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Life of John Wilson

John Wilson (1804–1875) was a Christian missionary and philanthropist. He spent most of his working life in India, where he built churches and schools, and founded the institutions now known as Wilson College and the University of Mumbai. First published in 1878, this biography was compiled by George Smith (1833–1919), at the request of Wilson's son. As former editor of the *Calcutta Review*, Smith was an expert on Wilson's career, and having met him on his own travels to India, held him and his work in high esteem. The book traces Wilson's life from his childhood to his final days. It reveals his patient mediation between native Indians and their rulers, his groundbreaking and lasting influence on their lives, and his pivotal role in the British government's efforts to help India and its neighbouring countries. It remains of great interest to scholars of religious and Asian studies.

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Life of John Wilson

*For Fifty Years Philanthropist
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GEORGE SMITH



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JOHN WILSON, D.D., F.R.S.

Moderator of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland.

ENGRAVED BY JOSEPH BROWN FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BY MOFFATT

John Murray, Albemarle Street, London, 1878.

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THE LIFE
OF
JOHN WILSON, D.D. F.R.S.
FOR FIFTY YEARS PHILANTHROPIST AND SCHOLAR
IN THE EAST

BY GEORGE SMITH, LL.D.

COMPANION OF THE ORDER OF THE INDIAN EMPIRE ;
FELLOW OF THE STATISTICAL SOCIETY ; CORRESPONDING MEMBER OF THE
ORIENTALISCHES MUSEUM, VIENNA.

Οἱ τὴν οἰκουμένην ἀναστατώσαντες οὗτοι καὶ ἐνθάδε πάρεισιν.

WITH PORTRAIT AND ILLUSTRATIONS

LONDON
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET
1878

The right of Translation is reserved

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This Volume is Dedicated

TO THE OLD AND TO THE NEW :

TO

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

JOHN, LORD LAWRENCE, G.C.B., G.C.S.I., D.C.L.,

LAST AND GREATEST OF THE CIVIL SERVANTS OF THE EAST INDIA COMPANY

AS HIS BROTHER HENRY WAS OF ITS SOLDIERS ;

AND TO

CHARLES U. AITCHISON, C.S.I., LL.D.,

CHIEF COMMISSIONER OF BRITISH BURMAH ;

FOREMOST IN EVERY SENSE OF THE COMPETITION CIVILIANS UNDER
THE CROWN.

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PREFACE.



WHEN, a year ago, I was asked by his son to go over the voluminous papers and write the life of Dr. Wilson of Bombay, I at once sacrificed other engagements to the duty. As Editor of the *Calcutta Review* for some time before the Mutiny of 1857, and as Editor of *The Friend of India* and Correspondent of *The Times* for many years after it, I was called to observe and occasionally to discuss the career of the Philanthropist and Scholar of Western India. For forty-seven years as a public man and a missionary he worked, he wrote, he spoke, and in countless ways he joyfully toiled for the people of India. While viceroys and governors, officials and merchants, scholars and travellers, succeeded each other and passed away all too rapidly, he remained a permanent living force, a mediator between the natives and the governing class, an interpreter of the varied Asiatic races, creeds, and longings, to their alien but benevolent rulers. Nor was his work for his own countrymen less remarkable, in its degree, than his life of self-sacrifice for Hindoos and Muhammadans, Parsees and Jews, outcastes and aborigines, and his building up of the indigenous Church of India. His influence maintained an English standard of morality and manners in society, while he was the centre of a select group of administrators, not confined to Bombay, like Sir Donald McLeod, to mention only the dead. As an Orientalist and

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scholar, the power of his memory was only less remarkable than the ardour of his industry; his linguistic instinct was regulated by the philosophy with which his native country is identified, and all were directed by the loftiest motive and the purest passion that can inflame the breast. Wealth and honours he put from him, save when he could make them also ministers in the work of humanity. From Central India to Central Africa, and from Cabul to Comorin, there are thousands who call John Wilson blessed. His hundreds of educated converts and catechumens are the seed of the Church of Western India. Every missionary and student of India Missions must sit at his feet.

From 1864, when I first visited Bombay, to his death at the close of 1875, I learned to know the man as well as his work. But he cannot be so well reproduced on the cold page, for his own writings do not reflect the charm of his talk, which delighted generations of friends, from Sir John Malcolm to Lord Mayo and Lord Northbrook, Sir Bartle Frere and Mr. Grant Duff. My aim is that this volume may supply the materials, at least, from which his Country and the Church Catholic, oriental scholars, and the princes and educated natives of India, shall not only see what manner of man he was but be stimulated by his rare example. I hope also that the sketches of the other good and great men who worked for a time by his side, may not be without interest; and that, still more, it may be seen how the British Government is rising to the height of our national responsibility for the good of the millions of Southern Asia, and of the neighbouring Malay, Chinese, Tatar, Persian, Arab, Abyssinian, and Negro peoples.

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This is an English book, and therefore, though it occasionally treats purely scholarly questions, the English vowels are used to transliterate oriental names and terms. Save in occasional extracts which demand the preservation of the original spelling, and in the name which I would fain have printed “Boodhist,” hardly an Asiatic word or phrase will be found which is not so rendered as to be capable of correct pronunciation, and of being easily understood. Scholars who write for scholars only, do well to follow the Indian and European vowel sounds. Scholars, officials, and all who desire the English reader to be attracted to, instead of being repelled from, the study of India and the East, will use English as uniformly as ineradicable custom permits.

Besides the acknowledgments made in the course of the narrative, I have to thank for their assistance his Excellency Sir Richard Temple, Bart., who, as the present Governor of Bombay, instructed the departments to supply copies of some of Dr. Wilson's official correspondence; Sir Alexander Grant, Bart., Principal of the University of Edinburgh, who, as Director of Public Instruction for some years, was closely associated with Dr. Wilson; the third Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy, Bart.; the Revs. Dhunjeebhoy Nowrojee and R. Stothert, M.A.; Dr. Birdwood, C.S.I., and Dr. R. Rost, of the India Office; Hugh Miller, M.D., Esq. of Broomfield, Helensburgh; W. P. Jervis, Esq. of Turin; Professors Charteris and Eggeling; and Professor Weber of Berlin, who has communicated to me, through Mr. John Muir, D.C.L., C.I.E., his very high estimate of the scientific pursuits of Dr. Wilson as an Orientalist who subordinated scholarly reputation to missionary ends. Only the long frontier war, and

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the other cares of his office as Governor of Cape Colony, have prevented his Excellency Sir Bartle Frere from contributing reminiscences of his lifelong friend.

As this volume has passed through the press death has removed these contemporaries and correspondents of Dr. Wilson—the Rev. John Cooper, his early colleague; Dr. Lang, of Sydney; M. Garcin de Tassy, of Paris; Professor Westergaard, of Copenhagen; and Mr. George Thompson.

SERAMPORE HOUSE, MERCHISTON,

EDINBURGH, *19th October* 1878.

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