

ISAIAH V. WILLIAMSON

# LIFE OF ISAIAH V. WILLIAMSON

BY  
JOHN WANAMAKER



PHILADELPHIA & LONDON  
J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY

1928

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## FOREWORD

From his earliest days John Wanamaker was a voluminous writer. His first manuscripts were the lessons prepared for Bethany Sunday School in 1858, and he continued to write on many subjects to the very end. His pioneer work transformed the writing of advertisements. When he reached middle life he began to write on municipal, state, and national political issues. The record of his participation in the Cabinet of Benjamin Harrison was preserved in the annual reports of the Postmaster General to the President. Many of his notable speeches in Pennsylvania political campaigns were published in book form by a league of Philadelphia business men. In his later years he wrote several thousand daily Store editorials. Throughout his long career he carefully prepared, and generally wrote in long-hand, his speeches before they were delivered. And they were speeches on all sorts of subjects.

But he did not write books. His life was a daily outpouring. It was not strange, then,

that his writings should be of the moment for the moment. No man of his time had greater vision, and saw more clearly the future. But he lived day by day.

The character of John Wanamaker, coupled with the tremendous demands made upon his time each day, makes all the more remarkable the little biographical sketch of a friend which we are publishing five years after John Wanamaker's death, twenty years after the sketch was written, and nearly forty years after the death of its subject.

Isaiah V. Williamson was of the generation preceding John Wanamaker. But he honored the younger man with his friendship and trust, and the younger man admired him and saw the great soul of Williamson when others went no farther than to be amused about and criticize the old philanthropist's habits of economy. So much that was legendary grew up around the name of Isaiah V. Williamson that John Wanamaker determined to write the life of his friend. It was a big undertaking for a busy merchant. But he went about it with his usual thoroughness and patient attention to detail. Gradually the

materials for a life of Williamson were gathered; and then the life was written. In its original form it was a considerably larger manuscript. John Wanamaker cut it down; and parts of it he recast. Then he put it aside. It was found among his papers—the only book-length manuscript that he had written.

It is not for this reason, however, that it is being published. We feel that the life of Isaiah V. Williamson should be known to this generation. The little book is a message to young men, written by one man who had achieved success, about another man who had achieved success before he did. But neither the subject of the biography, nor its author, had any thought for success in the worldly meaning of that word. Nor did they measure their life work by the money they had accumulated and the position they had won among their fellows by reason of the power that money gave them.

Honest living, honest thinking, and a passion for service are the characteristics of Isaiah V. Williamson brought forth in this little book. The biographer's enthusiasm for and keen sympathy with the man about whom

he writes could only have been possible through sharing his subject's ideals. There is inspiration in this book for those who want the ideals of Isaiah V. Williamson and John Wanamaker to be theirs.

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# LIFE OF ISAIAH V. WILLIAMSON

## I

### THE BACKGROUND



**B**ENSALEM TOWNSHIP is where we begin. You never heard of it? That is not to be wondered at, for there was nothing to star it on the map until a few years ago. Even now, though it lies along the Delaware River between Philadelphia and Trenton, it is thought of as an out-of-the-way farming region, in old Bucks County, Pennsylvania, celebrated for old-fashioned, straightforward, well-living farmers, chiefly of Quaker ancestors, who, according to tradition, remain county-contained and still vote for Andrew Jackson at the quadrennial Presidential elections.

Bensalem is not a railroad center. The trains simply hurry by on their way to and from New York. Neshaminy Creek, which forms its northern boundary, is not deep

enough to make it a shipping point. Mills, factories, and mines, which give importance to a region and bring it in touch with the outside world, are not to be found within its boundaries.

But it has a greatness all its own that will abide and enlarge as time goes on, because of a lad born in old Bensalem more than a hundred years ago. Men are living who knew him when he was little and who proudly saw him grow to an honored manhood. They had been unwilling to leave to old scrapbooks of desultory and disconnected newspaper clippings the telling of the story of his life. Therefore, it has been possible to go among them and to jot down what they have said of Isaiah Williamson. It is well worth while to collect the notes, and put them in authentic permanent form for the sake of the thousand and sixteen boys who at this writing<sup>1</sup> have already felt his influence in their lives.<sup>2</sup> We

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<sup>1</sup> Probably in May, 1907.

<sup>2</sup> The author is referring to Williamson's great philanthropy—the trade school that bears his name. The 1016th apprentice was enrolled on April 17, 1907. At the end of 1927 the number of indentures had reached 2293. In the history of the school "over 10,000 applications have been made for admission to the benefits of Mr. Williamson's philanthropy," stated President Pratt on November 16, 1927.

are moved to do this also for the sake of the tens of thousands more, just beginning to live, who cannot but be influenced for good when they read of this poor country boy. There is inspiration in the story of the Bensalem lad who, in a simple way, amassed a great fortune and used it wisely during his life by sinking wells and safeguarding them, that their life-giving streams might flow on through the ages to come.

Let us go back to old Bensalem, whose queer name breathes benediction and peace. We shall keep on a straight turnpike with our story, which will best be told as simply as possible.

On a late summer afternoon, not so very long ago, two old friends, rather up in years, stopped as they were walking along a road in Bensalem Township. The man of smaller stature, not more than five feet, six inches in height, thin and rather bent of shoulders, paused to point out to his comrade of early years a one-and-a-half story weather-beaten farmhouse. The man whose little kindly hand pointed out the old house said to his friend, as they stood together on Clover

Hill, "Under the roof of that house is where I first opened my eyes." The speaker was Isaiah Vansant Williamson, who, with his old friend, had gone back to see kinsfolk and friends in the region of his birthplace and childhood, and to stand once more near the early home of the beloved mother who long before had journeyed on. One of the richest men in Pennsylvania, one of the most influential in the great city where he lived, began his life in that wooden house. There he lived until he was four years old. In 1807, his parents, Mahlon and Charity Williamson, moved their family to the old homestead in Falls Township, the other side of Bristol, near Trenton, where Isaiah's grandparents had lived.

This century-old farmhouse, about four miles from the village of Fallsington, appears today pretty much as it did when Mahlon and Charity Williamson were rearing a family there. After nearly four score years Isaiah Williamson was neither afraid nor ashamed to go back to Bensalem and Falls, and to take with him those with whom he had been associated in later years. This was because he had



THE OLD HOMESTEAD OF MAHLON AND CHARITY WILLIAMSON  
(THIS IS EVIDENTLY THE HOME IN WHICH ISAIAH V. WILLIAMSON SPENT MOST OF HIS EARLY LIFE, AS MAHLON AND CHARITY WILLIAMSON WERE HIS PARENTS.)



been an honest boy of good conduct, and because he had lived true to his father's and mother's principles and instructions after he had moved away into the city. It was only an afternoon's ride from Philadelphia, and he returned frequently to meet the friends of his youth and early manhood. These old friends stopped to speak to him as he passed along the country roads making his visits. They called him "I. V.," just as they had done in the early days, and they said to each other, as they went along after the greeting, that "I. V." was "just the same—money has not changed him a speck."

How could he be other than the sunny-faced, gentle-mannered, softly-spoken man he had been from the beginning, when his manners, when his gifts came to him as birthday tokens?

He was "*the grand old man*" to the country friends, who knew him through and through. Did he not remember them and call them by their first names, asking for the man who broke his leg or lost his sick horse and had to be helped out of some distressing

trouble? And was it not done without anyone knowing from whom the person in trouble received help? About the only hatred this true, good Quaker had was "publicity." For that matter, everybody said this much of him, but sadly enough the city people did not stop at that, and though he was persistently criticized, the man does not live who ever heard Isaiah Williamson speak ill of anyone.

Did they not all know that city life and money had not spoiled him, though he had gone off early from the Bucks County farm, where he had his first start and entered the village store, and from that ladder, as others have done, climbed up to the city business? In his later days, he became a farmer again—a money farmer; he ploughed for it, planted for it, kept close personal touch on his financial fields of growing crops and from the wise planting and steady watch, reaped great harvests; yet he did not build his life upon it or let the money twist his life into personal aggrandizement, politics or speculation. He never cornered the stock market; he never helped to lock up money, as his vast wealth would have enabled him to do; he never



profited by questionable transactions within the companies of which he was a director, by absorption of other companies, freezing out the unasserting and helpless minorities.

He was a well-born man. Let the young fellow of good ancestry never forget that he starts with what the lack of to many another is a lifelong handicap. It is a great thing for any man to be well-born.

Isaiah Vansant Williamson found in his early years that he had much to be proud of in his ancestry, and doubtless his resolve not to do anything to tarnish the memory of their honorable and useful lives held him firmly to the upright course of life that marks every footstep of his long and busy days.

Because it has been thought and said that the people from whom he sprang were insignificant as well as poor, it is necessary to set forth at some detail what is known of these Williamsons that settled in Bucks County nearly two hundred and fifty years ago. Hard-working they were, indeed, but fairly educated themselves, they educated their children and trained them to the good-living, common in all the Quaker homes of that period, no

matter how humble; and it was a healthy atmosphere for a boy to grow up in that large family of eight children, making a little world of itself in the farmhouse, with its dairy and barns, smokehouse and toolhouse, cattle, and chores for the six boys and two girls to do. The schoolwork, too, had to go on in the wintertime. The long evenings for lessons and talk around roaring fires of wood-logs burning in the great fireplace, near the old clock which Grandfather Peter brought from England, sixty-odd years before, and their father, Mahlon, recounting often, doubtless, the events of those Revolutionary days, when the British came up the Delaware and fired a cannon at their grandfather's house, at Penn Manor<sup>3</sup>; and Isaiah's father was a baby in that old cradle, in yon corner, when a cannon ball struck the doorstep and bounced over the cradle without hitting anything—and there that same cannon ball was lying in their sight, on the strong corner shelf of their home room. That cannon ball is missing today, but the old

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<sup>3</sup> The incident referred to occurred when Peter Williamson was living at Beverly, on the New Jersey side of the Delaware, and not at Penn Manor. An armed barge threw a six-inch shot into the house, which passed just over the head of Mahlon.

clock and the cradle are with Jesse's son, Edward, in his home at Morrisville, Bucks County, Pennsylvania.<sup>4</sup>

A sturdy clean Scotchman was the founder of the Williamson family in America. Dunck Williames, as he spelled his name in the earliest records, arrived in New England, probably in 1660. His name is to be seen on the list of passengers sailing from Taunton, Massachusetts, in 1661, to the Block Island Plantations, afterwards included in Rhode Island. Later, in 1667, with his wife, Wallery, he settled on the Delaware River below what is now Trenton, nearly fifteen years before the advent of William Penn. It was just after the Dutch rulers had been expelled from New Amsterdam. The Delaware Valley had long been a bone of contention between Swedes and Dutch, in which the Dutch got the upper hand.

