

ALEXANDER WILSON.

VIII. HIS EARLY LIFE AND WRITINGS.

BY FRANK L. BURNS.

The Wilsons were strict Covenanters, originally from Lochwinnoch, Renfrewshire, but had been driven by persecution to seek refuge in Campbelltown, Argyleshire. The elder Alexander was born in 1728 and early returned to the shire from whence his grandfather had fled, settled in Paisley and took up the occupation of weaving, for which the town was famous. He married Mary McNab, who came from the "Row" in Durbartonshire to Paisley during her girlhood. Ord states that she was a native of Jura, one of the Hebrides or Western Islands of Scotland. Alexander, Junior, the fifth of the six children, was born on the 6th of July, 1766, within sound of the Falls of the Cart river, in a little suburb of Paisley known as the Seedhills. The house in which he was born has long since disappeared and another of the same height built in its place. It commanded a fine view of the river below the falls and overlooked the Hamels — the highest part of a range of craigs over which the stream rushes, forming a beautiful and romantic waterfall. To distinguish this house from the others in the row, David Anderson of Perth, in 1841, placed a tablet in the front wall to mark the birthplace of the Paisley poet and American ornithologist.

History has drawn a most gloomy picture of the life and condition of the common people of Scotland during the eighteenth century; their wretchedness frequently accentuated by immorality and intemperance. The father of our future ornithologist, notwithstanding of sober and industrious habits, of strict honesty and superior intelligence, highly respected by all who knew him, as testified by Dr. Hetherington; nevertheless interested himself in a small distillery plant hidden in his garden, illicit for at least part of the time and for that reason all the more commendable in the opinion of his good neighbors and patrons. The father outlived his distinguished son, departing this life on the 5th of June, 1816, at the ripe old age of eighty-eight years. His mother is said to have been comely,

pious, passionately fond of music and in many ways a superior woman. It was her fond hope that Alec would become a minister of the gospel and it is said that for a short time he was placed under the tuition of Mr. Barlas, then a student of divinity. She died of consumption when he was but ten years of age, and the father left with the surviving members of his family, a son and two daughters, soon married a widow, Catherine Uric *nee* Brown, who also had a family of young hopefuls. It has been said that Ord has given an erroneous impression of his stepmother. I am not so sure that he has; yet Wilson always wrote of her with respect and gratitude. Of Wilson's childhood little is known beyond knowledge of a limited and interrupted attendance at the Latin-Grammar school of Paisley and the statement, since disputed, that he was a "herd callan" for at least one season at the Bakerfield farm. Jardine states that he was herd to a Mr. Stevenson of Treepwood, near Lockwinnoch. According to tradition "he was a very careless herd, letting the the kye transgress on the corn, being very often busied with some book." By some good fortune his father had come into possession of a collection of magazines and essays, and these were the very first books to give him a fondness for reading and reflection.

Soon his father, burdened with an ever increasing family, could no longer support him in school, and after his thirteenth birthday he was apprenticed for a term of three years to his brother-in-law William Duncan, who bound himself to furnish the boy with bed, board, clothing and washing suitable to his station, and with John Finlayson, a journeyman, as cautioner, to instruct him in the art of weaving, the indenture being signed on July 31, 1779. For perhaps four years after serving his time, Wilson continued at this employment as a journeyman in Paisley, Lockwinnoch, and finally in Queensferry, near Edinburgh, whither his former master had removed; the wages being about a shilling a day. The time had come when the fame and genius of the greatest of all Scottish bards thrilled all Caledonia; and Wilson longing to emulate his example, produced a number of verses in the Scottish dialect, of

little or no merit. Yet he too enjoyed an uncertain local celebrity, and it is related that while he worked at the loom in Lockwinnoch, he was importuned by one of his fellow shop-mates who excelled in little, but had the habit of “dandering” about the hedgerows and whin bushes in search of birds nests on Sundays; to write his epitaph. Wilson silenced him with the following:

“Below this stane John Allen rests;
An honest soul, though plain;
He sought hale Sabbath days for nests,
But always sought in vain.”

