

ALEXANDER LAWSON'S BIRD ENGRAVINGS.

BY BAYARD H. CHRISTY.

Plate II.

IN the archives of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia lie two large scrap-books. The bindings are crumbling with age, but the contents are clean and bright. The books are filled with prints, and they constitute a memorial to Alexander Lawson, the engraver. They were compiled after Lawson's death, in 1846, by the pious hands of two surviving spinster daughters, who then gave them to the Academy.

The opening pages of the first volume bear in manuscript and signed with the initial *L*, a brief account of Lawson's life. This memoir is believed to be the work of Malvinia Lawson, one of the daughters mentioned. Though based in part upon an autobiographical memorandum, which Dunlap used in his work published in 1834,¹ this memoir still contains new matter, and it has not hitherto been published. The Academy has courteously assented to its appearance here, and it follows immediately upon these notes. At the head of the memoir in the scrap-book, a miniature portrait of Lawson is inserted. It is in water-color, and was done by the artist, Thomas Birch.² A reproduction of it is presented on the accompanying plate (II.).

It is in ornithological circles, chiefly, where Lawson is remembered, and there he is remembered as the compatriot and friend who encouraged Alexander Wilson in his early efforts at bird portraiture and who eventually became Wilson's engraver; it

¹ Dunlap's 'History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States,' New York, 1834, vol. I, p. 433.

² Thomas Birch (1779-1851), son of William Birch, an enamel painter, came in 1794 with his father from England, and about 1800 settled in Philadelphia. "Thomas Birch painted a few portraits early in his career, but after 1807 devoted his efforts to marine painting." Dunlap, *op. cit.*, ed. Bayley and Goodspeed, Boston, 1918, vol. III, p. 26, n. [Ensuing references will be to the Goodspeed and Bayley edition of this work.]

is remembered, too, that Lawson engraved the plates for Bonaparte's continuation of the 'American Ornithology'. But the fact has been pretty much forgotten that, even before Wilson began to make his drawings, Lawson already was an engraver of repute; it is forgotten that the bird plates constitute only a small part in the bulk of the man's life work. These scrap-books bring the whole to remembrance again.

Inasmuch, however, as present interests are ornithological, it must suffice to pass other matter by, with no more particular statement than the title pages afford. These are indited in the same hand with the memoir; they are pleasantly artless, and are not too incoherent to be understood. The first one reads:

"For the Academy of Nat. Sci. Phila. / Scrap Book / Engravings of Alexr Lawson / One or Two Examples of early Eng. / Plts for Clavigerios Mexico / Conrads Edi of British Novels. Drawings by Baralet. / Plts for Thompsons Seasons. / Oto Council with Drawings by Seymour, for Longs Expn. / Plts for Sporting Magan. with Original Drawings / Annual Plts. / Tigers / Plts for Lewis and Clarke, Drawings by C W Peale / Several Plts of Nat. Hist. with Drawings / Four Plts of Quadrupeds for Mr Ord / Plts for Nature and Art / Portraits / Bonaparte's Continuation of Wilsons Orni. With / Drawings and Col. Plates / Etching, and engraving of Rice Bird by Helen E. Lawson"

The title page to the second volume is as follows:

"For the Academy of Nat Sci Phila / Scrap Book / 2 vol / Wilsons Ornithology Col. / Specimens of Engs from 1st Edition / Wilsons Drawings, and first etching / of the Blue Jay / Haldemans Conchology / Binneys Do / Drawings by / Helen E. Lawson / Engravings by Oscar A Lawson"

It is the bird plates of which particular account is here to be given. Wilson's published work contains seventy-six plates, and of these Lawson engraved fifty-one; and he engraved all of the twenty-seven plates of Bonaparte.

Volume II of the scrap-books contains an all but complete set of colored prints from Lawson's plates for Wilson. The set includes Nos. 1, 2, 4-6, 8, 10-14, 16, 17, 19-31, 33-37, 42-47, 50, 52, 56-58, 60, 64, 67, 70-72, 75, and 76; it lacks but two, Nos. 3 and 18. The print from plate 44 was included by accident, it



Alex. Lawson

would seem, for the legend upon it runs, *Engraved by J. G. Warnicke*.¹

The same volume contains uncolored prints from plates Nos. 4, 5, 17, 19, 36, 47, 50, 56-58, 60, 70, 72, and 76. All of these excepting 57 and 58 are proofs before letters, and 70, 72, and 76 are printed on rice-paper.

