

WILLIAM CHAMBERS, THE PUBLISHER.

The life of William Chambers, who died in Edinburgh, May 21st last, was like a romance; yet it was a terrible reality. Born in Peebles in 1800, he got the usual dame school education, and would doubtless have received other tutorial advantages, but that commercial misfortune overtook the family. His father was a hand-loom weaver in a large way of business, but the introduction of machinery superseded his more laborious and more costly mode of work, and so he had to close his workshop. He does not appear to have been endowed with much energy, and his knowledge of the world seems to have been of the simplest. William and his brother Robert Chambers took their persevering, managing characteristics from their mother. The family, withal, was loving and united, and no break took place, until, after undergoing many hardships, and having made many shifts to keep the wolf from the door the elder Chambers got a situation which he suited and which suited him, a few miles from Edinburgh, and thither the family removed, except William, who had in the meantime become apprentice to a bookseller in Edinburgh, and who bravely resolved to remain behind and "fend" for himself on the magnificent sum of four shillings a week. Writing fifty years after these impecunious days, William Chambers proudly says: "On no occasion did I look to parents for the slightest pecuniary subsidy. I cannot remember," he adds, "entertaining the slightest despondency on the subject. But what may not one with the buoyancy of youth dare to encounter?" His passion for reading was intense. By the light of his landlady's fire he grounded himself in French. In English literature he made considerable headway by reading to a bookish baker, to whom he arranged to read every morning by the flickering gleams of the oven furnace, aided by a farthing rushlight whilst the "batch" was being prepared. For this purpose he had to rise daily between three and four o'clock.

Meantime the father was again in monetary difficulties, and Robert's education, which had hitherto been contrived to continue, was stopped. This son, two years the junior of William, had the indomitable pluck of his elder brother. He made a selection from the paternal library, rented a shop in Leith Walk for £6 a year, and began business as a book-seller. To save expense William took up his abode in the shop, sleeping on a primitive convertible bed, made up on the floor at night and transformed into a sofa in the morning. Robert prospered so well that when William's apprenticeship was finished his stock was worth £20. Fired by the good fortune of his brother, William rejected all offers of employment, and resolved to commence business on his own account. In this resolve he received aid unexpectedly. The late William Jegg, the well known London bookseller, being in the Scottish capital for a trade sale, engaged William Chambers to assist him during the few days of his stay. Attracted by the brightness, smartness and handiness of the youth, Mr. Jegg made enquiry as to his circumstances and aspirations, and told William Chambers to select from his stock £10 worth of books, make the most of them, and pay when due.

Here was the first step on the ladder. With a capital of five shillings and a credit

of ten pounds, the future great bookseller and litterateur began business. With the five shillings he purchased wood of which, with his own hands, he constructed a stand, and taking up a position in Leith Walk, not very far from his brother's premises, challenged fate to mortal combat. On the opening day he cleared a net profit of nine shillings and three pence, a splendid encouragement to the young adventurer. His success continued, and in due time he paid his debt, increased his stock, and took possession of a commodious shop. He necessarily had a good deal of spare time on his hands, and he cast about for some remunerative mode of utilizing it. Almost from the first he had taught himself book-binding. He bought many of his books in the sheets, and bound them for himself. But this, even, was not sufficient to afford constant employment, and he turned his attention to

casual. The old galleys press was still to do duty. The name of the aspiring periodical was the *Kaleidoscope*, which went through a brief career of eight numbers between the 6th of October, 1821, and the 12th of January, 1822. The papers, mostly of a humorous character, were nearly all written by Robert. I was not able to do much in the way of writing. The setting of type, and the toil of working the press, besides other business duties, were enough and more than enough; for, under the heavy labor, I broke down considerably in health, and was fain to give the whole thing up. After this, I stuck to bookselling and job-printing for a time." In 1824 he published his brother Robert's "Traditions of Edinburgh," and compiled and published himself "The Book of Scotland." In such work as this the years up to 1832 were passed. The *Kaleidoscope*, as has been said,

let me avoid political, sectarian, or any kind of controversial bias. No further time was lost in cogitation. In January, 1832, I issued the prospectus of the present *Journal*, and the first number appeared on Saturday, the 4th of February."

The success was immediate. Nothing like it had been seen. In a few days the sale in Scotland numbered 20,000; in England it required 50,000 copies to appease the appetite. From the first Robert Chambers was a contributor; with the fourteenth he joined his brother, and thus was founded the famous house of W. & R. Chambers, whose success was so unwavering and whose fame is so world-wide that no details are necessary here. The name of the firm is familiar as a household word in "Chambers's Educational Course," "The Book of Days"—the labor connected with which is blamed for shortening Robert's days—the *Encyclopædia*, and in many other productions of the brains of these busy men. Robert died in 1871, and four days after his death the youngest brother James, whom the business had also absorbed, expired. The double loss was too much for William at his advanced age. He never recovered from the blow. He was never the same man after it.

William, or rather Dr. Chambers, for he had been made an L.L.D. by Edinburgh University, travelled extensively in his later years. One of his pleasantest recollections was the hearty welcome he got upon more than one visit to Canada and the United States. His public munificence was boundless. To Peebles, his native town, he presented a museum, school of art and library of 15,000 volumes, at a cost of £20,000. St. Giles' Cathedral, Edinburgh, he restored at a cost of £40,000. He survived its completion, but he did not live to see the formal re-opening which took place three days after his death, with much ceremony, by the Earl of Aberdeen, Her Majesty's High Commissioner to the Church of Scotland.

This is but a scant outline of one of the most remarkable men of our century. The temptation is great to linger over the youthful struggles, the buoyant hope, the dauntless courage, the superhuman perseverance displayed in every year of a life whose beauties shine out at every point. The story of William Chambers's life has to be written, and when it is written the world will find that underneath that tower of St. Andrew's at Peebles lies one of the greatest of her sons, for he belonged to all nations and to all times.—*Congregationalist*.



THE LATE DR. WILLIAM CHAMBERS, OF EDINBURGH.

the copying with a crow pen verses of poetry in a style resembling fine print, and suitable for albums. This occupation apparently gave him the idea of turning printer, and so he invested £3 in an old "font" of type and set himself to learn "composition." In a little time he had so far mastered the difficulties of the art as to set up with his own hands a small volume of the songs of Burns, bound it himself in colored wrappers, making on the edition a profit of £8. The next enterprise we will leave William Chambers himself to describe.

"My next exploit was of a more ambitious description. It consisted of nothing less than trying to print a periodical, of which Robert was to act as editor. It was to come out fortnightly, and extended to sixteen octavo pages. The eight pounds realized by the success of my Burns helped to purchase a new font of type for the oc-

had a brief career. But there was a demand for popular literature and William Chambers was most anxious to meet that demand. In the "story" of this long and busy life, published in the Jubilee year of *Chambers's Journal*, he tells us how that extraordinarily successful periodical was projected. The worthlessness of the popular literature of the day proved its own ruin; ever so many ventures were made, but each was doomed to ignominious failure. These ventures Mr. Chambers had carefully watched. At last:

"Here," said I, pondering on the subject, "is my chance. I have waited for a favorable gale, and it has come at last. Taking advantage of the growing taste for cheap literature, let me lead it, if possible in a proper direction; let me endeavor to elevate and instruct, independently of mere passing amusement; and, in particu-

lar, let me avoid political, sectarian, or any kind of controversial bias. No further time was lost in cogitation. In January, 1832, I issued the prospectus of the present *Journal*, and the first number appeared on Saturday, the 4th of February."

The *Texas Baptist* thinks that "if every Christian would do his whole duty there would soon be a Sabbath-school in every neighborhood."