But many English and Scotch settlers must have already been in the country, because the earliest records at Upland (now

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<sup>4</sup> Edward Williamson died on October 10, 1911. The clock is in possession of a niece, Mrs. H. B. Harper, of Trenton; and the cradle is in the Frank Williamson home, in Lancaster.

Chester) under English jurisdiction (1676) show a number of names of undoubted English and Scotch origin. "Dunck" was a contraction of Duncan, and the "Williames" soon became Williamson. Duncan Williamson must have had some influence with the Court of St. James, for at the time of his arrival he was able to join with eight others in obtaining title to a tract known as Passyunk, and thus became one of the first settlers to get title in the Philadelphia area. The patent was granted by Governor Richard Nichols, in 1667. On July 18, 1676, Governor Sir Edmund Andros granted to Duncan Williamson and Francis Walker four hundred and fifty acres on the lower side of Neshaminy, in the present limits of Bensalem Township.<sup>5</sup> This land extended back from the river. Williamson established a ferry across to New Jersey, which still bears his name. On the Jersey side, at Beverly, some of his descendants settled.

The first Williamson's name is on the list of "Tydable persons under jurisdiction of the court," as belonging to Taokanink (now

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<sup>5</sup> These grants were afterwards confirmed by William Penn.



Ferry, and I shall dispose of the remainder in such manner and at such place as will be most likely not only to annoy the Enemy in their Passage but to give the earliest Information of any attempt of that kind.

“ George Washington.

“ To Hon’ble Thomas Wharton, Junr., Esqr.,  
 “ President of the Council  
 “ of Safety, Philadelphia.”

Now this Duncan Williamson, founder of the family, was not so absorbed in farm and ferry as to forget the important matter of child-training. For, in 1679, he made an agreement by which one Edward Draughton, also a resident of that township, was to teach his children to read the Bible. The fee was to be two hundred guilders, and the limit of time one year.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> John Wanamaker evidently got this information from the records of Upland Court, where we find that Edward Draughton sued Dunck Williames for breach of contract. There was some difference of opinion as to Draughton’s ability as a quick teacher. The court record reads:

“ The Plt demands of this Deft 200 Gilders for teaching this Defts children to Read in one Yeare.

“ The Court haying heard the debates of both parties as alsoe ye attestation of ye witnesses Doe grant judmt agst ye deft for 200 gilders wth ye Costs.

“ Richard Draughton sworne in Court declares that hee was p’sent at ye makeing that ye agreemt was that Edmund draughton should Teach Dunkes children to Read in ye bybell & if hee could doe itt in a yeare or a halfe yeare or a quartr, then he was to haue 200 gilders.”

It is at least evident that the several-times-great-grandfather Duncan not only had an ideal as to child-teaching and child-training, and wanted it realized, but that he was an American pioneer in that field as well as in others and that his idea remained with the successive generations.

William, the eldest of Duncan's children, inherited the greater part of the father's land by will; and dying at the age of forty-two, left it to his widow and several children. His wife was Elizabeth, daughter of Jan Claessen. William's death occurred on Christmas Day, 1721, and he was buried in the cemetery of Gloria Dei Church ("Old Swedes"), Philadelphia. William's son, Peter, was born before there was any record of births. But we know that he married Leah Le Niser on January 19, 1731, and that when he died in 1760 he left his property in Bensalem Township to his elder son, Jacob. The younger son, Peter, who bore his father's name, was born on January 17, 1735, and moved to Falls Township in 1764, when he married Sarah Sotcher, granddaughter of William Penn's steward at Pennsbury. During the Revolutionary War he

lived at Beverly, and among his eight children was Mahlon, the father of Isaiah.

Mahlon Williamson was born on March 15, 1777, and he married Charity Vansant, who brought Dutch and French blood into the Williamson family. Charity's father, Cornelius, married Anne Larzelere, descendant of Jacques La Resaleur. Her grandmother was Charity Van Horn,<sup>8</sup> and her grandfather, Isaiah Vansant, for whom our hero was named Isaiah Vansant Williamson, who was born on February 4, 1803, was, like his father, one of eight children.

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<sup>8</sup> The Van Horn family were almost original settlers of New Amsterdam, deriving their descent from Christian Barendtse, who came from Hoorn Brabant. Charity's father, Peter Van Horn, was a vestryman in St. James P. E. Church at Bristol. The family had been living along Neshaminy Creek for many years before Charity married Isaiah Vansant, in 1732. The father of Isaiah Vansant was married at the First Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, to Rebecca Vandegrift, in 1707.



## II

### THE PREPARATION



HE little eight-sided schoolhouse by the roadside, toward Mahlon Williamson's farm, did not hold Isaiah for long. He soon outgrew it. In keeping with the family tradition for education, his parents made the sacrifice of putting him in the excellent Friends' School at Fallsington, a pay school for more advanced teaching. But before and after school Isaiah was a helper on the farm. He was then about twelve years old and walked daily the eight miles to and from school, lucky enough sometimes to catch a ride on the way. Most likely Peter and John, his brothers, were there also; and the Vansant children, cousins on his mother's side, from another part of the county. There were boys of the Baldison family, too, of whom John, the eldest, was Isaiah's intimate friend. And among the boys and girls of other families, there was one girl in particular, the daughter of Harvey Gillingham, store-

keeper at Fallsington, of whom more will be said further on.

Isaiah's cousins, the Vansant children, would be his daily schoolmates and playmates; they were of good, solid Dutch stock, which was also Isaiah's inheritance on his mother's side. She was descended from Gerrit Vansant, who came to this country in 1651, as he testified in taking the oath of allegiance at New Utrecht, Long Island, in September, 1687. The records of the Dutch Reformed Church at that place note the baptism of several of Gerrit's children. Gerrit and his son, Jacobus, purchased land on Neshaminy Creek, each having about one hundred and fifty acres, the deeds being dated and recorded in December, 1698; and there they finally settled. Charity Vansant, of the fourth generation from Gerrit, was born in Bensalem Township, just at the close of the Revolutionary War, November 16, 1781. She was a woman of sympathetic nature and was Isaiah's confidant, having much influence over his early life.

At the time Isaiah attended the Orthodox



MEETING HOUSE, HICKSITE FRIENDS, FALLSINGTON, PENNA.



THE ORTHODOX MEETING HOUSE AND SCHOOL BUILDING  
IN THE REAR



Friends' School, the Hicksite split had not occurred, and of course the Hicksite meeting house—adjoining the Orthodox meeting house at Fallsington to this day—had not been built. The schoolhouse attached to the original meeting house of the Friends was built about the middle of the eighteenth century.

In the early part of the nineteenth century, about 1815, Jonathan Palmer was the principal teacher of this school, a man said to have been uncommonly well-educated for that day. He was supported partly by the Friends' Meeting, and partly by the farmers who sent their children to be educated.

The sessions of the school were held six days in the week—in the morning from eight to twelve, and in the afternoon from one to five o'clock, except in winter, when they closed an hour earlier. During the eleventh and first months (November and January), the girls were kept at home at work, to make room for the boys at school; in the fourth and fifth months (April and May) the boys were obliged to stay home in order to give the girls a chance; and during the seventh and eighth

months (July and August) there were no school sessions because all the boys and girls were needed in the farm work.

In this school, among other studies, Jonathan Palmer taught English, French, Latin and mathematics—including geometry, trigonometry and surveying.

Of the Baldison boys in the school at this time, John—a year older than Isaiah, and his special comrade—was fond of mathematics, and gave particular attention to surveying; his brothers made a specialty of French. Isaiah, also, had his predilections; while he took the general course right through, his favorite studies seem to have been mathematics in various forms, surveying, and French—the latter being kept up in later years after he went to Philadelphia, where he took private lessons from a good French teacher. Isaiah is spoken of as having been “a bright student” while in the Friends’ School. It may be assumed that his lively and fun-loving spirit would enter into the sports and pastimes and good-natured joking that every wholesome schoolboy shares. But that he was faithful to

his work and was really interested in his studies may be safely inferred not only from his lifelong characteristics, but from the fact that he continued them by taking private lessons from Palmer after leaving school and while he was a clerk.

Presumably three years at the Fallsington School carried our diligent, conscientious lad as far as his teachers could. He was now between fifteen and sixteen years old, and on the question of whether he should become a farmer or not, his parents no doubt had much to say. Any such boy who makes a confidant of his mother, as he did, and who had been brought up as members of the Society of Friends train their children, would not make a decision except with his parents' consent and approval.

The fact that Isaiah's brothers were well grown and able helpers on the farm made it possible for him to choose some other employment. More than that, the brisk, bright, energetic lad, careful, accurate and trustworthy in all his habits, who took the lead in doing the store errands, showed a developing

aptitude for business, though not in an extraordinary manner. He was simply a prompt, painstaking, dependable, industrious fellow with good sense and right principles, with a greater liking for a store than the farm.

Naturally, he thought of the store at Fall-sington, where his family dealt and where he was known. He applied there for a position. The storekeeper, Harvey Gillingham, was willing to take him as an apprentice. In those days, the system of apprenticing was the rule everywhere and, so far as is known, young Williamson became an indentured apprentice for a term of six or seven years.

Every one that knew Williamson intimately, knows that up to his death, he earnestly maintained that the best thing that happened to him when he was young was his apprenticeship to Harvey Gillingham. In those days, the apprentice was obliged to live with his employer, and received beside his board, lodging, and clothes, not more than fifty dollars the first year, with increases of wages each year. Beside the little store in the village of five hundred inhabitants, Gillingham had



a grist mill near the store and later a lumber yard.

These conveniences for the farmers to get grocery and drygoods supplies, and to turn into flour their wheat, and supply building materials, made the Gillingham Store " at the Corners " a centre not only for the village but all the surrounding townships. It supplied everything for the farm and the household, stoves, agricultural implements, hardware, clothing for women, men and boys.

The farmers brought in their poultry, eggs and butter, their pork, potatoes and apples, their wheat and oats, and traded them for harrows and harness, muslin and silk, soap and tobacco, powder and shot.

Gillingham's supplies came from Philadelphia, and thither he hauled the accumulated produce and sold it to the country produce dealers there for cash. Generally the wagons were driven to Morrisville or Bristol, where the miscellaneous cargo was transferred to a sailboat and carried to Philadelphia.