Most interesting of all are the prints from plate No. 1. There are two of them, and both are colored. One is from the plate in an earlier state, and bears the inscription, *A. Wilson fecit*; the other is later, and the legend upon it reads, *Engrav'd by A. Lawson*. And thereby hangs a tale.

The idea of publishing an illustrated work on the birds of America was an audacious one to be conceived in the mind of a middle-aged and poverty-stricken Scotch schoolmaster.

From childhood Wilson had known the delight of wandering afield; out of a recent happy friendship with his neighbor, William Bartram,² he had derived a quickened interest in bird and flower; at Lawson's prompting he had become enthusiastic in teaching eye and hand to draw. In addition to all this, Bartram's library lay open to him, and Wilson was a bookish man.³ Nowhere else

¹ It is true that some of the plates are products of two workmen. Plate 26, for instance, which depicts the Carolina Parrot and which bears Lawson's name, was in fact etched by George Murray, and George Murray received \$25 on that account. Lawson then took the plate in hand and with the burin finished it, and for this work he received \$35. But in the case of this plate 44, the plate which depicts the Passenger Pigeon, the supposition that Lawson may have shared in its production has no place. Warnicke received \$65 for engraving it, and it is a fair inference that he did all of the work upon it. The details here presented are taken from Wilson's receipt books covering the years 1810 and 11, and concerning volumes 3-6 of the 'Ornithology,' preserved in the Museum of Comparative Zoölogy, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The Museum authorities were most kind in allowing me to have access to this precious material.

² William Bartram (1739-1823), of Philadelphia, the botanist, and author of the well-known book of travels.

³ *Pace*, Elliott Coues! This sentence was already indited when on running through the historical preface to Coues's 'Key,' I happened upon the precisely contrary statement; nevertheless, I retain what I had set down. With all deference, I venture to think that here and elsewhere Dr. Coues was a little hasty in his pronouncements. Wilson's literary remains include, in addition to the 'Ornithology,' a sizable volume of poetry, and a sheaf of letters. The vivacity and distinction of his style have been matters of common observation, and Dr. Coues himself, both in the preface cited and in his 'Bibliography,' pays handsome tribute on that account. Furthermore, the facts will be borne in mind that Wilson served for years as a schoolmaster, and that a contemporary publisher thought well enough of him as a literary man to employ him to edit an encyclopedia which he was bringing out. For all that appears, he discharged with entire satisfaction the duties of that employ-

could he have come into the assembled company of the world's ornithologists: Buffon, Catesby, Edwards, Pennant.

Wilson was not slow to perceive the vacancy in this literature. These scientists had all but covered the globe; but none of them, not even Catesby,¹ had adequately presented the avifauna of North America. There lay the opportunity, and thence sprang the great idea. But how to finance the project, that was the question; and at first it seemed hopelessly large to be dealt with.

It was Edwards from whom the immediate impulse was derived. George Edwards, pupil of Mark Catesby, and editor of a later issue of Catesby's work, was himself the author of a general work on ornithology.² Like Catesby, Edwards had illustrated his volumes with etchings by his own hand, and in his preface had set down very particular instructions how another might follow in the same way.

Here Wilson began.³ He purchased a copper plate, took it to Lawson, who grounded it for him, borrowed from Lawson an etching needle, and betook himself to his chamber. The next day, Lawson afterward narrated, Wilson came bouncing into his room, exclaiming "I have finished my plate! Let us bite it with the aqua fortis, for I must have a proof before I leave town." And forthwith the plate was bitten, and a proof was struck. Not many days later Wilson sent to William Bartram a print of this his first attempt, colored by his own hand, and asked Bartram's comment upon it.

Wilson, however, was too modest a man, and too just a judge, to be satisfied with his own production. He saw that it would never do. He soon realized that if the work of which he had begun to dream in earnest were ever to become a reality, he must command for it a skill beyond his power to attain. So this plate and a second were, sadly, as we may suppose, laid aside.

ment. In his prefaces to the successive volumes of the 'Ornithology,' Wilson makes repeated allusion to the then standard ornithological works. It is out of consideration of these things that dissent is ventured from Dr. Coues's dicta, that Wilson was "a very unlearned man," having "insufficient knowledge of his predecessors' labors," and was "the least 'bookish' of men."

