

tion, for he was then advanced in life, and I knew there was a strong taint of insanity in his family. A few years after he died with a softened brain. Did that disease commence only when his physical powers began to fail? Does the lamp begin to burn when its flame flickers from want of oil? or does the miner's fuse take fire only when the explosion takes place? Verily, the freer and brighter the lamp burns, the sooner will its light go out; and the longest and the slowest creeping fuse spark will in due time reach the charge.

A far sadder illustration than the case of Sir Walter Scott, of the consequences of mental overwork, was that presented in the tragic close of the life of Hugh Miller. He was preëminently a self-made man. Those who reach the elevated regions of literature or science aided by the advantages of a liberal education, can but ill appreciate the difficulties and toils that beset the rough and thorny paths of the man who must be his own schoolmaster. The quarryman of Cromarty, to obtain the eminence reached by him, both in science and literature, must have taxed his brain endurance far beyond the limits of safety. It is my belief that even in early life a latent germ of insanity was present in his cerebral organization. If I remember aright, he has told of himself that in his boyhood he experienced visual illusions, or hallucinations. In Smiles' biography of Robert Dick we find recorded, on the authority of Professor Shearer, a very instructive incident which was communicated to him by Dick, whose words are thus given: "His mind was touched somehow by superstition. I mind," he continued, "after an afternoon's work together on the rocks at Holborn Head, we sat down on the lee side of a dyke to look over our specimens, when suddenly up jumped Hugh, exclaiming, 'The fairies have got hold of my trousers!' and then sitting down again, he kept rubbing his legs for a long time. It was of no use suggesting that an ant or some other well-known beastie had got there. Hugh *would* have it that it was 'the fairies.'"

Robert Dick regarded this occurrence as evidence of Hugh Miller's superstition; but to those who have well studied the early phases of mental disease, and have carefully scanned the biography of this wonderful man, it must present a different aspect. It was, in truth, but a morbid embryonal brain creation, in perfect affinity with those of more advanced and horrid development, which proved the tortures of his latter days, and finally precipitated the act of self-destruction.

On the day before his death he was, by request of his wife, visited by Professor Miller and Dr. Balfour. He acknowledged to them that he had been working, night after night, till very late in the morning, hard and continuously, at his new book, which, with much satisfaction, he said, he had that day finished.* On the very night preceding this

* "Testimony of the Rocks."