Gillingham's business was considerable, as shown by his books. One winter, for example, nineteen hogsheads of sugar were

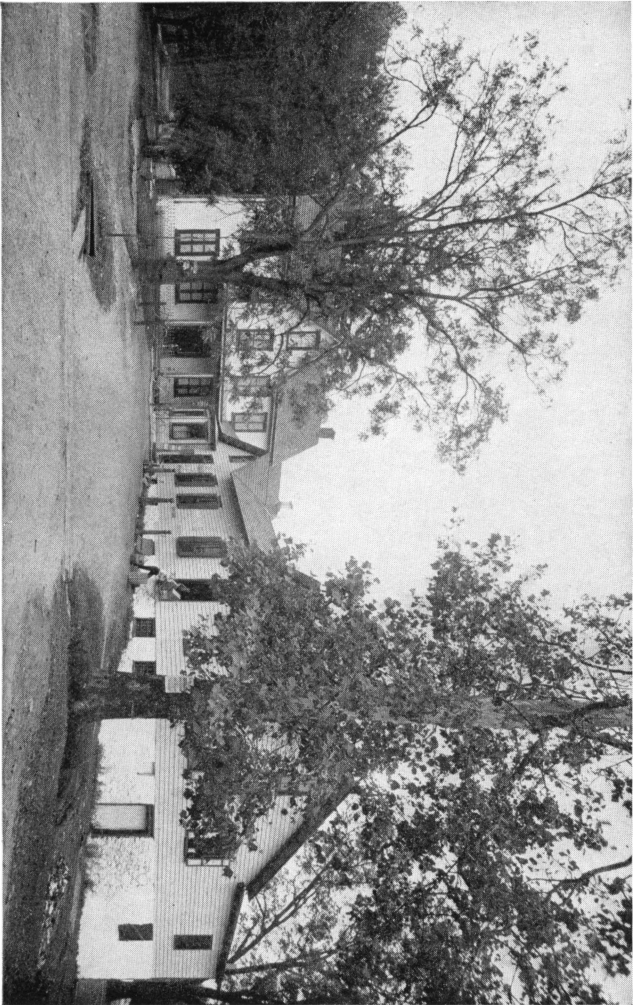
brought up to him from Philadelphia, with other goods in proportion.<sup>1</sup>

Young Williamson threw himself, with heart and soul, into this whirl of country trading life, and everything goes to show that in Mr. Gillingham he had a splendid teacher and that he was an apt, enthusiastic scholar. The boy soon did a man's work, was never tired, never absent, never idle and, of course, earned and received more wages.

At the store he was known not as a dandy, but as a fine, attentive lad. His quick, manly ways pleased the far-seeing, solid Broadbrims. They recognized merit, integrity and industry in him, and their wives found him alert

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<sup>1</sup> A visit to Fallsington in 1927, nearly twenty years after this MS was written, and more than a hundred years after Isaiah Williamson worked there, reveals a very small place, with virtually no business. Fallsington is not far from the thriving cities of Trenton and Bristol. But it is off the railroad and Wheat Sheaf Station on the main line of the Pennsylvania Railroad, which used to serve it, and where trains still stopped in John Wanamaker's day, has now been given up. Fallsington, although only a few hundred yards distant, is not on the Lincoln Highway, and could easily be missed by motorists passing on the Philadelphia-New York road. But in the days of Isaiah Williamson's clerking, roads were few and difficult, and farmers depended on the local store not only as their market for supplies but as their middleman to dispose of what they raised. It is interesting to remember that less than fifteen years before Williamson went to clerk in the Gillingham Store, Fallsington was seriously considered as the site of the national capital, and came very nearly being chosen for that great destiny.



THE GILLINGHAM STORE, FALLSINGTON, PENNA.



and polite as he rushed out to help them down from the farm carriage, to tie their horses, and to carry in their bundles. They appreciated his bright ways and bright words, knowing all the while that there were deeper depths of his nature, reserve forces, aptness and comprehension even in those formative days of young manhood.

It is wonderful how the memory of personality, of courtesy, of willingness to oblige, remains through the years, and comes down from one generation to another. Isaiah Williamson was working in the Gillingham Store eighty years ago, and yet Mrs. Rose Parsons Case, of Morrisville, remembers her mother speaking of Isaiah V. Williamson with admiration. Probably that mother went to the store in her early married days, and yet she talked to her daughter so enthusiastically about the Philadelphia philanthropist in his storekeeping days that Mrs. Case was able recently to quote her mother as having said: "He was a young man of sterling worth, prompt and deft in waiting upon customers, respectful and polite to all, an admirable clerk, as much in-

terested in the business pertaining to the store as was Mr. Gillingham, the proprietor.”

The lessons of Quaker thrift and industry, of conservatism and economy, which Isaiah had been taught at home by his wise and cautious parents, became advancing studies in those seven memorable years spent in Gillingham's store and home. He would hitch up a wagon and drive around the country to pick up all sorts of country produce. In this way, he learned how to make a good trade. Twice a year the stock of the store had to be replenished in Philadelphia, and he was occasionally sent there to make purchases to replace goods sold out.

Isaiah's fairness, good temper, straightforwardness and absolute trustworthiness, and withal an inherited modesty, made him popular and a general favorite with every one coming into contact with him. Recognized by Mr. Gillingham and his customers to be important and useful, young Williamson never assumed any sense of it and was the same unconceited chap that he was the first day he came into the store.

He spent his Sundays with his parents, and

with them and his brothers and sisters attended the Friends' Meeting. The years sped on happily and prosperously, as the young fellow grew in wisdom and ability for business life.

Living in Mr. Gillingham's family, he was regarded almost as a son and the brother of the Gillingham children. But for the daughter, who was a schoolmate of earlier years, there came gradually into Williamson's heart a deeper affection than brotherly friendship. It is not now known how long they had loved each other, what recognition of their affection there may have been on the part of their families, or even whether there was an engagement to marry. Mary died of consumption while yet a young woman. Isaiah's life was powerfully affected by the loss of his companion. He became restless, troubled, and anxious for a change of scene. This sorrow was always regarded at Fallsington as the chief reason of his going to Philadelphia when he had completed his apprenticeship.

Having always lived in and near Fallsington, knowing everybody and by everybody known, it was not without a struggle that the young fellow turned away to seek his fortune

in Philadelphia, which even then was a large city. His few trips for duplicating purchases of Gillingham, who did his own buying, had not left much opportunity for his clerk to become known. Williamson entered the city without a friend save his cousin, Peter Williamson, living on Pine Street, between Eighth and Ninth, opposite the Pennsylvania Hospital.

From his boyhood, he was never much of a talker, but he did a lot of thinking; and seeing that he had quarried everything of knowledge and experience that he could get at the Four Corners store, the only widening avenue of progress open to him was the road to the city, and thither he must go and find his way for himself. The law of growth in the very ground under his feet, as he walked over the fields around his home, was working in the young man's soul. He could not sit down and fold his hands, and let it die out, nor could he stifle it by allowing the thorns and thistles of procrastination and cowardice to spring up to delay him, in spite of efforts of kindly friends advising to the contrary.

From childhood his mother and father



taught him to be saving of everything, of clothes and shoes, as well as of the small sums of money that he earned as a boy and that they gave him from time to time.

It was under the home roof that he learned how to be careful in his expenditures, and as a little boy at home as well as a bigger boy apprenticed in a store, that he taught himself how to save. The experience and lessons of these early years were often referred to when he was a prosperous man. He used to say that before spending money it was worth while for any one to think seriously of the lot of things he could do without.

Little by little the savings of childhood, together with what was laid aside of the earnings of the seven years' apprenticeship, amounted to two thousand dollars. This is what he had to carry to the city to build his future with. It was not much money. In fact, it was less than a dollar a day for the seven years of clerking. But it included all the earlier savings. Two thousand dollars! The cornerstone of the future millionaire's life. One would say that this capital was necessary in order to accomplish what Isaiah William-

son accomplished. But the face value of the bank bills and gold was by no means the principal part of the capital gathered together for the investment in his future in the city. Isaiah had:

A good birthright in the family name.

The good name he had earned for himself as a school boy.

A fairly good education.

A well-earned reputation during the fulfillment of his apprenticeship.

Honesty, truthfulness, industry, energy, and good habits, of which the people of Fallington approved and to which they could bear witness.

A training in storekeeping.

The knowledge that he could earn money and save it if he wanted to.

These seven qualities far outweighed his savings that were to be added to his qualifications as a city business man. Had he lacked any one of these assets of character and experience, and had he disposed of ten times as much money, his equipment would have been far less likely to bring him success. This is only mildly stating the facts.

### III

#### EARLY YEARS IN PHILADELPHIA



THE year before Isaiah Williamson went to the city to stay, a quaint little volume was published, entitled "Philadelphia in 1824," whose title page proclaimed it to be "a complete guide to strangers." This book gave the population of the city proper as one hundred and twenty-one thousand, and stated that "the built up parts" stretched along the Delaware River three or four miles, and backed up toward the Schuylkill River to the extent of only about a mile, covered with unbroken buildings on both sides of the street. This central region had as its principal thoroughfare High Street, now Market Street, and was bounded by Callowhill Street on the north, and Lombard Street on the south. East and south of Independence Hall was the finest residential section. Center Square, now covered by the City Hall, was practically open country. The business center was only

two or three blocks back from the Delaware, north and south of High Street.

It was on Second Street, near Chestnut, that Williamson secured a position as salesman in a store that dealt in much the same class of commodities as those to which he had been accustomed in the country store at Fallsington. Doubtless he had a reference from Gillingham, who probably recommended him to the owner of this particular store. It is known that the Fallsington people kept up their interest in the youth who had gone to Philadelphia, and bought from him when they came to the city. Some often ordered goods from him by mail.

Within a year it came to his knowledge that the owner of a small drygoods store, located on Second Street, above Pine, wanted to sell his stock and fixtures. Isaiah had carefully kept his money and had added a little to it. He was in a position to start in business for himself, and the idea interested him. He went to his cousin, Peter Williamson, a druggist, and a level-headed man, for advice. The cousin told him to buy the store. But Isaiah was already cautious of his money, and he

thought it best to go home and talk to his father about it. The father's advice Isaiah had always taken, and he knew it to be prudent and wise.

Mahlon Williamson had such confidence in the integrity, good sense, and ability of his son that he not only approved of the venture, but sold some cattle that he might supplement his son's meagre capital. He loaned Isaiah several hundred dollars to enable him to increase the stock of goods. This adventure, entered into when he was twenty-four, was the starting point of the career of Isaiah V. Williamson as a Philadelphia merchant.

From the very beginning he had considerable success. The next year, 1827, he took William Barton into partnership, and they moved their drygoods business to a larger store, at the corner of Second Street and Coombe's Alley. They appear to have attempted to go also into the wholesale business, as a commission house, in addition to their retail business. But the partners proved to be of unequal ability, and the partnership was dissolved within a year. Isaiah was disappointed, and was faced with the problem of

liquidating the business or buying out Barton's interest. Once more he went home to consult his father, who raised the money to enable his son to become the sole owner. It was not long before the young man's guiding principle of not spending just because he was earning made it possible for him to return the borrowed money.