¹ 'The Natural History of Carolina, Florida, and the Bahama Islands,' by Mark Catesby, London, 1731-48.

² 'A Natural History of Birds,' by George Edwards, London, 1802-6.

³ The story has been preserved by George Ord. See Wilson's 'American Ornithology,' ed. Ord, Philadelphia, 1828-29, vol. I, pp. XXXII ff.

But not for long. A few months later Wilson had found employment, by a publisher with an established business.¹ And that publisher, when presently Wilson had opened to him his portfolio, and, so far as he was able, his heart also, undertook to set hand precisely to that which lay beyond Wilson's reach: he undertook to publish the dreamed-of work and to furnish funds to pay for engraving.

That altered matters. Alexander Lawson, who with reason had hesitated, hesitated no longer, and now went about the engraving of the plates with a happiness, we may believe, second only to Wilson's.

First of all, Wilson's two plates were brought out again. They were by no means a thing to be ashamed of. In drawing, in composition, as faithful presentments, they were excellent; it was only in the rendering in copper that they were amateurish. Lawson with point and graver gave them the strength and emphasis they needed. And here on successive pages of the scrap-book lie Wilson's attempt and Lawson's achievement.

Any one curious to do so may take the second print and find each line of the first carried over into it—a demonstration that Lawson's is the self-same plate with which Wilson began. Ord had in his possession such another print from the plate in its first state, and wrote that he preserved it "as a relic of no small value."²

The same volume of the scrap-book contains a few of Wilson's original drawings. These are,—

House Wren; pl. 8, Fig. 3. Pen and pencil, uncolored;

Clark's Crow; pl. 20, Fig. 2. Pen, uncolored;

Lewis's Woodpecker; pl. 20, Fig. 3. Pen, uncolored;

Rusty Grackle; pl. 21, Fig. 3. Pen and pencil, uncolored;

Purple Grackle; pl. 21, Fig. 4. Pen and pencil, uncolored;

Savannah Sparrow; pl. 22, Fig. 3. Pen and pencil and wash, uncolored;

Fox-coloured Sparrow; pl. 22, Fig. 4. Water-color; the only colored drawing in the collection;

¹ Samuel F. Bradford. Wilson was employed as assistant editor of a late edition of 'Rees's New Cyclopaedia.'

² Wilson, 'American Ornithology,' *ubi sup.* vol. I, p. LX. Indeed, it is not impossible that the print in the scrap-book may be Ord's identical copy. And it is altogether probable that the coloring was done by Wilson himself—or, perhaps, by Miss Bartram.

Belted Kingfisher; pl. 23, Fig. 1. Pen and pencil, uncolored.

Comparison of these with the larger collection of Wilson originals in the Museum of Comparative Zoölogy in Cambridge, Massachusetts,¹ reveals identity in technique, such as to dispel any doubt which might arise concerning authenticity. There is the same painstaking literalism, the same defective comprehension of perspective, the same low key struck in the coloring. The pen lines, under a glass, are revealed to be, not the swift sure strokes of an adept, but the laborious tracings of slow and patient fingers.

It would seem that Wilson advanced, as his work progressed, from one mode of procedure to another. At first it was his practice to furnish his engraver with a pen drawing, in some instances scarcely more than an outline, and with a specimen of the bird itself. From these the plate was engraved. Then upon a print from the plate, the colors were for the first time laid down, and this became the master print in the preparation of further prints for publication. But toward the end, the more usual procedure seems to have been to prepare a water-color drawing which in every respect—in size, grouping, and color—should be the sufficient guide both to engraver and to colorist. It is well, however, to speak with reservation, for the data are fragmentary. Wilson in his penury—and humility—when once a plate had been finished, was apt to destroy his drawing—to cut it up and use the blank side of the paper for new sketches.² But whether this analysis

¹ The museum in Cambridge contains, in addition to about thirty of Wilson's drawings, all of the seventy-six copper plates themselves. It contains also the ninety-seven copper plates engraved in Edinburgh by Lizars, for the Jardine octavo edition (1832) of Wilson and Bonaparte combined. Bonaparte plates 22-27, the plates of original volume 4, were not reproduced in the Jardine edition.

² The drawing of the Carolina Parrot, for instance, (pl. 26, Fig. 1), one of the most pleasing of all Wilson's work, remains only as a scissored fragment.

