

ELMSLIE W. DALLAS, Esq. By General Robertson and  
Professor Piazzi Smith.

ELMSLIE WILLIAM DALLAS, the second son of William Dallas an underwriter at Llyod's, was born in London on 27th June 1809. He was educated at the Academy of Inverness, where he lived with his aunt, Mrs Sweetland, widow of General Sweetland; afterwards for a short time he attended classes at a commercial academy in London.

In his twenty-second year he decided to follow art as a profession, and was admitted a student of the Royal Academy in 1831. He completed his Academy studies in 1834.

The next six years (1834–1840) were spent on the Continent. During this time he resided a winter in Munich, nine months in Venice, and three years in Rome and its neighbourhood; he also spent several weeks at Dresden and Florence, and visited many other German, Flemish, French, and Italian cities. Several portfolios filled with highly-finished water-colour copies of the most celebrated pictures in the galleries he visited, and also with original drawings, sketches, and etchings, remain to testify the industry and skill with which during these six years the young artist pursued his studies.

In 1838 (æ. 29) he exhibited his first picture at the Royal Academy—it represented the interior of a Roman convent.

Soon after his return to England in 1840, he was employed by Herr Grüner to assist in the decoration of the garden pavilion at Buckingham Palace.

In 1841–42 he sent some pictures to the Royal Scottish Academy, which were well received and sold. In consequence of this success he resolved to settle in Edinburgh, and from 1842 until his death (*i.e.*, from his thirty-third to his seventieth year) he continued to reside there. For the next sixteen years (1842–58) he was a regular contributor to the annual exhibitions of the Royal Scottish Academy. His chief pictures were highly-studied interiors and mediæval subjects. There were also several landscapes, notably some views of the Campagna and its ruins. His last picture was exhibited in 1858 (æ. 50).

On 17th June 1846 he was appointed-assistant master of the architectural and ornamental class of the School of Design under

the Board of Manufactures. This appointment he held until 30th September 1858, when he was placed in retirement by the Treasury in order to carry into effect the affiliation of the school with the Science and Art Department of South Kensington. His connection with this school, therefore, extended over a period of twelve years (æ. 37–49).

On 3d March 1851 he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society, to which he continued to belong until his death.

On 16th June 1859 (æ. 50) he married Jane Fordyce, eldest daughter of the late James Rose, W.S. Soon after his marriage he commenced the practice of photography as a profession, and applied the process of carbon-printing, with great success, to the illustration of books.

In 1870 (æ. 61) his health, which had previously been very good, was severely shaken by blood poisoning from bichromate of potash used in the process of carbon printing.

In 1872, when smallpox was prevalent in Edinburgh, he caught the infection from one of his assistants, and had a very severe attack of that disease. In the autumn of 1877, while on a visit to London, he had a very serious attack of typhoid fever, and never thoroughly recovered from the prostration of strength which followed the fever. The long-continued cold of the winter of 1878–79 tried him greatly. An attack of inflammation, brought on by a cold caught in January 1879, was the cause of his death, which took place at Dean-bank House on the 26th day of that month.

Such were the incidents in the uneventful but by no means unworthy life of Elmslie William Dallas. As regards pecuniary results it was a life of unsuccessful effort; but as regards the spirit in which the work of his life was done, and the intrinsic value and perfection of that work, E. W. Dallas's efforts to do well and thoroughly things worthy to be done, accomplished much that was admirable, in a manner that was most instructive and exemplary to all who had opportunities of observing the wealth of earnest lucid thought and the patient skilfulness of hand with which he worked out his results.

On 2d February, the Sunday following his funeral, the Rev. John M'Murtrie, speaking from the pulpit of St Bernard's, in which church Mr Dallas had been for upwards of ten years an elder,

said :—“ His beautiful features, his grave almost sad expression, as of one who had fought life’s battle and was wearied, were familiar to us all ; but most of us could only guess at the worth, the truth, the goodness which lay under that reserved demeanour, for he shrank from prominent positions, and had that low estimate of his capacity for public affairs which often characterises the very best. But whatever he undertook he carried out thoroughly. His was a pure and chastened life ; its brightest side not seen by the world, but shining in his own home for those who were dearest to him. In severe illnesses—of which he had several—he was gentle and patient ; but I never knew how brave he was till I saw him face the last enemy without fear, in lowly trust in his blessed Saviour.”