A little later Williamson was attracted by the location and reputation of the business of John S. Newlin, who had let it be known that he wanted to retire. Williamson thought so much of the opportunity that he sold his own business with the idea of buying Newlin's. But before doing so, with his usual caution, he spent a year or more in the store as a clerk under Newlin's tutelage, desiring to learn everything about the business before risking all his capital in pitting a country experience against city methods. When he felt that he knew the details of the business, Williamson made a deal with Newlin, who then retired. Williamson took hold with new ambition and confidence.

One of the clerks was a Penn Manor boy, H. Nelson Burroughs, who had had business

experience similar to Isaiah's in a large country store at Taylorsville. The young men were congenial in tastes and training. Both had been accustomed to the practice of rigid economy in the country stores from which they came, and where they had learned also habits of hard and diversified work. They ran the city business with the same frugality and energy and adaptability. Many a time Williamson might have been heard to say something like this:

“Nelson, get out the wheelbarrow, and we'll bring over those goods I bought at auction.”

If they could save cartage, so much the better. What work they could do themselves they did. They followed the principle of watching every penny. But rigid economy and close attention to the details of the business did not blind them to the bigger things. They were always reaching out, dreaming dreams and making them come true. Burroughs soon developed a remarkable capacity as a salesman, and he is said to have been one of the first in Philadelphia, if not the pioneer, to go out and solicit business for a wholesale

house. He was particularly successful with the Southern merchants, who at that time patronized Philadelphia more than any other Northern city. He used to go to see them at their hotels, won their confidence, entered into their social life, and thus obtained a large share of their trade. It is said that he sometimes sold goods to the amount of three hundred thousand dollars in a year—a phenomenal showing for a young salesman in those days.

It is not surprising, therefore, that after some time Burroughs was unwilling to work any longer on salary. He asked to be admitted to partnership. As Burroughs was too valuable a man to let a rival concern secure, Williamson acquiesced. Under the firm name of Williamson and Burroughs, formed in 1834, the business grew and prospered rapidly. Its sales were larger than those of any drygoods house in the city, and there were proportionately larger profits. Both men looked out with clear eyes over the city for opportunities to invest their earnings. Burroughs became one of the early presidents of the Commonwealth National Bank. Williamson soon began to



impress his personality and influence upon the financial life of the city.

It is interesting to consider the conditions that existed in Philadelphia during the decade in which Isaiah Williamson rose to the position of the city's foremost drygoods merchant, and to speak of other men with whom he began to come into contact in the business life of the city.

Isaiah Williamson was already well on the way to outstanding success in the city of his choice before railroads connected it with New York and Baltimore, and before the new form of transportation began to bring the west into contact with the Atlantic seaboard. The mails, as well as passengers and good, went by steamboat, stage coach and wagon. The revolution in the economic life of the nation through steampower applied to transportation on land and sea was just ahead.

Philadelphia was still lighted by oil lamps—some sixteen hundred under the care of night guards. Gas lighting came in 1835, the year after Williamson and Burroughs formed their partnership. But Philadelphia, compared with other cities, was a metropolis, and

its public works and institutions, its homes and churches, and high degree of culture were things to boast of. The fine water system, with the great reservoir at Fairmount on the Schuylkill, had been completed. The city fire plugs gave sufficient pressure to reach the tops of the highest buildings, and the fire-fighting volunteer hose companies did efficient work.

Eleven daily newspapers kept the city posted. Of the meeting houses and churches, there were nearly a hundred in 1825, representing the Catholics and the various Protestant denominations—Presbyterians, Methodists and Episcopalians were most numerous, in the order named. Those were the days when chains were stretched across the streets in front of the churches during Sunday services. The charitable institutions included the notable and splendidly conducted Pennsylvania Hospital; three dispensaries affording aid to the poor in their homes; two almshouses; several asylums for orphans, women, the deaf and the dumb, and lunatics; numerous humane and soup societies, benevolent orders had lodges, and other helpful organizations. The Franklin Fund provided loans to assist “young, un-

married artificers" who had served their apprenticeship.

In the Philadelphia and the Mercantile libraries, the newcomer could find attractions, as well as in the collections of the Philosophical Society, the Philadelphia Museum, the Academy of Natural Sciences, and the Academy of the Fine Arts. At the fore stood the University of Pennsylvania, the principal building then being situated on Ninth Street, where the Post Office now stands. Among the scientific organizations were the College of Physicians and the Philadelphia Medical Society, and the new Franklin Institute, just organized in 1824—to bring together exhibitions of the products of American workshops.

The theatres numbered five. Two of them were temporary summer theatres at Tivoli and Vauxhall Gardens near Centre Square. The old Chestnut Street Theatre was then one of the architectural features of the city. The editor of the "Guide to Philadelphia in 1824" remarks in this connection: "Such are the dramatic entertainments in Philadelphia. If they are not as numerous as in some other

cities, it may be attributed perhaps to the general disposition of the inhabitants inclining them to more sober and scientific amusements."

But Isaiah Williamson, on coming to Philadelphia, doubtless found the statistics regarding the city's wealth, commercial enterprises, and business outlook of chief attraction. The city's capital in 1823 was estimated at \$158,000,000, invested in Government and bank stocks, and insurance companies; in bridges, canals and roads; in factories, merchandise and shipping; in personal and real estate.

He found an efficient Chamber of Commerce, recommending fixed rates of commission on all forms of domestic and foreign business; and the Custom House in its fine new building on Second Street, below Dock. He found a flourishing export and import trade, the exports amounting annually to about \$10,000,000, and the imports to \$14,000,000. And he perceived that Philadelphia was even then distinguished as a manufacturing city, its cotton factories being especially notable, using two or three thousand looms and annually

producing cotton cloth worth \$2,000,000, or more.

Three packet lines to Liverpool were talked of, in order that the business of importing for Philadelphia merchants, which for a time had fallen into New York hands, could be restored to the city. As to internal trade, he learned that a surprising amount of business was being done by wagons, especially westward throughout the State. A single house in Philadelphia loaded two hundred for Pittsburgh in one year, with an average weight of two tons.

Williamson became interested, also, in the two canals then in the process of building, the Chesapeake and Delaware, and the Union; in the stupendous work of the Schuylkill Navigation Company by which navigation had just been opened the whole way from Philadelphia to Reading and the coal mines; and especially in that organization of a couple of years before, the Lehigh Coal and Navigation Company, having the purpose "to bring to market the valuable stone coal which abounds in a mountain situated on the margin of the Lehigh, about forty-six miles above the con-

fluence." The anthracite coal business was then in its infancy. With his quick, nervous temperament, he clearly comprehended the possibilities of the future development of the city as a manufacturing and mercantile center. He was constantly thinking of its future, of which he was always as enthusiastic as his nature would permit.

At that time there were also many young men who, like Isaiah Williamson, were at the beginning of business careers that later gave them prominence. There was the shrewd and diligent John Grigg, whose small book business later developed into the large affairs of Grigg, Elliott & Co., and finally into the publishing house of J. B. Lippincott Company. Joseph H. Seal, a farmer's boy (whose experiences paralleled Williamson's), had then begun in a small way as a drygoods merchant; he made his fortune in a few years, and retired in 1838, leaving a large part of his money in commercial enterprises as a special partner, which was the good practice of sixty years ago.

He came into contact with the active young men of this time, such as John Welsh, Joseph

R. Evans, and Jonathan Fell, and their sons; Thomas Ridgway and his partner, John Livezey; Alexander Henry, his son, and his nephew of the same name; Robert Waln and his successors; the Becks, the Willings; the Latimers; Jonathan Leedom; Eyre and Massey, whose many ships went all over the world; and Thomas P. Cope, then in the prime of life, whose regular packet lines to Liverpool, started in 1821, preceded all other lines, all of whom gave him a certain inspiration as these and others were all in the same boat with himself, making their fortunes.

Henry Budd, James Steele, Henry Sloan, and Alexander J. Derbyshire were clerks at that time in various concerns. Isaac R. Davis, also, was a clerk with H. C. Corbit, before the drygoods firm of Corbit, Davis & Co., had been formed. The sons of Matthew Carey, pioneer publisher, were already fairly started in the publishing and general bookselling business, in the two firms of Carey & Lea and Carey & Hart. George W. Carpenter, at twenty-three, was still an assistant to Charles Marshall in the drug business, and not till three years later began the independent career

that sent his medicines all over the land. David Freed, another country boy, had just started in for himself in the retail flour trade. Charles Oakford, whose hat manufacturing later occupied many "palatial stores," was not done learning his trade, and not until two years later did he start out with his first order of four hats taken in "a little cubby hole" on Lombard Street. Edmund A. Souder, to whom belongs the credit of beginning the coasting trade to Maine and beyond, was still a young clerk in a commission house. Charles S. Boker—who in later years as president of the Girard Bank rescued it from its difficulties—had at that time scarcely more than made a start in the business of hats and shoes. The young Samuel Bispham had in a few years pushed the wagon trade of Alter & Bispham all over the State, and was laying the foundation for the future strength of Samuel Bispham & Sons. Six years older than Williamson, Benjamin W. Richards—son of a wealthy father, and a Princeton honor man—had married a daughter of Joshua Lippincott, and in 1825, the firm of Lippincott & Richards, commission merchants, was one of the largest in the



city. Five years later Richards was Mayor, and through life one of Philadelphia's prominent and best men.

These are a few of the young men who were Isaiah's contemporaries and neighbors in business when he came to Philadelphia, and all of whom became more or less notable in after years through their industry, fair dealing and indomitable pluck. Contact with them gave him a certain inspiration, as they were all in the same boat with himself, making their fortunes.

In this thriving, bustling city Isaiah Williamson was matching a country boy's experience against city methods. He found that he had much to learn before he could hope to attain a large success. There were many strong men to compete with among Philadelphia's merchants, and there were many long and well-established houses. Their signs were numerous on Front, Water, Dock, Second, Third, and High Streets.

But are not the country boys, ever anew coming into the cities, the salvation of the cities? God did not build cities. He made trees and stored iron and stone and coal and

clay in the earth. To men he left the task of finding and using these things. It was theirs to mine and forge and dig and build brick walls for homes and businesses. The majority of men that have made outstanding records in the cities were born among the trees and fields.

To Isaiah Williamson the city was an open race course for country boys. He was not the only one who came with the inexperience of youth and filled with great ambition. He determined to enter the race and make a fair struggle to win. Win he did, amid great applause from his fellow runners of those early days, who praised his name and gave him full credit at the time of his voluntary retirement from the activities of Market Street.

Nature has given to almost every man a dowry of latent energy that flames up to the surprise of the man himself when he needs it most.

Young Williamson came to Philadelphia, saying to himself, "I must and will conquer circumstances." All his strength rose and asserted itself when his will power became enlisted in his work.

In 1837 the firm of Williamson & Burroughs was dissolved. Isaiah retired, and his youngest brother, Mahlon, became the active Williamson of the firm. It was reorganized under the name of Williamson, Burroughs & Clark. Isaiah left money in the firm as a special partner.