Wilson’s dislike for the occupation of weaving as much as the knowledge of the injury the constant bending over the loom was effecting upon his health, influenced him to abandon the trade for the pack about 1786, traveling through south-eastern Scotland on foot. It was about 1788 when he had visited the great song poet at Ayrshare, and writes: “Blessed meeting, never did I spend such a night in all my life. Oh, I was all fire! Oh, I was all spirit . . . I have now more deep regard for the muse than ever.” In 1889 he collected his writings and having arranged with John Neilson a local printer for their publication; armed with a proposal in the form of a rhyme, “resolved to make one bold push for the united interest of pack and poems.” The following year his octavo volume of 308 pages appeared¹ and his journal is full of his unsuccessful attempts to dispose of the edition of only 700 copies. A second edition, merely 500 copies of the original, with a new title,² some omissions and additions, followed in a pitiful effort to obtain patrons. Hutchinson says that this great change was effected by merely cancelling a number of pages and substituting newly printed pages.

He appears to have taken considerable pains, and had resource to a curious shift to conceal from the public the

¹ Poems by Alexander Wilson, Paisley. Printed by John Neilson, 1790.

² Poems, Humorous, Satirical, and Serious, by Alexander Wilson, Edinburgh, 1791.

melancholy evidence of the unsuccessful sale of the book. On the last page of the work was the word "Finis," in large type, and to save the reprinting of this page, he had impressed by hand, a stamp of a round pattern, so as to obliterate it; the 32 pages added contained a continuation of his curious prose journal. The dual occupation of pedlar and poet does not seem to have been a happy combination, and he was confronted with the dreaded alternative: "Renounce poetry and all its distracting notions, descend to the laborer's vale of life, there attend the dictates of prudence, and *toil or starve.*"

As Wilson advanced in knowledge he became ashamed of his boyish publications. Lawson once attempted to criticise and he snatched the volume from his hand and threw it into the fire. Ord could not induce him to loan or allow him to read the copy in his possession. On the fly leaf he had written: "I published these poems when only twenty-two, an age more abundant in sail than ballast. Reader, let this soften the rigor of criticism a little.—Gray's Ferry, July 6th, 1804."¹

Though open air work had improved his health, he was not yet capable of great physical exertion without evil results. In January, 1791, he writes his father that he was scarcely able to move for four days after running one stormy night from Paisley to Glasgow and back again, a round trip of about twelve miles.

In 1792 he published anonymously at a penny a copy, his best dialect poem "Watty and Meg or the Taming of a Shrew." It passed through seven or eight editions and was at first ascribed to Burns, which gave the author a great deal of satisfaction. It is a faithful word picture of a vulgar type, reflecting the vices of the time; and at once entitled Wilson to a seat among the minor poets of his country. The sale of the

¹ Robert Smith, bookseller in Paisley, is said to have published a collection of Wilson's minor poems in 1814, title not given; but an 1816 collection, which should not be confounded with the so-called "Crichton" edition of the same date, is entitled: *Poems, Chiefly in the Scotch Dialect, by Alexander Wilson, Paisley, Printed by J. Neilson, for R. Smith, Booksellers, 1816, pp. 1-228 (about 3x5 inches).*

poem was so rapid that Mr. Neilson, the printer, sold in a few weeks, it is said, the vast number of 100,000; and the author's recompense reported as twelve copies of his own poem. To the latter assertion by Wilson to a third person, Neilson replied, "It is all true, but did he tell that I became security for a coat to him. I suppose not; well, *I had to pay for it.*"

It is said that he furnished the words of seven hymns for Robert Gilmour's "The Psalm-Singer's Assistant," published in Paisley in 1791; and the material for the "Spouter," separately published, being a collection in itself; the best is a piece entitled "The Spirit of the Lake's Song." The chorus:—

"Then hark! hark! hark!
 To my fairy song:
 As I dart like a spark
 The clouds among,
 In sovereign sway,
 Till break of day,
 Chanting with glee my wild war song."