A glimpse of the coöperation which Wilson rendered his engraver is afforded in a letter written to Lawson from Lexington, Kentucky, April 6, 1810. The plate particularly under discussion is plate 19, the first of volume 3. The pertinent passage reads—"I have this instant recd yours enclosing the etching, which to me is most acceptable. The Owl is admirably done, and the Lark most sweetly and freely managed. The little black and white Creeper may be dug up as deep as you please only leaving the necessary lights, and the breast of the pine Creeper below may increase pretty considerably in depth of colour from the throat inwards to the tree, as it is a dirty yellow there. What would you think of shading the ground gradually and fully under the lark? The Owl's eyes I am aff[raid] will not bear much work [as] they are extremely brilliant & I [don't] know but the [illegible] may be rounded [?] to advantage by deepening the work gradually [illegible] from the row of white coverts also behind the ear. But these are only

be correct or not, these drawings in the scrap-book in Philadelphia are to be classed with Wilson's earlier work.

Of the twenty-seven plates for Bonaparte's continuation of the 'American Ornithology,' Volume I of the scrap-books contains a complete set of uncolored prints, and of these, Nos. 4, 6, 7, 11, 16-19, 22-24, are proofs before letters.

It contains colored prints from plates 1 to 21 (vols. 1-3), and they are beautifully colored. This is the more noteworthy, since many sets of Bonaparte in this particular are inferior.

Finally, the book contains a considerable number of the original drawings. These are,—

Audubon's drawing, in pen, pencil, and wash, monochrome, of the Great Crow Blackbird (pl. 4);

Titian Peale's pencil drawing, in monochrome, of the Burrowing Owl (pl. 7, Fig. 2);

Alexander Rider's pen and wash drawings, all in monochrome, of the White-tailed Hawk (pl. 11, Fig. 1), of the Palm Warbler (pl. 10, Fig. 2), of the Zenaida Dove (pl. 17, Fig. 2), and of the Female Spotted Grouse (pl. 21, Fig. 2).

Charles Lucien Bonaparte, son of Napoleon's brother Lucien, was but a youth of twenty-one when he projected this work of his. He employed Titian Peale¹ and Alexander Rider,² in turn, to make the drawings and Lawson to do the engraving. By as much as Peale and Rider were trained artists whereas Wilson was but an amateur, by as much as Lawson had gained in skill as he

suggestions of mine which I leave to your superior judgment . . . I hope to be able to send you a packet of skins and drawings from Nashville . . ."

This letter, preserved in the museum in Cambridge, has not, I believe, been published hitherto.

¹ Titian Ramsey Peale (1800-85), son of Charles Willson Peale, shared in the artistic talents of his family, and devoted them to the delineation of animal life. Besides his work for Bonaparte, he made drawings for the 'Mammalogy and Ornithology,' of the South Sea expedition of 1838-42, of which he was naturalist and artist, and these were published in Cassin's report on the collections.

² In another connection, Miss Malvina Lawson wrote: "Rider, the artist who undertook the coloring of Wilson's first edition, was a Swiss painter in oils; he understood water colors however, but to facilitate his work, spoiled a great many copies by using opaque colors both in Wilson's and afterwards in Bonaparte's works. Of course none of this trouble was felt in the same way by Bonaparte, although he complains bitterly of Rider." "Miss Lawson's Recollections of Ornithologists," Frank L. Burns, 'Auk,' vol. XXXIV (1917), pp. 275, 279. It seems more likely that Rider was not a Swiss, but a German, from Württemberg. See Dunlap, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 392.

carried through the earlier work, these plates of Bonaparte excel technically those of Wilson. It has been said of these artists that their work is commonplace; it has been said—with Audubon in mind, no doubt—that their birds lack animation. And upon this point concession must be made. Wilson, for all his ineptitude, managed to set down a livelier presentment; he told with the pencil things which these artists never saw. Nevertheless, the insignificance to which Bonaparte's work has receded is due in greater part to other circumstances: the birds which he presents form a ragged list—a few species overlooked by Wilson; a few brought from afar. Realizing these things, it is well to go back to these twenty-seven half-forgotten plates. The drawing is sure, there is no more distressful foreshortening; pose is lithe; surfaces are spread understandingly; there is subordination of detail, and the engraving is of high order.