Professor Piazzi Smyth, who knew him well and had intercourse with him more or less frequent for a period of upwards of thirty years (from 1846 until his death), thus bears testimony to what he terms “ the high calibre of his character.”

E. W. Dallas was (the Professor says) undoubtedly a remarkable man : gifted with a *naive* simplicity of mind and thorough goodness of heart, as well as with no uncertain abilities of head and hand. Each singly of an admirable kind, and collectively very rarely found combined in the same individual. Yet so modest and retiring withal, was the possessor of them, that these rare abilities were little known.

The mere extent of his knowledge in the fine arts, and the great number of his acquisitions in the exact sciences, were, to say the least of them, very noticeable. But still more noticeable was the thorough soundness of his knowledge of every subject he had studied ; so that I find now, on looking back through the years that are gone, this far higher commendation for him than any amount of local success or of temporary celebrity ; viz., that almost whatever he said, or did, at any time, has stood : having been proved by subsequent experience to be true ; and I have never regretted any moments I have spent in his company, either listening to his opinions or discussing his views.

I first met him in his capacity as a teacher of the architectural and ornamental class in the Trustees’ School of Design, in the Royal Institution. The outlines to be copied were of large size, of classical severity, and yet not without poetical feeling ; and he taught with

success, both morning and evening, a class of between seventy and eighty youths.

Equally skilful was he at home in modelling exquisite ideal forms in clay or wax; or in carving in wood, some of Nature's choicest leaves and flowers, with a delicacy of imitation which made a charming approach to the beauty of the originals.

At other times he would take up his palette and either paint landscapes from notes of former continental travel; or produce figures, usually of the *genre* kind, which testified to his possession of considerable powers of imagination, and of a lively memory well stored with reminiscences of extensive mediæval reading. Here, then, we have at once powers of multifarious work, extending over a very considerable range of the fine arts; enough of itself to have fitted out most successfully for the battle of life, many an aspirant for fame. But to all these artistic faculties, Elmslie W. Dallas added mastery of not a few branches of hard science; as thus—

1. He wrote a book on applied Geometry for the use of the School of Design, showing complete knowledge of the latest continental developments of the subject.\*

2. He prepared papers on the optical mathematics of lenses.

3. He entered at one time with zeal and fervour into the casting, grinding, and polishing of the specula of reflecting telescopes.

4. He made experiments in improving and adapting compound microscopes to special subjects of minute anatomy.

5. He possessed a considerable range of chemical knowledge, and made many experiments, both on large and small scale, in crystallogenesis.

\* In a report upon this treatise submitted to the Board of Manufactures on 17th June 1860, the late Professor Kelland writes:—"Regarded as a book of reference, which shall contain all the more important solutions of the ordinary problems of Practical Geometry, this treatise deserves very high commendation. The constructions adopted by the author seem in all cases to have been well selected; and the arrangement, founded on a classification of results, is eminently adapted to afford facility of reference."

The Professor, however, reported that, considered as an educational treatise, he did not think its arrangement suitable for the instruction of youth; and the result has confirmed this judgment. As a class-book, Mr Dallas's treatise has been superseded in the School of Art by a much less elaborate and more elementary little book compiled by Mr J. S. Rawle, Headmaster of the Nottingham Government School of Art.

6. He prepared grandly illustrated papers on the minuter forms of microscopic infusoria.

7. Long before he adopted photography as a profession, and when very few persons in this country knew anything about it, he had become conversant with the then newly-born art in all its chemical, as well as its optical and mechanical details; and he had prepared, with his own hands, special and instantaneous apparatus for applying it, on the one hand to record sun-spots as shown by a telescope; and on the other hand, to picture microscopic images of his favourite forms of *naviculæ*.

Now, how could any ordinary man occupy himself with all these arts and sciences, without being more or less shallow in some, and proving an undesirable leader or adviser in others of them?

It would be impossible! and yet so conscientious a student and thorough a worker was E. W. Dallas, that he possessed skill and solid acquirements in them all. Without pretension or direct effort on his part, he was looked up to, as rather a notable authority, in all of them, by many persons who prosecuted only one or other single subject out of the many with which our late Fellow was conversant.