Wilson had returned to the loom, but continental Europe was in a ferment, British exports fell off, and times became almost unbearable. In the inevitable dispute between capital and labor over the reduction of wages Wilson threw all his strength of a mind made bitter by want and adversity on the side of the workingman, publishing anonymously several crude lampoons, one of which was entitled "The Shark, or Lang Mills Detected." He was suspected, and waylaid coming from the printer. William Sharp, the manufacturer, considered himself libeled, so Wilson was fined and condemned to burn the satirical verses at the public cross, Feb. 6, 1793. Under the date of May 21, he writes from the Paisley jail to David Brodie: . . . I sincerely thank you, sir, for the token of friendship which you have sent me, which I will repay as soon as Providence shall open the door for my release from this new scene of misery, this assemblage of wretches and wretchedness. . . . Being unable to pay the sum awarded against me, which is in *total* £12, 13s. 6d., I yesterday gave oath accordingly, and had the comfort to be told that Mr. Sharp was resolved to punish me

though it should cost him a little money. . . ." In serving a short term of imprisonment, he had ample leisure for retrospection. Many years later, when his brother David came to America, he brought with him a collection of these pieces, thinking to please the ornithologist; but Wilson threw them into the fire, exclaiming: "These were the sins of my youth; and if I had taken my good old father's advice, they never would have seen the light."

Upon his release it became evident that his spirit was subdued, and that the notoriety he had gained made Scotland a home for him no longer. He resolved to emigrate to America, and with that end constantly in view, applied himself to the loom with feverish industry; subsisting for four months on an average of less than one shilling a week. Bidding farewell to a few friends, and taking his nephew, William Duncan, a lad of sixteen years; he walked to Port Patrick, crossed over to Belfast, Ireland, and took passage in the Swift, bound for Philadelphia with 350 emigrants, and so crowded that he was obliged to sleep upon the deck during the entire passage. The vessel sailed on May 23rd, 1794. It doesn't appear that Wilson informed his father fully of his intentions until after his arrival at New Castle, July 14, when he apologized for having caused him any anxiety or unhappiness.

Borrowing a few shillings from a fellow voyager by the name of Oliver, our future ornithologist walked to Philadelphia in urgent need of some kind of employment in order to live. John Aiken, a copper plate printer, and a fellow countryman, gave him work until he obtained employment at his trade with Col. Joshua Sullivan on the Pennypack creek, ten miles above the city at that time. Lured southward by the glowing accounts of a new settlement at Stephenstown, in Virginia, he was glad to return to weaving for a time, but soon shouldered the pack and tramped through New Jersey, and next began teaching school near Frankfort and then at Milestown, both in Philadelphia county. Three different occupations and seven changes in two years! He spent almost six years at the last

named place before moving to Bloomfield, New Jersey, which held him only a few months.

Wilson had formed plans for the acquisition of some land, and in September, 1798, Duncan set out to examine the country lying between the Seneca and Cayuga lakes, in New York. He walked the distance in eight days and remained there nearly a week, finding the soil surprisingly rich, the situation healthy and the game abundant. Wilson determined to become a farmer and arranged with his former employer, Col. Sullivan, for the purchase of 100 acres uncleared ground at \$5.00 an acre on the border of Seneca Lake in Ovid township, Cayuga county, and the nephew began burning down the timber the succeeding spring. Wilson made one trip to the place about 1800, but sooner than he exposed to the ague, he decided to return to his desk, and the occasional vacation jobs at surveying he was able to secure. His nephew Alexander, and later his sister, Mrs. Duncan, and her younger children, arrived and found an asylum on the farm. Her husband, Wilson accuses four years later, of cohabiting with guilt, poverty and infamy in Ireland, after transporting a most promising family to a foreign country. He says: "I have no doubt the lash of remorse has already severely punished his unparalleled inhumanity, and I wish never to see him." To the sorely discouraged nephews at Ovid, he writes cheerful letters and sends all the money he can scrape together. In a letter to his namesake, Alexander Duncan, he says: "An old weaver is a poor, emaciated, helpless being, shivering over rotten yarn and groaning over his empty flour barrel. An old farmer sits in his arm chair before his jolly fire, while his joists are crowded with hung beef and gammons, and the bounties of Heaven are pouring into his barns." But his town bred nephews longed for the city life and it required the utmost tact to keep them on the place even temporarily.