Miss Lawson, although no authority on such a matter, still preserves a reminiscence of contemporary opinion. She writes, "I do not know whether you ever saw any uncolored impressions of Bonaparte's work? Every one said it was a pity they should ever be colored. The Condor in particular is wonderful and so are some of the Geese [Grouse?]."¹

The uncolored proof of plate 7 is interesting, for it is printed in soft brown ink, in order to gain in the colored print heightened and truer color values. This expedient of printing in tint, suited to the color to be applied, was at about this time brought to a high degree of excellence in France. Good instances of it are found in the illustrations for Temminck's work, and in Bouquet's. Wilson made essays with it, and the print of his plate No. 63, in which the Roseate Spoonbill is the principal figure, is the best example. But neither Wilson's printer nor Bonaparte's had the skill to do this as it should be done. And they probably lacked properly prepared inks.

Audubon's drawing of the Great Crow Blackbird—based, by the way, on Wilson's drawing of the Cowbird (W. pl. 18)—deserves attention. The finding of it here recalls the story of Audubon's initial bid for scientific recognition, and of his rejection by the pundits in Philadelphia. He was too facile and too assured;

¹ 'Miss Lawson's Recollections,' cited above, p. 281.

there was the freedom of the frontier about him, and the volatility of his French ancestry. And they mistrusted him; they raised the question whether he were not (to use Roosevelt's modern phrase) a nature faker. It was because of his rejection in Philadelphia that, on the advice of friends, Audubon presently took himself and his drawings to England. Across the water something bizarre and extravagant is expected of the New World; and in Audubon such expectations were not disappointed. There the compunctions of the Philadelphians had no place; there Audubon was acclaimed, and thence he returned triumphant. All this is aside from the matter in hand; but this comment should be added: the bitter experience in Philadelphia had unquestionably a fortunate effect upon Audubon. His intelligence did not fail to seize upon the lesson of that day. Prone to exaggeration, the memory of rebuff called him back to the essentially scientific function he must perform, if he would succeed. And from that time forward, a chastening and refining influence is increasingly manifest in Audubon's drawings.¹

Bonaparte, however, himself a Latin, and young, was from the beginning completely won by Audubon. He had ideas of merging Audubon's work in his own—ideas which, when imparted to Lawson, elicited a grim negative; if he went on with Audubon, he would have to find another engraver. With scant courtesy and with excess of feeling, Lawson, even in Audubon's presence, challenged his accuracy and honesty in drawing, until Audubon himself lost patience and exclaimed (again with characteristic exaggeration), "Sir, I have been instructed seven years by the greatest masters in France!" "Then," growled the Scotchman, "ye made dom bad use of your time."²

After all this contention and pain-giving, it is comforting to

¹ This comment can hardly be put to the test on consideration of the engravings alone, for the engraver's work has had the effect of smoothing out inequalities and bringing the whole to a level. It is based on a study of the originals, preserved in almost unbroken entirety by The New York Historical Society and courteously opened to inspection. Some, not all—indeed, only a few—of the drawings are dated. Nevertheless, with the aid of the letters and journals, and by reference to dates of publication, a sufficient chronological arrangement can be worked out. For details of such an arrangement, see Dr. Francis H. Herrick's 'Audubon the Naturalist,' New York, 1917, vol. I. p. 425, n., and elsewhere. It is believed that the grounds for this item of higher criticism are easily discoverable.

² Dunlap, *op. cit.* vol. III, p. 204.

find that Lawson conceded something. Bonaparte did buy this drawing at least, and Lawson did engrave it. He protested that a life-size drawing was a mistake,¹ and artistically he was right: a drawing to the measurements of life and viewed at arm's length is Gargantuan in effect. Nevertheless, Lawson made the engraving, and made it honestly and well.

The plate as actually published bears the legend, *Drawn from Nature by John J. Audubon and A. Rider*; and the wonder rises, by what justification Rider's name appears. For Lawson's sake, it is well to note that he did not engrave the legends on the plates. That was left to the hand of a commercial engraver. The matter is a small one, but it seems to afford another indication of an ungenerous bearing to a man whose manifest faults overlay his greater merits.

A survey of the field of Lawson's activity, as it lies spread upon the pages of these scrap-books, brings certain matters clearly into view. One is that the engraver necessarily did a vast amount of hack work; plate after plate of diagrams for an encyclopedia are weariness to behold. But out of such weary work sprang the skill to do the things that remain important. Another thing brought to light is the perfection of the ability to render the quality of surfaces; whether it be the shell of a snail or the down of an Owl's wing, the proper touch is there. And finally, there is the aesthetic sense, the perception of and communication of the feeling for beauty. In scientific work this quality is submerged in the gaining of other ends. But leaving the scientific work aside, here, for example, is a portrait of Washington, after Gilbert Stuart, and another of Burns, after Nasmyth, and these as artistic transcripts are of first quality, incomparably superior to what was being produced elsewhere in America at that day.