This was the end of Isaiah V. Williamson's active participation in the life of Philadelphia as a drygoods merchant. He felt that he had made a comfortable fortune in less than twelve years, and in those times the possession of one hundred thousand dollars was considered a large fortune. For a man still in his thirties to have made in a little over a decade a sum like this by straight business dealing—no speculation—was a remarkable feat. At the time of his retirement he had the reputation of being one of the richest young merchants in Philadelphia, and he was much praised because his money was the result of his own effort.

It was not uncommon in the past for business men to fix an age or the amassing of a certain sum of money as the time of retiring from business. In our own time there are men

who have won fortunes, and who have withdrawn from active business, and who have made to education and charities the best of all gifts, the gift of their time and talents to college and church work, notably in Philadelphia, Charles Custis Harrison and the late George C. Thomas, and in New York, Morris K. Jesup.

To Isaiah Williamson, who was not constitutionally strong, and who was a bachelor with simple tastes, one hundred thousand dollars, in the thirties, was a mountain of money far in excess of his personal needs. His decision to retire in favor of his younger brother was characteristic of the man. He always knew when to stop. He was a man of few words, good at listening but quick to stop when through speaking, or when he had made his bargain or concluded his investment. The subsequent events of his life prove that he knew when to stop giving all his time and attention to a drygoods business on Market Street.

It must also be borne in mind that the country Quaker loved quiet and needed much rest. He was fond of books. The extremely

modest man had attained a far greater degree of culture than he was generally credited with. He kept up the study of French under a private tutor for some time after coming to Philadelphia. He read it easily, and if he did not speak fluently, it was because there was none with whom to talk. A portion of his books still remains in the possession of one of his nephews, and there is eloquent testimony to Williamson's intellectual tastes in glancing along the shelves.

## IV

### SEEING THE WORLD



**A**FTER Isaiah Williamson withdrew from Williamson & Burroughs, in 1837, he began to travel in his own country and abroad. While he enjoyed the novelty of foreign lands, his tremendous belief in the great development of his native land led him far afield in the United States, seeking first-hand opportunities before investing his fortune.

The hardships of travel did not deter him—and there were hardships in those early days of a kind we do not dream of. Where the railroads went he followed them to the railheads. But much of his travel had to be in a stage coach or on a river steamer. Everywhere he studied industrial developments. He knew all of his own state, in a thorough way that few people even today, when travel is so easy, know Pennsylvania. His favorite trips were to the iron, coal and timber lands, where he gathered information that stood him

in good stead in after years. Pittsburgh had a lifelong fascination for him. Up to his death he watched the progress of the steel industry.

These travels, profitable to the shrewd investor that he was from a business standpoint, broadened his ideas and outlook, and gave him an appetite for travel that led to the European trip he had long looked forward to. Leaving in May, 1841, on the *Great Western*, whose voyage was 13 days, 9 hours to Clifton.

From a well-written diary of his travels, kept by Williamson, probably only for his own eyes to refresh his memory in after years, much is discovered of the man himself, his sorrow in leaving friends, his enjoyment of his companions making the same "Grand Tour," his sympathetic nature, humor, and tireless energy to make the most of time and opportunity, his farseeing shrewdness in observations recorded of people, places and customs. The intensely human side of him is revealed in contradistinction to "the money bag man" that some people took him for. There are a hundred and thirty-four pages of twenty-four lines and about three hundred

words on a page, all written with neatness in a small, round hand, clear as print, the i's being dotted and the t's crossed with punctilious care.

Apparently he was out to see everything that was to be seen. If he reached a city in the late afternoon, he must start right at sight-seeing that very evening. Naturally, he gives larger space to the prolonged sight-seeing in such cities as London, Paris, Berlin, Vienna, St. Petersburg, Moscow, Edinburgh and Dublin. Everywhere he visited cathedrals, art galleries, theatres, business houses, factories, wharves, charitable institutions; and expressed himself with sympathetic shrewdness about what he saw. He had his positive opinions and comparisons as to the good, bad and indifferent in art, music, oratory and ceremonial. His appreciative comments on the great men of history, literature and art, as well as on living personages he saw, were brief and passing. But they were enough to show that he was not only well informed but often held a point of view that was peculiarly his own. He did not just echo the words of the guide, the guide book, or the work he was reading. As a



traveller he was individualistic. And he felt. His heart responded to the great things of art and nature—to the grandeur of cathedral and mountain, to the beauty of stained glass or velvety lawn and waving meadow, to the colors and figures of tapestry, and to the light and shade of encastled river and lake. Many things that he saw were not mentioned in the guide book.

He was sympathetic, too, to human conditions, pitiful toward poverty and sorrow; and humorously cynical of shams. He knew, also, when he was paying moderate prices and when he was being overcharged.

Transoceanic steamers in 1841 landed their passengers at Clifton, near Bristol. From there Williamson went to London, with stops at Bath and Reading. Before leaving England he seems to have planned his Continental tour with his usual care for detail. Railroads were still few. As in the United States one had to travel between many points by river steamer and stage. From London he went to Brighton, Portsmouth, and the Isle of Wight. The Channel steamer took him up the Seine to Rouen. After a stay in Paris and Lyons, he

entered Switzerland at Geneva, first having stopped at Chamonix. A steamer took him along Lac Léman to Vevey. He circled around to Basel, via Freiburg. There he started the journey down the Rhine, with a side trip to Frankfort. He stopped at Mainz, Coblentz, Cologne and Dusseldorf. He left the Rhine at Gorcum to go to Amsterdam by coach, passing through Utrecht. In Holland he saw also Haarlem, Leyden, the Hague, and Rotterdam; and in Belgium, Antwerp, Brussels, and Liége.

Then began at Aix La Chapelle the journey across Europe that few in those days had the time, money, energy, and will to make. The itinerary was: Bremen, Hamburg, Leipzig, Dresden, Magdeburg, to Hamburg again by steamer, to Lubeck by diligence, and by water to Travemunde, where he boarded the Baltic Sea steamer for the four-day trip to St. Petersburg. After ten days in the capital of Russia, he was not dismayed to travel by diligence to Moscow and back. Leaving Russia by the Baltic Sea route to Hamburg, he crossed the North Sea back to London.

What he had seen of Continental culture

and civilization made him feel that he ought to study at first-hand the culture and civilization of the land from which his ancestors had come and which was akin to that of his native land. Philadelphians, especially Quakers, feel more at home in England than anywhere else abroad. The diary records visits to Cambridge, Sheffield, Leeds, York, Ripon, Newcastle, Berwick, Kelso, Sidbury, and Melrose Abbey, on the way to Edinburgh. He went from Edinburgh to Dundee on a small steamer; thence to Sterling, Callander, the Trossachs, Dumbarton, and Glasgow. There he took a steamer to Belfast, went north to the Giant's Causeway, and then to Dublin. After Ireland, Wales. He crossed from Kingston to Holyhead; thence to Bangor, Chester, and Liverpool. Once more in England he visited Birmingham, Warwick, and Stratford-on-Avon. The diary ends abruptly with an account of Lord Mayor's day after his return to London in November.

These details are given to show that it was not an idling pleasure excursion that Isaiah Williamson undertook in those days of limited conveniences for rapid travel. He

traversed England, Ireland, Scotland, France, Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, Russia; visited the great art galleries of the principal cities and studied the old masters of painting and sculpture; also the great Universities of Cambridge, Edinboro and Glasgow, as well as the hospitals and schools.

So did this country lad, of Fallsington village, choose to do with his first free time, when he spent, perhaps, the largest amount of money that he ever spent for himself in all of his life.

## V

### AT THE CROSS-ROADS



His return to his native land set him down at the "Four Corners" again, not in old Bucks County, but in Philadelphia, where he faced the real cross-roads of his life in determining his future course.

He was out of business, still in his young manhood, unmarried and with all his time to do as he pleased. He was a handsome, well-dressed man in those days, slender, erect and alert, rather less than medium height, with dark hair, expressive and extremely bright eyes, smooth face and firm mouth, and with a rare touch of gentleness.

As a rich, good-looking, young bachelor, only forty years old, with education and refinement, he might have been a social lion had he so chosen. He was fond of society, enjoyed the company of good women and clever men, liked horses and dogs, as his diary and some old letters prove.

At this period of his life, nothing was farther from his thought and purpose than to become in any sense a recluse; neither was he of the kind who think that they have done the world a service in being born into it and that it ought to find for him for the rest of his days, some highly honorable and remunerative position, without hard work or great responsibility.

It may be fairly said, for reasons that follow, that his determination had been finally to remain a bachelor. Having lost his first choice of a country girl, by death, when he came to live in the city he endeavored to win as a wife a most worthy woman, to whom he paid court and to whom he proposed marriage. But he was refused as too poor and with a business too uncertain. It is stated that in after years, when better off, he renewed his proposal to the same person and was again refused for being too rich!

Had he desired to return to the drygoods business he established, doubtless every door would have opened to him. With the reputation that he had made and the good judgment he possessed, he could with his means

have allied himself with almost any of the large financial or business concerns of the city.

Having voluntarily retired from business, because he was not ambitious to go farther either for fame or riches, when he returned to America he was for a short time at a stand-still as to what his future life was to be.

He is known to have entertained the idea of going back to Europe to continue his studies of the great cities and peoples which he had not visited. The early forties were the most perplexing period of his life. One thing that is said to have brought him home from abroad was the notice that had been drawn to coal lands and their advancement in values. He had large investments in certain important coal properties.

The strenuous and thorough investigations he had made prior to investing his capital proved the excellence of his judgment, because all his investments greatly enhanced in value. The careful survey he had to make of his properties and the examinations of other investments offered to him, to take up his income uninvested, deferred his return to Europe until he lost his enthusiasm for it.

But much more than this, other influences were silently and strongly working upon his mind and heart, by which he was unconsciously being led to a new view of his life and to enter upon a new career.

The world grew larger and finer to him as he wandered through the British Museum and the National Gallery of London. The great universities were to him the living representatives of the wise and good whose benefactions had made possible these great seats of learning. He was deeply stirred by the touch he had with the forces working for the world's uplift in science, art and general education.

While he walked among the treasures of the old past, he saw signs of a new life as he watched the artists at their work and the teachers in their college classrooms. He wandered about the streets and shops, drinking in the vitality of an advancing civilization. The effect upon him was depressing. He had cut the connection with the living forces and activities of his time. He had cast himself upon an island in the midst of a great sea and chosen to be a Robinson Crusoe. He could



not rid himself of the thought that he was a lone man, without an object in life.

In London he heard much of what Earl Shaftesbury, a noble Lord, with leisure and means, was doing for the poor of London. In Bristol, he saw the large orphan houses built by George Mueller. Wherever he went, he saw the endowed schools and hospitals, built by the gifts of retired merchants, bankers, and generous women, like Lady Burdett Coutts.