Nowhere in history has Wilson employed his descriptive powers to better advantage than in his "Foresters." It is not altogether a dreary waste of words, but whether he could have spent his time more profitably in writing a simple prose narrative of

the journey, as Ord has hinted, is another matter. Its chief fault seems to lie in its length, excessive detail and more than occasional careless composition. That it has been appreciated, the several editions would seem to attest.¹ No account of his life is complete without at least a synopsis of it, especially as he has assured us that all the incidents are substantial facts, and then it was the first and only extensive trip he ever made purely for pleasure.

Early in October, 1804, accompanied by Isaac Leech, the son of his landlady, and his nephew, William Duncan, he left Philadelphia on foot for Niagara Falls.

"The corn stood topped, there pumpkins strewed the ground,
And driving clouds of blackbirds wheeled around.
Far to the south our warblers had withdrawn,
'Slow sailed the thistle-down along the lawn,
High on the hedge-rows, pendant over head,
Th' embow'ring vines their purple clusters spread.
The buckwheat flails re-echoed from the hill,
The creaking cider-press was busier still;
Red through the smoky air the wading sun
Sunk into fog ere half the day was done;
The air was mild, the roads embrowned and dry,
Soft, meek-eyed Indian Summer ruled the sky."

¹The Foresters; A Poem: Description of a Pedestrian Journey to the Falls of Niagara, In the Autumn of 1803 [corrected to "1804" in Vol. III, p. 159]. By the Author of American Ornithology. <The Port Folio, A monthly Magazine Devoted to Useful Science, the Liberal Arts, Legitimate Criticism, and Polite Literature; Conducted by Oliver Oldschool, Esq. Associated by a Confederacy of Men of Letters. [Vol. I, June, 1809—Vol. III, March, 1810]. Published by Bradford & Inskeep, Philadelphia, and Inskeep and Bradford, New York, 16mo.

The Foresters: A Poem, descriptive of a Pedestrian Journey to the Falls of Niagara, in the autumn of 1804. By the Author of American Ornithology.—Newton [Buck's Co., Pa.]. Published by S. Siegfried & J. Wilson in June, 1818.> The Foresters, A Poem. Copyrighted, Simon Siegfried, Printer, 16mo. pp. 5-106.

Ibid. Paisley, Scotland. Published by J. Frazer, Bookseller, 1825.

Ibid. By Alexander Wilson, author of American Ornithology,—Westchester, Pa. Printed by Joseph Painter—1838. 16mo. pp. 5-106.

Ibid. Philadelphia, 1853.

On through Germantown, Chestnut Hill, fertile Bucks county and over Northampton's barren heights, describing the comfortable "Pennsylvania Dutch" farmer with fidelity. Leaving Easton behind, a spur of the Blue mountain was ascended for the pleasure of the extensive view of the Delaware and Lehigh rivers, before the northern journey was continued and a little rural school visited and commented upon as only a fellow pedagogue could. Then on to the Pocono, at that time one of the few localities in Pennsylvania where the Pinnated Grouse frequented; and "near where Tobyhanna's savage stream descends," a bear was startled from his feast of whortleberries in the great windfall of timber and two strutting Ruffed Grouse secured. That night they lodged in a settler's cabin in the Dismal Swamp, and the woodman told them tales of adventure with the wild animals of the country; and the following day being stormy, shelter was sought in a hunter's shack midst the pines near Bear creek, and the occupant made happy by a present of some of Dupont's best powder. Next Wiomi came in view and Wilson found that his broken German made him welcome in the valley of Wyoming. Robins, the Bald Eagle, and the Pileated Woodpecker, which in a footnote he calls the crested woodcock or the great scarlet-crested black woodpecker, are observed. Journeying onward along the banks of the Susquehanna, hemmed in on every side by the mountains, they cross at Keeler's ferry, and continue upon the opposite bank. Beyond Tuckhannock creek, they put up at a miserable dwelling without a door and prepare their own meal of game and bread. After jotting down the incidents of the day, Wilson enquires:

"'What Township's this, old daddy?' 'Why—hm—well; Township? The dickens, Sir, if I can tell; It's Pennsylvania, though?' 'Right, Daddy Squares. Who are your nearest neighbors?' 'Why, the bears.' 'No mill or school-house near you?' 'Yes, we've one Beyond the church a piece, on Panther's Run.' 'Is church far distant, daddy?' 'Why—hm—no; Down Susquehanna, twenty miles or so.' 'You go to preaching, then?' 'Be sure, that's clear.