¹ Liberty is here taken with the record, but only in very slight degree. Dunlap, whose narrative otherwise is perfectly intelligible, imputes to Lawson the objection that the drawing was too large for the plate, and he imputes to him stubbornness in refusing to reduce it in scale. Why, it may be asked in argument, if Lawson considered this bird figure too large for the plate, should he without a word of dissent have prepared many subsequent plates in which the bird figure is equally large? And, as for reduction in scale, the fact is before us that this is a life-size portrayal of the Boat-tailed Grackle, and we know that *Audubon*—not Lawson—had set his heart on life-size presentment. The statement given in the text is offered as the probably correct definition of Lawson's position—a position which, as may be supposed, Dunlap in his haste failed fully to comprehend.

In the bird plates, etching is supplemented with line engraving. Plumage is rendered in etching, and no one has succeeded better. Nowhere, as with Lawson, are the clean outlines so surely given; nowhere else is the soft texture of plumage so convincingly rendered. The work is greatly superior to the more widely famed work of Havell for Audubon. The heavier harder surfaces of beak, claw, and perch are done with the graver, and the contrast thus introduced between light and heavy lines is most happily managed.

The plates are well worth careful study.

Miss Lawson's memoir follows:

Alexander Lawson was born December 19, 1772, at Ravens-tuther, a village in Lanarkshire, Scotland.

An orphan at fifteen, he left his native place, to reside with an elder brother in Liverpool.

Mr. Lawson's passion for the art, he so successfully pursued, evinced itself at a very early period. Possessed of an extraordinary love of knowledge, in the retired home of his youth he sought eagerly for books, and soon discovered that illustrated works afforded him intense pleasure; at a very early age he earnestly desired to produce something of the same kind. In Liverpool this taste was more fully gratified, and his favourite resort was the shops of print sellers. He bought or borrowed every work on the arts that came within his reach; but, although he read much on painting and water-colour drawing, his inclinations led him to prefer engraving, notwithstanding the difficulties placed in his way.

His brother, who was anxious that he should devote himself to mercantile pursuits, opposed determinedly, what he considered a mere whim of youth. Although in after life Mr. Lawson was the soul of frankness, at this time his manners were shy and retiring. Much as he desired to make the acquaintance of artists, he shrank from intruding upon them. Alone and unaided, he derived from books his first steps in his art. A graver was made under his direction, from a figure he found in one of the many works which he studied. With this he amused himself at home during his leisure hours; and whilst on business journeys in Lancashire and

Yorkshire, he frequently, during evenings, when no book with reading presented itself, would ornament the silver tankards of his host, by encircling his initials with a graceful wreath or scroll. Some of these works of his graver, Mr. Lawson heard of more than thirty years afterwards, being preserved in the families to which they belonged, as a relic of a young artist, who went to America, and made himself a name there; the owners only producing them on great occasions.

Mr. Lawson was deeply interested in the French Revolution, believing with the liberal party in Great Britain that the description of its frightful excesses were exaggerations of the conservatives. He resolved at twenty to leave his home and assist in the French struggle for freedom. In his heart also lurked a strong desire to visit a land whose artists and engravers he highly prized, the accuracy and elaborate finish of the French school being very agreeable to his love of perfection. As a passage from England was of course impossible, Mr. Lawson sailed for the United States, and arrived in Baltimore, May, 1792. The impression made upon his mind by the shores of the Chesapeake was so agreeable, that he felt at once that the New World was a home for him. The perfect freedom of speech and action allowed him in the Land of Liberty, was peculiarly in accordance with a nature so boldly conscientious and honest, that in the course of a long life no word was ever spoken by the subject of this notice which did not, as in a clear glass, reflect the inner soul and heart of the speaker.