The man most talked about in Philadelphia, when Isaiah Williamson first came to town, was Stephen Girard—the merchant and mariner, who stood first on the roll of its eminent citizens. Girard's vast wealth and business successes were constantly referred to with wonder and praise. He had begun in poverty, peddled oranges on the streets of Philadelphia, and advanced slowly, step by step, to the first place in its business world.

His patriotic support of the Government during the War of 1812 and his many benevolences were constantly on the public tongue. People liked to talk about everything Girard did. His peculiar walk, old gig, his

one eye and his queue, his odd coat and characteristic speech, always enlisted the young countryman's interest and admiration. He thought often of the fact that Stephen Girard had not accomplished large financial results until he was past forty. For ten years, he listened to all that was said of Girard, and during that ten years, until Girard died in 1831, he watched him as a young beginner always watches the older business leaders of their time. Girard's life and work, unconsciously at first but admittedly afterward, greatly influenced young Williamson's course of life. His conscience now was keenly alive to what Girard had done—after he was forty—and to the fact that he himself had stopped before he was forty doing anything but what he pleased. That he was forty now and might possibly do his best work, were he willing, haunted him as though he heard voices, like Jeanne d'Arc, bidding him to not throw away his best years.

He had what the Quakers call "a concern."

As in all his extremities, for good counsel he sought the advice of his cousin, Peter Wil-

Williamson, whose house he often called his home. Peter Williamson was an excellent citizen. He was one of the founders of the Southern Dispensary, the Southwark Soup Society; also of the College of Pharmacy, of which he was a trustee, having been a successful druggist for many years. He was one of the originators and directors of the Western Saving Fund and a prominent Mason, filling the chair of the Right Worshipful Grand Master and Right Worshipful Grand Treasurer of the Grand Lodge, F. & A. M., of the State of Pennsylvania, which antedates all the other Grand Lodges of the United States. Peter Williamson was a broad-minded, wise counsellor, a man of affairs, and a helper of his fellowmen, giving strong support, service and aid to all public and private charities. His strength of character, highmindedness, unselfishness, and public influence, led to his judgment being sought after by his fellow citizens.

At this period of Isaiah Williamson's life he could not have had a better adviser than this older cousin.

The turning point of his career had come.

In the long and frequent interviews, the whole ground of Isaiah Williamson's position was gone over :

1. He had gone out of business because he had reached the goal he aimed for, and had abundant money for his own needs.

2. He had none of kin dependent upon him and there were none of his relations that could not and were not taking care of themselves.

3. His investments were growing well and he would have a surplus to divide among them, if he wished, from the advanced values, accumulating dividends and savings through small living expenses.

4. He desired to travel, enjoy the old world as well as the new, and cultivate his mind beyond what was possible when he was younger.

Peter Williamson, with great tact, drew out information touching the investments that Isaiah had made. Developments going on were likely to lead to a sudden rise in value of coal properties and coal railroads. Isaiah's investments in this field, therefore, might produce a million of dollars.

All things pointed plainly to a new side of Isaiah Williamson's brain. He was more than a merchant, he was also a financier, like Marshall Field, who came along later on the same path.

It was a surprise to both Peter and Isaiah that this unlooked-for development of character and power had come. Other investors were just as diligent, cautious, painstaking, in study of enterprises. But results proved that the keen perceptions and soundness of judgment possessed by Isaiah Williamson were most uncommon and amounted to a talent which, hitherto, had lain dormant.

Therefore, this previously unknown something in the quality of his mind must now be taken into account and worked just the same as the lead or silver veins that might come to light on the owner's farm.

The calm, deliberate discussions of these two kinsfolk slowly settled down to a summing up somewhat like this:

Isaiah was in good health, with a probability of years to give to making money for himself.

He had found out that he could not only

amass wealth, but also do what many others could not do. He could organize himself to control the saving of it. Not needing it for himself, he had no right to wrap his talent in a napkin but turn it over and over to the utmost for others needing to be helped.

The example of Stephen Girard had taken deep root in Isaiah Williamson's soul, and he was much drawn towards some such work for his own country, and similar to what was going on in and about London, where he had recently been.

Slowly, steadily but surely, Williamson, under a deep sense of his accountability for talents and wealth, came to the renunciation of his arranged plans. He resolved to use all his ability, whatever it was, and the gains thereof, for the benefit of his fellowmen.

## VI

### PHILANTHROPY HIS REAL BUSINESS



FROM this time on, he regarded his life and its powers as a trust to be enlarged, controlled and administered diligently, savingly, and solely for others. From his retirement for communion with his own soul and with his Maker, he came out into the open of a new life and surrendered himself wholly to the duty before him as he saw it. He knew the mighty energy of money, and he would gather and rightly direct it. But it went hard with him that day, to let go the dream of leisure and hope of travel and study, to go back again to a desk and an office, to the labor he had laid aside as he thought forever, when he had no personal wants to serve. No one but himself knew that in the Court of Conscience, he was passing upon himself a life sentence.

He had a definite purpose now, and he set himself to daily work to carry it out in the most practical way. Unflinching in his de-

termination and without vagueness or flabbiness, he concentrated and consecrated himself to his self-chosen task. It was noticeable to his old friends that a new light was in his eyes. He practically withdrew himself from the world at large and took long walks of inquiry into existing benevolences, with a view of helping them rather than multiplying organizations. Just as he had done on Market Street, when in business, in examining into the character, capacity and actualities of business firms that sought to buy goods of his firm on credit, so did he go into the objects of charitable and other institutions, the quality of work, their methods of management, and the accuracy of their reports and financial statements.

He would put his finger on the weaknesses and waste of organizations that directors and trustees seemed to be ignorant of, and he made it a rule to leave those which he decided were sentimentally impractical so severely unhelped as to call down upon him the condemnation of some of his friends, who did not know the facts about their institutions as well as he knew them. For hours he would sit



silent and alone with a small pencil in hand, and look off at some distant object while he thought out his problems.

Always economical in his habits, his expenses became smaller. He lived in the simplest way, dressing more plainly and dispensing with everything he could do without.

At this very time, he was giving away secretly thousands and tens of thousands of dollars, covering up his hand so that only two or three persons would know the source of the gifts.

During this time and through the fifties, his wealth grew much more rapidly than he could wisely distribute it. He never speculated. He paid in full for what he bought and put it in his boxes to keep until the right time to sell. First of all, he made himself thoroughly familiar with all the corporations, their men and methods of management, and the possibilities of advancing values. The hard-headed, thorough business man that he had always been, held him off from being drawn into operations through friendship or sentiment.

He dealt not in vague expectations or by

promising prospectuses but in the plain actual facts.

Being known to have cash always on hand, he was sought for to join the best things being organized, and almost as constantly the doubtful schemes that wanted the use of his name to give respectability to proposed operations.

On occasions when invited into investments and directorates upon a special and lower basis than other people, he indignantly declined, declaring that to do so would dishonor him in his own sight and prevent him from looking his friends in the face.

He made the most exhaustive inquiries into the situation of everything he thought of investing in, and after he put his money into any undertaking, he kept close watch on its operations and its operators to the extent, sometimes, of becoming a member of its board and serving as a committee man, in order to give personal attention to make the returns profitable to himself and other stockholders. He made much money from the study of and investment in city real estate, in which, by his foresight, he went ahead of the changes and revolutions ever going on in city localities,

buying properties sure to advance and holding them for a time. His practice with all his investments was to sell at a fair profit and not to wait to get all the advance, but let other people have the chance for a part of it, taking the money and profit he had made, and reinvesting again in another locality to repeat the turnover in the same way.

There was no jumpy luck in all this, nor favored knowledge of conditions beyond the opportunity and reach of other men. It was his thorough organization of himself to look for and think over existing conditions, and the use of plain, common sense in acting thereon.

He worked hard and long, and in fact more zealously than in the days he was storing up the first hundred thousand.

Fifteen years now follow that this modest, unobtrusive man, with a genius for money-getting, buried himself contentedly in delving, digging, mining and storing for the poor and weak, for whom he had accepted a charge from his Maker. His body constitutionally weak, his life wearing thin, confined to the narrow spaces of an office, his chosen food but

little more than a crust, making one suit last the usual time of two, and his spirit soaring higher and higher as he toiled and saved to make and distribute his gains for humanity, that they might breathe good cheer and strength and happiness upon others unfavored by fortune.

What a lifetime it was, that period from 1850 to 1865! With hungry mind, he analyzed the energies of money. He selecting the altars upon which to lay it. He was constantly subjected to the criticisms, stabs and scorn of fellow citizens and misinformed newspaper writers, who regarded him as "the threadbare philanthropist." Maligned by those whose appeals for aid for their charities or enterprises were unsuccessful, who wished to deprive him of his liberty to determine where to place his money, he steadily went on, meek and silent, all the time carrying on his little shoulders the hospitals, homes and schools with which he had loaded himself up for future aid.

As his friend of many years, the late Henry C. Townsend, said in 1891, in his address at the opening of the Williamson Free

School of Mechanical Trades, of which he was one of the original trustees:

“When he reached the age of nearly seventy, his fortune probably amounted to about \$4,000,000; and at that period of his life, yielding to the impulses of his naturally kindly and sympathetic nature, keenly alive and responsive to the claim of all forms of suffering humanity, and regarding himself as only a steward of the large fortune he had acquired by a life of integrity, self-denial, and intelligent efforts, he began a system of wise, judicious and liberal distribution of his means, giving in various directions and for a variety of purposes, in a broad and catholic spirit, both money and property, to hospitals, schools, homes and similar charitable and educational organizations. The aggregate of his donations during this period of his life, from the age of seventy to eighty-six, while not known during his lifetime, was ascertained after his decease to have amounted to (independent of the endowment of this school) about \$4,000,000, a sum believed to be larger than that ever given by any one individual in

his lifetime in this country for benevolent purposes."

This was the result of a gradual mental process rather than of any sudden outside influence. However, General Joshua L. Chamberlain, in his historical sketch of "The Founding of the University of Pennsylvania Hospital," suggests that Isaiah V. Williamson's benevolent start was caused by an appeal made to him, in 1872, for that hospital scheme by two members of the committee having in charge the raising of funds from individual donors. The State Legislature in April, 1872, granted to the new hospital in West Philadelphia, \$100,000, "on condition that \$250,000 in addition should be collected from other sources, and that at least two hundred free beds for injured persons should be maintained forever"; and later made other appropriations. The City Councils granted five and a half acres adjoining the university site, on condition that the new hospital should furnish fifty free beds for the indigent sick. Subscriptions were also asked of the public generally, in sums of \$3000 or multiples, giving each donor "the right to nominate one

or more free patients in the hospital." This is what General Chamberlain has to say regarding the visit to the Quaker financier :

“ One picturesque incident, at least, arose in this private subscription. Isaiah V. Williamson was a man noted for his wealth, but almost equally for his unwillingness to give from it. Two members of the committee, however, one of whom was Dr. William Pepper (at that time the Provost of the University), with some reluctance, braved his common reputation, visited him in his dark little office in an obscure building on a narrow street (30 Bank Street), and laid their request before him. He allowed them to talk for almost an hour, only asking two questions, and then brought the interview to a close by saying he would think the matter over. In a few weeks the hospital committee were surprised to receive from him a subscription of \$50,000, the largest single contribution to the hospital fund. But, curiously enough, from that time forward, Mr. Williamson became a liberal giver to philanthropic objects. He gave \$50,000 more to the University and left \$100,000 to it in his will, and his office became a

regular calling place for those interested in various charities.”