We go to mill and meeting twice a-year.'
 'No curiosities about?' 'Why—yes,
 You've brought a few of them yourselves, I guess.'
 'What, dollars?' 'Aye, and fi' pennybits, I swear.'"

Once more emerging from the woods, a settlement at the Narrows, at Athens, and then up the Tioga river to Newtown. A little beyond the latter place water may be turned into the Chesapeake, or the St. Lawrence by the way of Catherine creek. Forests of enormous walnuts and sugar maples, some of the former trees measuring thirty feet in circumference, are seen in the vicinity of the Great Catherine's swamp. Wilson induced two striplings to paddle their canoe down a clear deep stream to Seneca lake and temporarily parting from his companions, prepared for a few hours gunning, his comrades trudging along the shore.

There sits the hawk, inured to feasts of blood,
 Watching the scaly tenants of the flood.

Slow round an opening we softly steal,
 Where four large ducks in playful circles wheel;
 The far-famed canvass-backs at once we know
 Their broad flat bodies wrapt in pencilled snow;
 The burnished chestnut o'er their necks then shone,
 Spread deepening round each breast a sable zone.

O'er the flat marsh we mark the plover's sweep,
 And clustering close, their wheeling courses keep,
 Till, like a tempest, as they past us roar;
 Whole crowds descend to rise again no more.

There on the slaty shore, my spoils I spread,
 Ducks, plover, teal, the dying and the dead;
 Two snow-white storks, a crane of tawny hue,
 Stretched their long necks amid the slaughtered crew;
 A hawk whose claws, white tail, and dappled breast,
 And eye, his royal pedigree confest;
 Snipes, splendid summer-ducks, and divers wild,
 In one high heap triumphantly I piled.

In a footnote, Wilson remarks that the "fishing hawk or osprey" differs considerably from the European forms, and that the celebrated canvasback appears to be the *Anas ferina* of Linnæus, an opinion he afterward retracts. The "black duck *Anas perspillata* (*sic*), very numerous," is probably not *Oidemi perspicillata*, Surf Scoter or Black Duck, but *Anas rubripes*, Dusky or Black Duck. The "snow-white storks" most certainly were not the "*Ardea alba*" of Linnæus, as he seems to think, nor is it plain what species they might be. The "chane" is probably *Ardea herodias*, Great Blue Heron and he identifies the "hawk of royal pedigree" as the "white-tailed eagle (*falco fulvus*), so much sought after by the Indians of North America, for its quill and tail feathers, with which they plume their arrows, ornament their calumet and adorn their dresses."—The Golden Eagle? Wilson walked ten long miles, heavy laden, before locating his party, and darkness coming on, they were alarmed by the howling of a wolf and the screaming of a panther; but guided by the light of burning brush in a settler's clearing, reached friends by midnight. The next day a skiff was launched in Cayuga lake and by night a landing made at the cabin of an absent trapper, the good wife making them welcome. The Indian's lament and Wilson's description of their encampment is excellent. Floating down the Oswego to the fort at its mouth, they boarded a sloop on Lake Ontario, bound for Queenstown on the Canadian side of the Niagara River, seven miles below the Falls, and landing, eagerly pushed forward. It had been stated that the roar of the cataract could be heard for upward of forty miles, while actually the distance depended upon the condition of atmosphere and direction of the wind, Wilson's illustration of this is homely and graphic.

"Up to the Ridge's top, high winding led,
 There on a flat, dry plain, we gaily tread;
 And stop, and list, with throbbing hearts to hear
 The long expected cataract meet the ear;
 But list in vain. Though five short miles ahead,
 All sound was hushed and every whisper dead.
 'Tis strange,' said Duncan, 'here the sound might reach.'