Mr. Lawson determined on settling in Philadelphia, at that time the seat of the government, and immediately entered his name for naturalization, and during his whole life performed all the duties of a good citizen. Here he engaged himself to study his profession with a person who was considered at that time an artist of some merit; but, soon finding him incapable of any higher knowledge than the mere rudiments, Mr. Lawson left him, preferring to work out his own improvement, without being cramped and annoyed by the incapacity of his instructor. Mr. Lawson was the father of the art of engraving in this country. The first plates at all rivalling the works of European artists were four engravings for Thompson's Seasons, executed by him for Mr. Dobson. When Joel Barlow saw these engravings he expressed

his regret to Mr. Lawson that he had not been employed to illustrate the Columbiad, for, had he known they could have been engraved in so superior a style in his own country, he would not have engaged British artists.

In the year 1798 Mr. Lawson formed a friendship with Alexander Wilson which terminated only with the life of the latter. Mr. Lawson's name is intimately connected with American ornithology, and with the most elegant works on natural history that have been produced in this country, numerous illustrations of Scripture, travels, poetry, novels, maps, and surgical plates. He possessed indefatigable industry, and his whole life was governed by a conscientiousness so delicate, that the low prices paid for the arts in the United States never remunerated him for the labours bestowed. He loved his profession intensely, and was always happy in the pursuit of it, unless compelled by circumstances to occupy himself with uninteresting work. In person Mr. Lawson was tall and slender, with complexion hair and eyes so dark that they conveyed to strangers the impression of his being a Spaniard or Italian. He had a fine constitution, very abstemious habits, and was capable of intense application; frequently, when he was a young man, working sixteen hours in the twenty-four, for many weeks consecutively, with scarcely any relaxation. He was firm in all his attachments and very happy in his friends, from an almost intuitive sense of worth in the person chosen, death alone severing for him friendships of twenty, thirty and forty years standing. In 1805 Mr. Lawson married an English lady, a woman of fine mind, and a devoted wife and mother. His only son who attained maturity inherited his father's taste, and was instructed by him; he was employed in the office of the Coast Survey for about eleven years, and survived his father only eight years.

Amongst the most distinguished works of this excellent artist, are all the best plates of Wilson's Ornithology, Charles Bonaparte's continuation of Wilson, some plates of natural history for Lewis and Clarke's travels, four very fine plates for a proposed work on quadrupeds by Mr. George Ord, Prof. Haldeman's work on conchology, and another on the same subject by Dr. Amos Binney of Boston. These two last works are engraved after very beautiful and correct drawings by Mr. Lawson's second daughter.

Mr. Lawson left unfinished an engraving of 25 inches in length, by 16 inches in height, after a painting by Krimmel of the same size; the subject, "The Election Day in Philadelphia." On this he had expended more than two years' labour.

Mr. Lawson was most happy in giving appropriate expression to the smallest face and figure, and in the Election Day, there are numerous groups, whose varied forms and circumstances told their own story. In his engravings for the annuals, at the time they were popular, he was very successful.

It would be impossible to enumerate all the works of this artist, besides those already alluded to, immense numbers of maps, charts, surgical plates, illustrations of chemistry, botany, mineralogy, crystals, natural philosophy, &c., that, in the course of fifty-three years' close application and almost uninterrupted good health, passed from under his hand. It would seem almost impossible in looking over the impressions of his works that the man who elaborated all these could find time for mental improvement. Yet few were better read on every subject. A passionate love of poetry, first awakened no doubt by his romantic birth place on the banks of the Clyde and by the legends of Wallace with which these regions abound, made him a collector of ancient and modern poets, most of whose finest passages he could repeat. With history and science he was well acquainted, and found time to instruct the intellect and hearts of his children.

Mr. Lawson never took any pupil except his own son, although much pressed to do so, and offered large fees as an inducement. He felt that for many years to come in this country, his would be an unprofitable profession, and he declined receiving them, not being satisfied that the youths presented to him possessed his own self-denial and enthusiasm, without which qualities he knew they would eventually regret the career they had chosen.

Mr. Lawson departed this life August 22, 1846. His health had been gradually declining for several years. He continued at his profession, however, until two days before his death.

These volumes which contain specimens of his works have been collected at the instance of one of his friends.¹

¹Prof. Haldeman.

So many years have elapsed since the engravings for Wilson's ornithology were executed, that it was found impossible to present a set of uncoloured plates of the first edition, which would alone have done justice to the artist's merit. The coloured plates, therefore, have been selected from a later edition, and interspersed with such uncoloured impressions as could be found.

At the suggestion of the same friend, wherever original drawings of Wilson, or others, had remained with the engraver, they have been added to the book, thus preserving some curious efforts of the art.

L.

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