This quotation should doubtless be taken with several grains of salt. How could General Chamberlain fairly assume to know what no one knew, but the man himself, as to his dedication of himself, not in public, a score of years before that visit to solicit for the University Hospital? Other assertions have been made that Williamson gave grudgingly, particularly at that period; but hesitation for careful examination is not the same as disinclination. One of the editorials in the Philadelphia papers at the time of his death declared that “he was seldom a voluntary and never a cheerful giver”; that “he was never a leader, and often not even a follower, in the movements of the progressive or the philanthropic”; and that if it had not been for “the ceaseless and wisely directed efforts of sincere philanthropists who cultivated his friendship and confidence, the Williamson School would never have been founded.”

This is painfully untrue.

If it could be proved that Mr. Williamson never gave anything spontaneously and



generously, of his own initiative, it would at least be to his credit that there was something in his heart which could respond to definite appeals, or that he could succeed in overcoming a natural ungenerosity. But the reverse is true. In numerous instances, his gifts were not only voluntary, but absolutely secret—as, for example, in the many gifts which he made to various charities under the pseudonym of “Hez,” which no one knew stood for him till after his death.

That certain great-souled people, of whom he sought counsel, did exert a positive influence over him in this direction at various times, and that he appreciated their spirit and rose to the occasion, is manifest. The charities of Peter Williamson and his daughter, Mary, made such an impression on him that in his will of 1874, it was directed that \$10,000 should be left to Mary to assist her in carrying on her charitable work. The same amount was entered for Mrs. J. Bellangee Coxe, for the same purpose; and it is well known that as Miss McHenry was greatly admired by him for her unselfish character, fine executive ability and energy, in founding and carrying

on the Lincoln Institution, the Educational Home, and other enterprises for young men; and, as has been said, some of his first large gifts were in the direction of her work. It is plain that the years of money-getting had not withered his heart.

His long-time friend, William C. Ludwig, was another who exerted a great influence over Williamson, both by example and positive pressure. For many years the philanthropist was accustomed to consult Ludwig more or less regularly regarding benevolent causes in mind, often not only following his advice, but going on far beyond his suggestions. As will be seen, this was particularly so in the matter of the Merchants' Fund.

But whatever the influence, subjective and objective, which set this great engine of charity going, the fact remains that the number and variety of Williamson's gifts in three or four years, from 1873 to 1876, are simply bewildering, even with the incomplete records which we have. Alfred Helmbold, Jr., who was his private secretary for seven years before his death, has collected such memoranda as he could of those years. The benefactions

amounted to at least \$200,000, aside from the gift to the University Hospital. Mr. Helmbold's list is here classified and arranged alphabetically.

ASYLUMS AND HOMES

Asylum for Relief of Persons Deprived of Use of Their Reason.

Church Home for Children.

Clinton Street Boarding Home for Young Women.

Foster Home Association of Philadelphia.

Frankford Asylum for the Insane.

Frankford Home for the Insane.

Franklin Reformatory Home for Inebriates.

Home for Incurables.

Home for Infants.

House for Homeless.

House of Refuge.

Howard Institution Under Care of Women Friends.

Lincoln Institution for Soldiers' Orphans.

Newsboys' Home.

Old Men's Home.

Pennsylvania Asylum for Indigent Widows and Single Women in the District of Kensington.

Pennsylvania Industrial Home for Blind Women.

Philadelphia Home for Incurables.

Temporary Home Association.

Temporary Home for Children.

Union School and Children's Home.

Union Temporary Home for Children.

Western Provident Society and Children's Home of Philadelphia.

## BENEVOLENT FUNDS AND SOCIETIES

- Bank Clerks' Beneficial Association.  
 Bucks County Association.  
 Central Employment Association.  
 Female Association of Philadelphia for the Relief of the Sick and Employment of the Poor.  
 Fuel Saving Society of City and Liberties of Philadelphia.  
 Mercantile Beneficial Association of Philadelphia.  
 Merchants' Fund.  
 Northern Association of the City and County of Philadelphia for the Relief and Employment of Poor Women.  
 Pennsylvania Seamen's Friend Society.  
 Pennsylvania Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.  
 Philadelphia Lying-in Charity for Attending Indigent Females at Their Own Homes.  
 Philadelphia Protestant Episcopal City Mission.  
 Philadelphia Society for Employment and Instruction of the Poor.  
 Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons.  
 Seamen's Fund Society.  
 Soup Societies—all of the regularly organized ones in Philadelphia.  
 Union Benevolent Association of Philadelphia.  
 Western Association of Ladies of Philadelphia for Relief and Employment of the Poor.

## HOSPITALS AND DISPENSARIES

- Children's Hospital.  
 Church Dispensary of Southwark.  
 Episcopal Hospital.

German Hospital.  
 Germantown Dispensary and Hospital.  
 Howard Hospital and Infirmary for Incurables.  
 Jefferson Medical College Hospital.  
 Jewish Hospital.  
 Medico-Chirurgical Hospital.  
 Northern Dispensary of Philadelphia.  
 Orthopaedic Hospital of Philadelphia.  
 Pennsylvania Hospital.  
 Philadelphia Dispensary.  
 St. Luke's Hospital, South Bethlehem.  
 University Hospital.  
 Women's Hospital of Philadelphia.

COLLEGES, LIBRARIES AND OTHER EDUCATIONAL  
INSTITUTIONS

Academy of Natural Sciences.  
 Cambria Library Association of Johnstown.  
 Educational Home for Boys.  
 Haverford College.  
 Historical Society of Pennsylvania.  
 Industrial Home for Girls.  
 Library Company of Fallsington.  
 Mercantile Library.  
 Philadelphia School of Design for Women.  
 Swarthmore College.  
 University of Pennsylvania.  
 West Philadelphia Institute.  
 Women's Medical College.  
 Yardleyville Library Company.

This is undoubtedly an imperfect showing, for Williamson was always as reticent

as possible regarding his gifts. Information had to be gathered from one source and another after his death. To many of these causes the contributions were fixed annual subscriptions, which were later found to have been permanently provided for in his will of 1874, according to certain definite percentages, thus revealing his accurate knowledge of the details and relative needs of certain benevolent organizations at that time. As an illustration of this, the Mercantile Beneficial Association received annually not less than \$600 by the provisions of the will.

It is possible that Williamson came across the saying a member of Parliament once shrewdly uttered, out of personal observation as one of the laboring class, that "charity creates much of the misery it relieves, but does not relieve all the misery it creates." It is evident he held a similar opinion; and tried to avoid unwise, careless, thoughtless methods that have often done more harm than good. He seems to have preferred, usually, to contribute to the organized city charities rather than to the special local work of the churches. One of his chief reasons, according to Mr.

Helmbold, was that "the needs of the suffering could be better investigated and understood by those having charge of these matters than from his personal efforts."

On the other hand, it is true that in numerous instances he gave secret personal attention to individual cases of need, or did this through his secretary—who was frequently his almoner in charitable deeds never publicly known. It seems to be true, also, that in a quiet way he helped many a feeble church in gifts. This is borne out by an exclamation known to have been made during the last year of his life, when told that two well-dressed ladies, coming in a carriage, had called at his office and asked for a contribution toward an expensive altar rail in a rich church:

"Rich church, eh? Well, I've got no use for rich churches. When I give money, I don't give to rich churches; I give to struggling ones."

In that first period of systematic giving in the '70's he made his gifts chiefly from the income of his investments, and as a rule pledged money only as he had an expected

income to meet his promise. At times many of his valuable securities were not producing incomes, though increasing in value; and in fact the increase of his four millions, at seventy years, to three times as much in the last fifteen years of his life, was largely due to this great appreciation of values in capital stocks, bonds and real estate.<sup>9</sup>

As an illustration of his method of giving away his income, it may be mentioned that about 1868 or 1870 he owned several lots or squares in the southwestern part of Philadelphia, which he was interested in building up. This section was in the neighborhood around Carpenter, Christian, Reed, Dickinson, Mt. Holly and Lingo Streets, between Fifteenth and Twentieth. As these properties were sold, he made advances to insure the erection of buildings, and reserved yearly ground rents, according to a local Philadelphia custom now not so much in vogue as formerly. Of those hundred or more ground rents nearly

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<sup>9</sup> Before he died he had amassed a fortune of \$20,000,000, of which he disbursed \$5,000,000 during his lifetime to various charities. In his offerings it was sufficient for him that they were deserving and commanded his confidence, and public mention of his contributions was a matter of great dislike, for, of all things, he especially avoided notoriety.



all were given to various charities during his lifetime.

While Williamson's charities were usually bestowed secretly, coming as something of a surprise to the beneficiaries, there were numerous occasions when he openly made them conditional, in order to get other people stirred up. On one occasion, for instance, when he was asked to give \$10,000 to the Home for Incurables—to which he had given before, and in which he was deeply interested—for the purpose of purchasing additional ground adjoining the Home, he replied to the committee that if they would raise \$5000 from other people by a certain time, he would give the other \$5000. This was accomplished, and thus the circle of the Home's friends and supporters was enlarged.

From the time that it became publicly known that he was a large giver he was, of course, beset on all sides by appeals, and his mail brought begging letters from all over the world, some of them absurd or impudent—the common experience of men and women known to be wealthy or generous-minded. Many of these requests, both distant and

local, could only be ignored. But to any straightforward and apparently worthy cause or person, he would listen patiently and sympathetically, generally asking a few penetrating questions, and usually, without giving aid at the time, would close the interview by saying: "I will look into the matter."

This was no idle answer, intended only to get rid of suppliants. It was a promise which he fulfilled. He "looked into the matter" with surprising thoroughness; and if the decision was favorable, the amount of his gift was usually surprising, also.

This desire to get the facts at first hand and to decide for himself is illustrated in a characteristic story told of him. On one occasion he had contributed to a certain cause in which a lady was deeply interested. She said to her father that while it was a generous gift, it was insufficient to accomplish her purpose, but she was afraid to ask again. Her father suggested that she should write a letter and he would deliver it. But Williamson was not satisfied with that; he asked that the daughter should come to him; he wanted the story of need from her own lips, and also

wished to reassure her of his confidence in the work. When she went away from his dingy office, she carried an additional check for \$10,000.