'Tis all an April err,' and answered Leech.
 'Men to make books a thousand tales devise,
 And nineteen-twentieths are a pack of lies.
 Here, three long weeks by storms and famine beat,
 With sore-bruised backs, and lame and blistered feet;
 Here nameless hardships, griefs and miseries past,
 We find some mill-dam for our pains at last.'

Heavy and slow, increasing on the ear,
 Deep through the woods a rising storm we hear;

Yet the blue heavens displayed their clearest sky,
 And dead below the silent forests lie;
 And not a breath the slightest leaf assailed,
 But all around tranquility prevailed.
 'What noise is that?' we ask, with anxious mien,
 A dull salt-driver passing with his team.
 'Noise! noise!—why nothing that I hear or see,
 But N'agra falls—Pray, whereabouts live ye?'
 All look amazed! yet not untouched with fear,
 Like those who first the battles thunders hear,
 'Till Duncan said, with grave satiric glee,
 'Lord, what a monster mill-dam that must be!''

Wilson views the stupendous cataract with awe and his pen picture of the Bald Eagles floating in the sky above the mad waters, Ord pronounces poetical and sublime:

"High o'er the watery uproar, silent seen,
 Sailing sedate, in majesty serene,
 Now 'midst the pillared spray sublimely lost,
 And now emerging, down the rapids tost,
 Swept the gray eagles; gazing calm and slow,
 On all the horrors of the gulf below;
 Intent, alone, to sate themselves with blood,
 From the torn victims of the raging flood."

Wilson attempted to sketch the falls, but owing to the unfavorable weather during his short stay, it was not completed and subsequent engagements prevented him from returning as he had designed to do. The two drawings were finished by Sutcliffe, engraved by George Cook of London, and published in the Port Folio to illustrate "The Foresters." The return was

by a different route. Parting with Duncan, who returned to the farm via Aurora, on the shores of the Cayuga, on the 20th of November, Wilson and Leech lodged at the outlet of Owasco lake after wading in the cold stream and washing their boots and pantaloons. At five o'clock the next morning the journey was resumed past the outlet of Skaneateles lake, Onondago Hollow, to Manlius Square, Wilson falling insensibly into a hard step, Isaac groaning a rod or two behind. Wading knee deep in snow or worse in mud, the former singing to drown the latter's complaints and execrations against the vile roads, they left Oneida Castle and Utica behind, following the valley of the Mohawk to within fifteen miles of Schenectady, where Leech took the boat. At the latter place they took the stage to Albany. Wilson's boots were reduced to legs and uppers. New York was reached in a sloop via the Hudson, and he reached home penniless on the 7th of December, having walked forty-seven miles the last day, and traveled upward of twelve hundred miles in two months.

About the time his *Foresters* appeared in the *Portfolio* in 1809, several prose articles appeared from his pen, signed "W." They were entitled: "On the Study of Natural History, No. 1." Vol. I, June, pp. 511-513; "Queries Respecting the Cowper-Finch of North America." Vol. II, July, pp. 61-62; "The Naturalist, No. III. [Article on the Milkweed], August, pp. 119-123; "Answer to the Queries in last Relating to the Cowpen-finch of North America," August, pp. 151-152; and "No. IV, Observations on the Nighthawk and Whippoorwill of the United States," Sept. pp. 197-199. His "Invitation," "The Solitary Tutor" and "A Rural Walk" contain a great deal of nature. In his Scottish verses, with the single exception of "The Disconsolate Wren," he only incidently mentions the birds; but in America he frequently devotes whole poems to a single species, as the "Hummingbird," "The Tyrant Flycatcher, or Kingbird," "The Baltimore Bird," "The Fish Hawk, or Osprey," and the best of all "The American Bluebird"; most of which appeared in his *American Ornithology* and is accessible to all. Doubtless had the poetry proved ac-

ceptable to the general reader, more would have been produced, though science and poetry are scarcely in accord. Coues is responsible for the following: "The tradition runs, that Wilson asked Major L—, (a distinguished naturalist) how he liked the work; the latter replied that he liked it, 'all but the poetry;' and Wilson seems to have taken the hint." His poetry lacks imagination, expression, smoothness and finish. Science and poetry are scarcely accordant and Wilson's faculties were eminently fitted for exactness rather than fancy. Someone has written that his poetry is remarkable for its dreary prosaism, and his prose for its poetry; a remark more witty than true perhaps; but after all, Ord's estimate of the comparatively small value of his friend's poetical attempts, and Dr. Wilson's recent scholarly criticisms and his final opinion that only the claims that the few good poems can establish for him, give us any right to call him a poet at all, are more in accord with the general verdict, than Grosart's unstinted praise; and it is a pleasure to know that a great poet was not lost in the ornithologist, and that the minor poet found expression in prose and his great scientific services dwarfed all else. Seldom has opportunity been grasped with the strength and energy of Alexander Wilson.