At a meeting of the first Edinburgh Photographic Society, established by the late Sir David Brewster, when a novel kind of landscape lens, invented by that very original genius the late Mr Sutton, was laid on the table, how the members in general were non-plussed! It was a fluid-corrected, achromatic, globular lens with "butterfly diaphragm" stop, and producing equal illumination and good definition over three times as wide an azimuthal angle as had ever before been obtained. Presently Elmslie W. Dallas entered the room and sat down in a quiet corner, when it was perfectly delightful to me (a non-professional looking on) to see how several of the best men in the room brought the lens to *him*, told him all their hopes, fears, and difficulties about it, and then hung expectant on his words as though they would prove infallible—and if he spoke at all, his words, on such a matter, might be accepted as infallible. For although, not only when questioned privately but also in public, he was often sufficiently discourseful, yet he could be silent when he chose; and would not let popular applause, or personal requests, or hope of gain move him to give out a single opinion on any

subject, further than he himself had examined into it, after his own thoroughgoing manner, and to the satisfaction of the special ideal aspirations of his own soul. And herein was the most individual trait of the man—the rare cast of mind which made him a most worthy member of the Royal Society of Edinburgh ; yet caused his worldly success in life, to fall far below his intrinsic worth and high capacities.

Gifted by nature with a sensitive soul, responsive to the love of abstract truth and appreciative of ideal beauty ; ever inclined to be generous beyond his means, and quite incapable, amidst higher surroundings, of bestowing serious and concentrated attention on petty affairs, he worked at his profession (photography) in a manner regardless of cost ; and not so much for profit, as for the sake of the scientific interest he involuntarily felt in overcoming difficulties in the practice of the art. That he did, from such motives, procure the most marvellous lenses and the most elaborate apparatus ; that he tried, with patient and often long-protracted and expensive experiments, every new method in photography, was to his honour as a lover of science ; but was not to his advantage as a man of very limited means, whose income mainly depended on daily studio work of a more certain kind. And, more untowardly still for his success in securing an adequate income, this taste for perfection and power in all the objective of his art, was accompanied by a curious inner subjective state of mind,—by a kind of inward psychical craving, perpetually urging him to desire, that his knowledge of whatever he touched, should be if possible more than perfect : persuading him too, that in order to know thoroughly any particular thing in nature, he should not only know and handle the thing itself, but that to be quite certain about it, he ought also to become similarly acquainted with everything else existent which, though outwardly excessively like, was not in reality the very thing itself ; and might in consequence, at some time or other, possibly deceive the unwary. Under the pure, but exacting, domination of which idea, carried as it was by him to an inordinately high degree, he appeared at last to think that, in the conduct of his scientific inquiries, his chief duty consisted rather in finding and proving a negative ; than in either establishing any positive result, or in securing opportunities for the most brilliant mercantile success. Had he been heir to a large fortune he



would have rendered services of the most invaluable kind to the science of the age he lived in ; for with his eminent skill, perseverance, and capacity for untiring labour, joined *then* to ample pecuniary resources, he would have followed up most exhaustively all the *least* inviting paths of thought and experiment. And whenever he had traced the objects of his investigation, step by step, both back to their sources, and onward to their final outcome and practical application, according to his own high ideas of efficiency in research,—he would have been equally ready, if the result of his labours proved to be something good, true, and workable, to present it as a free gift to others ; but if the contrary, to keep all the disappointment to himself. And no self-sacrifice in thought or work would ever have weighed with him for a moment, if by such devotion he foresaw that the road to future success, through any very difficult labyrinth, would be made safer and straighter for others. But without any adventitious aids of either fortune or favour, E. W. Dallas did, in fact, to a very great extent, fulfil the noble part for which he was in a manner designed, and specially endowed, by nature. And living as he did, conscientiously, day by day such a life, his soul could not but be advancing *pari passu*, and maturing itself to the end of his appointed time here below.

His own work is finished ; but his rare example has, without doubt, even unknown to himself, kindled the spark of progress and self-improvement in many another mind that was around him ; and his noble qualities, not less *excelsior* in aim, but more practically applied, may reappear in his own family, in another generation, as well as in a different field of labour.\*

Dr J. G. FLEMING. By Dr Andrew Wood, Edinburgh.

DR JOHN GIBSON FLEMING, who for many years occupied a prominent position in Glasgow as a medical practitioner, at first in general practice and latterly as a consultant, was born there on the

\* E. W. Dallas leaves behind him a widow, a son, and two young daughters (twelve and five years of age). In the term ending July 1879, his only son James passed out of the Royal Academy of Woolwich, first of the commission class of Cadets. Besides the Pollock gold medal and a sword of honour for general good conduct, he received prizes for excellence in five special subjects. James Dallas is now a Lieutenant in the Royal Engineers.