,* though he equally knew that the messenger of death had come, and was waiting for him. He appeared at the family meals as usual, and next day he lectured twice, punctually fulfilling his engagements; but the exertion of speaking was followed by a second attack of hemorrhage. He now became seriously ill, and it was

* "One night, about eleven o'clock, Keats returned home in a state of strange physical excitement—it might have appeared, to those who did not know him, one of fierce intoxication. He told his friend he had been outside the stage-coach, had received a severe chill, was a little fevered, but added, 'I don't feel it now.' He was easily persuaded to go to bed, and as he leaped into the cold sheets, before his head was on the pillow, he slightly coughed, and said, 'That is blood from my mouth; bring me the candle; let me see this blood.' He gazed steadfastly for some moments at the ruddy stain, and then, looking in his friend's face with an expression of sudden calmness never to be forgotten, said, 'I know the color of that blood—it is arterial blood. I can not be deceived in that color; that drop is my death-warrant. I must die!'"—HOUGHTON'S *Life of Keats*, ed. 1867, p. 289.

In the case of George Wilson, the bleeding was in the first instance from the stomach, though he afterwards suffered from lung hemorrhage like Keats. Wilson afterwards, speaking of the *Lives of Lamb and Keats*, which had just appeared, said he had been reading them with great sadness. "There is," said he, "something in the noble brotherly love of Charles to brighten, and hallow, and relieve that sadness; but Keats' death-bed is the blackness of midnight, unmitigated by one ray of light!"

doubted whether he would survive the night. But he did survive; and during his convalescence he was appointed to an important public office—that of Director of the Scottish Industrial Museum, which involved a great amount of labor, as well as lecturing, in his capacity of professor of technology, which he held in connection with the office.

From this time forward, his "dear museum," as he called it, absorbed all his surplus energies. While busily occupied in collecting models and specimens for the museum, he filled up his odds-and-ends of time in lecturing to Ragged Schools, Ragged Kirks, and Medical Missionary Societies. He gave himself no rest, either of mind or body; and "to die working" was the fate he envied. His mind would not give in, but his poor body was forced to yield, and a severe attack of hemorrhage—bleeding from both lungs and stomach*—compelled him to relax in his labors. "For a month, or some forty days," he wrote—"a dreadful Lent—the wind has blown geographically from 'Araby the blest,' but thermometrically from Iceland the accursed. I have been made a prisoner of war, hit by an icicle in the lungs, and have shivered and burned alternately for a large portion of the last month, and spat blood till I grew pale with coughing. Now I am better, and to-morrow I give my concluding lecture (on technology), thankful that I have contrived,

* On the doctors, who attended him in his first attack, mistaking the hemorrhage from the stomach for hemorrhage from the lungs, he wrote: "It would have been but poor consolation to have had as an epitaph:

"Here lies George Wilson,
Overtaken by Nemesis;
He died not of Hæmoptysis,
But of Hæmatemesis."

notwithstanding all my troubles, to carry on without missing a lecture to the last day of the Faculty of Arts, to which I belong.”*

How long was it to last? He himself began to wonder, for he had long felt his life as if ebbing away. At length he became languid, weary, and unfit for work; even the writing of a letter cost him a painful effort, and he felt “as if to lie down and sleep were the only things worth doing.” Yet shortly after, to help a Sunday-school, he wrote his “Five Gateways of Knowledge,” as a lecture, and afterwards expanded it into a book. He also recovered strength sufficient to enable him to proceed with his lectures to the institutions to which he belonged, besides on various occasions undertaking to do other people’s work. “I am looked upon as good as mad,” he wrote to his brother, “because, on a hasty notice, I took a defaulting lecturer’s place at the Philosophical Institution, and discoursed on the polarization of light. . . . But I like work: it is a family weakness.”

Then followed chronic *malaise*—sleepless nights, days of pain, and more spitting of blood. “My only painless moments,” he says, “were when lecturing.” In this state of prostration and disease, the indefatigable man undertook to write the “Life of Edward Forbes;” and he did it, like every thing he undertook, with admirable ability. He proceeded with his lectures as usual. To an association of teachers he delivered a discourse on the educational value of industrial science. After he had spoken to his audience for an hour, he left them to say whether he should go on or not, and they cheered him on to another half-hour’s address. “It is curious,” he wrote, “the feeling of having an audi-

* “Memoir,” p. 427.

ence, like clay in your hands, to mould for a season as you please. It is a terribly responsible power. . . . I do not mean for a moment to imply that I am indifferent to the good opinion of others—far otherwise; but to gain this is much less a concern with me than to deserve it. It was not so once. I had no wish for unmerited praise, but I was too ready to settle that I did merit it. Now, the word *DUTY* seems to me the biggest word in the world, and is uppermost in all my serious doings.”

This was written only about four months before his death. A little later he wrote: “I spin my thread of life from week to week, rather than from year to year.” Constant attacks of bleeding from the lungs sapped his little remaining strength, but did not altogether disable him from lecturing. He was amused by one of his friends proposing to put him under trustees for the purpose of looking after his health. But he would not be restrained from working, so long as a vestige of strength remained.

One day, in the autumn of 1859, he returned from his customary lecture in the University of Edinburgh with a severe pain in his side. He was scarcely able to crawl up stairs. Medical aid was sent for, and he was pronounced to be suffering from pleurisy and inflammation of the lungs. His enfeebled frame was ill able to resist so severe a disease, and he sank peacefully to the rest he so longed for, after a few days’ illness:

“Wrong not the dead with tears!
A glorious bright to-morrow
Endeth a weary life of pain and sorrow.”

The life of George Wilson—so admirably and affectionately related by his sister—is probably one of the most

marvellous records of pain and long-suffering, and yet of persistent, noble, and useful work, that is to be found in the whole history of literature. His entire career was indeed but a prolonged illustration of the lines which he himself addressed to his deceased friend, Dr. John Reid, a like-minded man, whose memoir he wrote:

“Thou wert a daily lesson
Of courage, hope, and faith;
We wondered at thee living,
We envy thee thy death.

“Thou wert so meek and reverent,
So resolute of will,
So bold to bear the uttermost,
And yet so calm and still.”

CHAPTER VIII.

TEMPER.

“Temper is nine-tenths of Christianity.”—BISHOP WILSON.

“Heaven is a temper, not a place.”—DR. CHALMERS.

“And should my youth, as youth is apt, I know,
Some harshness show;
All vain asperities I day by day
Would wear away,

Till the smooth temper of my age should be
Like the high leaves upon the Holly-tree.”—SOUTHEY.

“Even power itself hath not one-half the might of gentleness.”
LEIGH HUNT.

IT has been said that men succeed in life quite as much by their temper as by their talents. However this may be, it is certain that their happiness in life depends mainly upon their equanimity of disposition, their patience and forbearance, and their kindness and thoughtfulness for those about them. It is really true what Plato says, that in seeking the good of others we find our own.

There are some natures so happily constituted that they can find good in every thing. There is no calamity so great but they can educe comfort or consolation from it—no sky so black but they can discover a gleam of sunshine issuing through it from some quarter or another; and if the