ADDENDA

Through the kindness of Mr. W. Lee Chambers I am enabled to cite the title of another Jardine edition of Wilson—the one referred to by Grosart:

American Ornithology |or| The Natural History |of the| Birds of the United States |by| Alexander Wilson |and| Prince Charles Lucian Bonaparte| The Illustrative Notes and Life of Wilson| by Sir William Jardine, Bart., F.R.S.E., F.L.S. |[Woodcut]| In three volumes—Vol. I. [—III]. |London| Chatto and Windus, Piccadilly| 1876.

This edition printed by Ballantyne & Company—Edin. & London—on large paper, 8½ by 11 inches; otherwise the same as the Cassell, Petter & Galpin edition (h), excepting the plates, which are hand-colored instead of printed in colors. The coloring is almost as good as the original edition.

Also another Brewer edition, practically the same as (m), but with the imprint T. L. Magagnos & Company, New York, 1854, 16 Beekman St., as publishers. It also contains a few plates not from Wilson.

I have recently had the very great pleasure of examining valuable manuscript relating to Wilson, collected by the late Joseph M. Wade, and now in the hands of Mr. Frederic B. McKechine, who, while reserving the bulk for future publication, has kindly permitted me to quote certain portions of the Hazard and Lawson letters. It enables me to confirm the existence of a Philadelphia edition of Brewer's Wilson, 1856, by quoting the publisher: "My connection with Wilson was this: As a publisher in Philadelphia, Harrison Hall who had formerly been the publisher of Wilson in 3 Vols. 8vo of text and 1 Vol. 4vo of plates [1828-1829], who succeeded Laval and Bradford, the former publishers [Vol. IX of the 1824-25 reprint]. He used frequently to be in my store on Chestnut St. between 7th and 8th Sts., and being a very old man, and desiring of selling the plates, induced me to buy the coppers, which were all he had of the work, except a number of odd printed impressions, plain and colored, and a few copies of the edition of Wilson and Bonaparte in 1 Vol. 8vo edited by Brewer of Boston, and which was out of print. I used to buy all the copies of this letter press I could pick up, and print off some plates and color them and thus sell the work. When I went out of business, I sold the plates to Porter and Coates."¹ The latter publishing house made use of them in their 1871 edition, when Mr. Hazard was manager for the firm and doubtless superintended this work, and the late Henry T. Coates informed me that he in turn transferred the plates to The John C. Winston Co., successors to Henry T. Coates and Company; therefore I believe the original coppers are still intact after serving five editions. Mr. Hazard does not state that the title page of the letter press was replaced by one of his own, but I regard this as extremely probable, as well as his own or a close friend's authorship of the notice in Alli-

¹ Willis P. Hazard MS.

bone's *Critical Dictionary of English Literature*; otherwise the few sets of this pseudo-edition sold at retail from his bookstore would scarcely have attracted attention outside of his immediate neighborhood. The price of the work does not appear and it received no reviews.

To my list of portraits I would append a photographic reproduction of the Gordon painting or the original picture in the possession of Wilson's sister.

Chamber's *British Science—Biographies* <Natural History by H. Allyn Nicholson, M.D., D.Sc., (1886); 122, half length.

