

# 'CHRISTOPHER NORTH'

## A MEMOIR OF JOHN WILSON

LATE PROFESSOR OF MORAL PHILOSOPHY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

COMPILED

FROM FAMILY PAPERS AND OTHER SOURCES

BY HIS DAUGHTER

MRS. GORDON.

VOL. II.

New Edition.

EDINBURGH  
EDMONSTON AND DOUGLAS

1863.

something racy and characteristic. His expressions of interest with regard to Mrs. Wilson's health are more than friendly. The first few lines of this fragment refer to a paper in *Blackwood's Magazine* for July 1823, "On the Gormandizing School of Eloquence," "No. I. Mr. D. Abercromby." In such scraps as this we find the salt which flavoured his letters, and without which he could not have written :—

"Who is Mr. D. Abercromby? You have little sympathy for a brother glutton. What would you think of the Gormandizing School, No. II. 'Professor John Wilson?' I could easily toss off such an article if you are anxious for it,—taking one of the *dilettante* dinners, perhaps, and a speech about Michael Angelo by David Bridges,<sup>1</sup> for the materials. No. III. 'Peter Robertson;,' No. IV. 'Wull' Miss Edgeworth is at Abbotsford, and has been for some time;<sup>2</sup> a little, dark, bearded, sharp, withered, active, laughing, talking, impudent, fearless, outspoken, honest, Whiggish, unchristian, good-tempered, kindly, ultra-Irish body. I like her one day, and damn her to perdition the next. She is a very queer character; particulars some other time. She, Sir Adam,<sup>3</sup> and the Great Unknown, are 'too much

<sup>1</sup> Mr. David Bridges, dubbed by the Blackwood wits, "Director-General of the Fine Arts." For a description of his shop, which was much resorted to by artists, see *Peter's Letters*, vol. ii. p. 230.

<sup>2</sup> Miss Edgeworth's visit was in August 1823. "Never did I see a brighter day at Abbotsford than that on which Miss Edgeworth first arrived there; never can I forget her look and accent when she was received by him at his archway, and exclaimed, 'Everything about you is exactly what one ought to have had wit enough to dream.'"—*Scott's Life*.

<sup>3</sup> Sir Adam Fergusson, the school-fellow of Scott, died on Christmas day 1854. Mr. Chambers remarks, in a biographical sketch of the good old

for any company.' Tom Purdie is well, and sends his compts ;<sup>1</sup> so does Laidlaw.<sup>2</sup> I have invited Hogg to dine here to-morrow, to meet Miss Edgeworth. She has a great anxiety to see the Bore.

"If you answer this letter, I shall write you a whole budget of news next week ; if not, I hope to see you

knight, published shortly after his death, that "many interesting and pleasant memories hovered around the name of this fine old man, and in his removal from the world one important link between the Old and the New is severed. It will be almost startling to our readers to hear that there lived so lately one who could say he had sat on the knee of David Hume." He was about a year older than Sir Walter.

<sup>1</sup> Scott's faithful servant, and affectionately devoted, humble friend, from the time that Tom was brought before Sir Walter in his capacity as Sheriff, on a charge of poaching, and promoted into his service, till his death, which took place in 1829. A full account of his peculiarities will be found in Lockhart's *Life of Scott*.

<sup>2</sup> William, or, as he was always called, Willie Laidlaw, was the factor and friend of Sir Walter Scott at Abbotsford, and latterly his amanuensis ; and in this case "the manly kindness and consideration of one noble nature was paralleled by the affectionate devotion and admiration of another." His family still retains as sacred the pens with which he wrote *Ivanhoe* to his master's dictation ; and he used to tell that at the most intense parts of the story, when Scott happened to pause, which he very seldom did, running off, as he said, "like lintseed out o' a pock," Laidlaw eagerly asked, "What next?" "Ay, Willie mau, what next ! that's the deevil o't !" so possessed with the reality of the tale was the busy penman. It is a curious subject how much and how little an author such as Scott can control his own creatures. If they live and move, they possess him often as much as he them. That "shaping spirit" within him is by turns master and slave. Some one asked the consummate author of *Esmond*, "Why did you let Esmond marry his mother-in-law?" "I ! it wasn't I ; they did it themselves."

Of his *Lucy's Flitting*, my father said, "'Tis one of the sweetest things in the world : not a few staves of his have I sung in the old days when we used to wash our faces in the Douglas Burn, and you, James, were the herd in the hill. Oh me ! those sweet, sweet days o' langsyne, Jamie. Here's Willie Laidlaw's health, gentlemen !" — *Noctes*.

Mr. Laidlaw died in 1845.

and Mrs. Wilson in good health next 12th of November, till when I shall remain your silent and affectionate brother-glutton,

J. G. LOCKHART.

“*N.B.*—Hodge-podge is in glory ; also Fish. Potatoes damp and small. Mushrooms begin to look up. Limes abundant. Weather just enough to make cold punch agreeable. Miss Edgeworth says Peter Robertson is a man of *genius*, and if on the stage, would *be a second Liston*. How are the Misses Watson ? Give my love to Miss Charlotte when you see her ; and do let me know what passed between you and the Stamp-Master,<sup>1</sup> the Opium-Eater, etc. etc. LL.D. Southey is, I suppose, out of your beat.”

The remaining portion of this season spent at Elleray contributed (as appears by allusions in the following letters) not a small share of its occupations to the satisfaction and gratitude of Mr. Blackwood :—

“ EDINBURGH, *September 6, 1823.*

“ MY DEAR SIR,—I hope you would receive the coach parcel yesterday or to-day, and I expect I shall have the pleasure of receiving a packet from you by Monday or Tuesday. Being so anxious to make this a very strong number, I have put nothing up yet till I see what you and Mr. Lockhart send me. He is to send me something on Monday, and if I receive Hayley<sup>1</sup> in time, I intend to begin the Number with it. I have time enough yet, as this is only the 6th, but in the

<sup>1</sup> Wordsworth.

<sup>2</sup> A review of Hayley's *Memoirs*, Art. X. September 1823.