The Public Ledger of Philadelphia, May 7, 1890, p. 3, contains a notice by Thompson Westcott of the presentation by Mr. James N. Stone to the Academy of Natural Sciences, of some of Wilson's letters to Bartram, Bradford and Abbott, all of which have since been published; a hitherto unpublished letter of Waterton's to Ord, chiefly referring to an incident on the Mediterranean in which it appears Prince Charles Bonaparte saved the writer from a watery grave. Westcott also announces the receipt from the same source, of the pencil drawing of Wilson "probably by Joseph B. Ord." The authorship of the portrait cannot be ascertained, however. It is not at all probable that the son of George Ord was the artist. Ord was unmarried until some time after Wilson's death and it is not until 1838 that he writes from England that his son has entered the atelier of Barron Gres as a student of painting. Had the elder Ord possessed the talent for drawing the human countenance, it would certainly be like him to leave it unsigned. Miss Malvina Lawson makes mention of a copy in her possession of a profile, cut out of paper in the old style, taken from the one in Peale's museum.¹ This silhouette may or may not be the original, or an outline copy of the drawing.

Neither is the exact date of the Barralet portrait positively known. Miss Lawson could not be certain, but she thought the drawing was made after Wilson's death, and thin, as he always was, of course death from a wasting disease reduced him terribly. Her father said the portrait did not do Wilson

¹ Malvina Lawson MS.

justice, although it gave some idea of him. Hazard states that the stipple engraving on copper was published in November, 1814; and as it was done by Barralet himself, it is probable that the date of the death of this artist-engraver, "about 1812," was placed too early by his biographer.

The portrait in *Potter's Monthly*, 1875, a coarse reproduction by the photo-electric process, was from Barralet's original engraving in the possession of Mr. Hazard, and the woodcut in *Webber's Romance of Sporting*, 1852, a crude reverse from the same source, Miss Lawson wrote in criticism: "The outline of the face, in the forehead and nose, is the same as Barralet's, from which it is evidently taken; the mouth and chin are certainly wrong. Wilson's temperament was pure bilious, and pouting lips are unknown to that temperament, even in early life. The dress alone would mark its want of truthfulness."

A rather clever bit of plagiarism, amusing to all but the editors whom it deceived, was perpetrated by some one in a newspaper. It included the second, seventh and ninth stanzas of Robert Burns' well known poem "Elegy of Capt. Matthew Henderson." Beginning with the third line of the second stanza, the only substitution in the text was that of "Wilson" for "Matthew." Mr. Hazard wrote a sketch of Wilson's life for the last Porter and Coates edition of *Griswold's Prose Writers of America*, and included this "Elegy of Alexander Wilson" in all innocence; and later, Mr. Wade was taken in (*Ornithologist and Oologist*, 1883, p. 39) even to the extent of stating that the author was unknown!

In conclusion I wish to state that I am indebted to Mr. Witmer Stone for criticism of my IV paper before it went to press, to Mr. Ernest Spoffard of the Pennsylvania Historical Society for his kind assistance, and Messrs. Alfred C. Redfield and Ernest W. Vickers for photographs; in addition to the gentlemen already mentioned.

FERRATA.

In my key for the identification of the reprint and the original editions (*Wilson Bulletin*, No. 69, p. 178) "*Oriolus*

baltimorus" and "*Oriolus baltimore*" should be transposed; and I would add that in the later copies or second edition (1809) of the initial volume, it is identical with the reprint (1824). Bonaparte employed the second edition of the first volume as reference in preparing that part of his Observations on the Nomenclature of Wilson's Ornithology.

Dr. Walter Faxon writes me as follows: "I notice you repeat the statement [Wilson Bulletin, No. 68, p. 140] made, I think, by Coues [Proc. Boston Soc., XII, 1868, p. 106; and Birds of the Colorado Valley, 1878, pp. 24 and 34], by J. A. Allen [Bull. Mus. Comp. Zool., II, 1870-71, pp. 251 and 254], and by Ridgway [Birds of North and Central America, 1907, 49 and 56; also Baird, Birds, 1858, 209], that Wilson's figure of the Hermit Thrush is in reality the Olive-backed Thrush. This is an error—due to the faulty coloration of Wilson's published plates. I possess the original colored drawing of Wilson, from which Lawson engraved it. It is a Hermit Thrush. If you scrutinize the figure in the *original* edition, you will perceive that there was an attempt to display the rufous tail of the *Hermit*, but that the pigment was obscured by the underlying black engraved lines or by some other cause."