The circle of his sympathy was wide. Any great calamity stirred his heart; but also the poverty and distress of the humblest peddler who strolled into his office with a basket of cheap notions on his arm, from whom he would always buy something—perhaps a spool or two of thread, a paper of pins, or a stove lifter—odds and ends which he subsequently gave away when occasion offered. He was invariably strongly moved to help the man who was trying to help himself, however humble the effort. But for mere beggars, low or high, he had little sympathy.

Among the many benevolences of the last decade or so of Williamson's life a few stand out with special boldness on account of the large sums given while he was living. Among these the University of Pennsylvania at one time received a gift of fourteen acres of city property valued at \$200,000; the Episcopal Hospital ten acres valued at \$75,000; and the Woman's Hospital and College authorities

thirty-eight acres in the southern section of the city, supposed to be worth more than \$100,000. Besides the \$50,000 or so given to Swarthmore College several years before, the sum of \$80,000 was added in 1888, which the trustees used in founding "the I. V. Williamson Professorship of Civil and Mechanical Engineering."

Of the larger charities, also, were the Mercantile Library, the Merchant's Fund, and the House of Refuge. His active interest in the Mercantile Library dated back to 1873 or earlier, when one of the directors who knew Isaiah V. Williamson approached him on the subject of giving \$10,000 to establish a "Williamson Fund," the annual income to be used in the purchase of new books of interest to mechanics and tradespeople, with Williamson's name printed on the inside label as the donor, thus keeping his generosity before the patrons of the Library. He replied that the notion was "all rubbish," and he could not allow his name to be used in that manner. The disappointed director gave it up and went home. However, Williamson "thought it over" in his usual way, and in a few days

informed the director that he would do a little something for him. Deeds were turned over to the Library, embracing valuable timber and coal lands in Clinton County, worth \$35,000 or more; and later, other gifts of ground rents brought his contribution up to \$50,000. Thus eventually, whether he would or no, the "Williamson Fund" was established in the Mercantile Library.

As to his interest in the Merchants' Fund, no doubt Ludwig had a good deal to do with that. He was one of its organizers in 1854, and its president from 1869 till his death in the latter part of 1889; and its purpose was very near his heart—to aid fellow-merchants who had met with reverses and were in distress. It was natural that Williamson, who valued so highly Ludwig's judgment in benevolences, should sympathize with him in this manner, especially as he had himself passed through the struggles and anxieties of a city merchant. In the early '70's, accordingly, he joined with others in various subscriptions to this fund, his own amounting to about \$15,000. Feeling the importance of a largely increased permanent endowment, he worked actively to

get others aroused on the subject; and not meeting with the response he desired, he simply did it himself—a little later conveying to the association property on Chestnut Street above Seventh, worth \$85,000 or more, and making his total subscription to the fund \$100,000 at the lowest valuation. Among the managers and ardent friends of the fund in those days was Edmund A. Souder, one of Williamson's young business contemporaries when he first came to Philadelphia.

Regarding the gift of \$105,000 to the House of Refuge, there are some especially interesting features. In one of the semi-official accounts of the history of that institution the date of his gift is entered as February 2, 1889, only a month before his death. But the subscription seems to have been made during the preceding year, in three payments of \$35,000 each. The special occasion was the removal of certain departments of the institution from the city to the country, in order to erect new buildings and establish the "cottage" system at Glen Mills, giving the boys more freedom, and so far as possible doing away with the prison-like methods of former years. The idea

had so appealed to William Massey, the wealthy brewer, that he had recently subscribed \$100,000 to it. Williamson must have been familiar with the history of the institution from the first, as it was organized in 1826, a few months after he came to Philadelphia, and have known the long devotion to it of Isaac Collins, Alexander Henry, and their children from the first. But his attention had been particularly drawn to it for some time, leading him to make a careful study of the whole situation, and his interest in the House of Refuge became so great, through his examination of its past history and future plans, that he resolved to give it a lift whether or no. Meeting Massey a little later, their conversation is said to have been something like this:

“They tell me,” remarked Williamson, “that you have given a hundred thousand to move the House of Refuge boys out into the country. That is good. There is something in nature to heal the diseased mind as well as the diseased body.”

“That is true; but it is not enough. What

will you give?" asked Massey, in his whole-hearted way.

"I thought about it all last night," said Williamson. "The forlorn boy lies close to my conscience; and I have promised them a hundred thousand or so."

"Bless my heart! Have you? Come and take lunch with me."

"Thank you, Mr. Massey, but I have my lunch here in my pocket."

During those years—the '70's and onward—Williamson's old affection for the country relatives and country life was as warm as ever, manifesting itself in various ways as occasion offered.

In 1875 he came to the rescue of the Library Company at Fallsington, the village of his early years. The Library was incorporated in 1802—the year preceding his birth—with thirty-five shareholders. It began with 138 volumes, some of which are still in service. As a boy and young man he must have made use of the Library frequently. It had been maintained after a fashion ever since, but its scope was very limited and in the early '70's



its life seemed flickering. The organization was barely kept alive through the courage and perseverance of three or four individuals. One of the villagers kept the cases of books at his house, and acted as librarian, with a trifling fee. But Williamson put new life into the enterprise by giving \$5000 as an endowment fund, of which the interest was to be used in purchasing new books. This was made conditional upon the capital stock being increased to at least one hundred paid-up shares providing for the maintenance and incidental expenses of the Library. The result was that the organization took on a new and larger life. Public enthusiasm was aroused. A library building was erected four years later, to which Williamson contributed one-half the expense. At the time of the Library's centennial, in 1902, there were more than seven thousand volumes listed in its catalogue.

Williamson also had a part in the formation of the Bucks County Association, in 1876, in which Judge Edward M. Paxson, Amos Briggs, John O. James, Theodore C. Search, and John Stackhouse were officers of the first

Board of Managers, and of which many eminent Philadelphians, who had come from Bucks County, became members. The purpose, besides providing a suitable rallying place during the Centennial Exhibition, was to perfect a permanent organization, with rooms and social features, and to afford whatever encouragement and protection it might to young men settling down in the business of the city.

## VII

### DEVELOPMENT OF THE WILLIAMSON SCHOOL IDEA



AS SEEN in preceding chapters, there had been notable indications for many years of Williamson's peculiar interest in charitable efforts for boys and girls. Foreign institutions of that sort had greatly appealed to him while abroad, before he was forty, and all through his bachelor life these feelings seem to have gathered power. It has been noted how the Lincoln Institution for soldiers' orphans was one of the first benevolences to which he contributed largely. Other asylums and educational institutions for children later received his substantial aid. In the management of some of them he bore an active part. In the work of the Educational Home for Boys, for instance, he was a member of the Board of Council, a body of representative men giving counsel and aid to the Board of Managers, all of whom were women; and when it was pro-

posed to start a girls' department of the same institution, he became a member of the committee appointed to receive contributions to that end. He was a member, also, of the Board of Trustees of the Union School and Children's Home. These and other official duties were quite likely to have increased his knowledge of the need and intensified his feeling; but to go deeper, they were really varied forms of expression of a feeling that had existed for years, of which one of the latest and most expressive was his study of the House of Refuge conditions and his gift to it of \$105,000 during the last year of his life.

There is abundant evidence, also, that boys who were dependent on themselves were always especially on his mind. Mr. Helmbold says that he often revealed his deep interest in them by some sudden exclamation like this: "I see so many boys on the street! I think if they had better opportunities they might make good men!" And to a reporter of the *Philadelphia Times* he said: "It was seeing boys, ragged and barefooted, playing or lounging about the streets, growing up with no education, no trade, no idea of use-

fulness, that caused me to think of founding a school where every boy could be taught some trade free of expense." He talked with his intimate friends—Mr. Lewis, Mr. Ludwig, Mr. Wanamaker and others—about "the boys" many times, often with emotion that was near to tears.

And he was equally emphatic in his oft-expressed opinion that the abolition of the apprentice system was one of the greatest mistakes of contemporary society.

The thought of founding some sort of an institution for boys came as early as "the fifties" into his mind. Any doubt on this score would disappear after reading the brief preamble to the Foundation Deed presented to the Trustees of the Free School of Mechanical Trades, December 1, 1888. Four times within a few paragraphs he asserts and reasserts this fact:

"The subject of the training and education of youth to habits of industry and economy, and the importance of their learning trades, so that they may be able to earn their living by the labor of their hands, has for a long time received my careful attention."

—“For nearly thirty years I have carefully considered this subject, with the intention at the proper time of founding and endowing a free institution.”—“The time has now arrived at which I can put my long cherished intention into effect, and devote and dedicate to the object a sufficient fund out of means which have been saved and accumulated for the purpose.”—“Now, know all men by these presents, that I, Isaiah V. Williamson, of the City of Philadelphia, merchant, in order to carry out the object I so long have had in view, in the hope of supplying a long-felt want in the community, and with this intention and design of founding and endowing in perpetuity an institution to be known as ‘The Williamson Free School of Mechanical Trades,’ and hereinafter designated as the School, do hereby make, constitute, and appoint my friends, John Baird, James C. Brooks, Lemuel Coffin, Edward Longstreth, William C. Ludwig, Henry C. Townsend, and John Wanamaker, the Trustees.”

It seems that Williamson’s thought, at one time, had been to provide for such a school by will, to be organized after his death; and

to that end Mr. Helmbold made a "first rough draft" of a codicil, the manuscript of which he has preserved. It bears marks of dictation, with some of Williamson's characteristic forms of expression. Here we find his scheme in its formative stage, only partly worked out, but of much the same nature as the well rounded-out foundation deed into which it developed. He uses the term "managers" instead of the later "trustees." His opening paragraph raises a complaint afterwards omitted, regarding trades unions: "The subject of the proper training and education of the young to habits of economy and industry, whereby they shall become self-sustaining, has received my careful attention; and the unwarrantable position taken to some extent by Trades Unions and other Labor organizations in regard to apprenticeships—assuming as they do, arbitrarily, to control and limit the number that shall be admitted to learn a trade—is fraught with great danger to the community, in compelling the young to grow up in habits of idleness, leading at times to vice and crime."

Three features of the manuscript notes,

however, are of special interest, showing that Williamson then entertained the idea of an institution for both sexes, the girls to be trained, among other things, in cooking and all forms of plain housekeeping; that the title then in mind was the "Institute (or School) for the Mental and Industrial Education of the Young"; and that four million dollars was the amount he was first planning to bequeath, the institution to be "organized as soon as practicable" after his death.

But gradually, as Williamson revolved his great purpose after the cautious manner of years, looking at it repeatedly from all sides, the desire grew upon him to get the scheme started in his lifetime. The counsel of some of his friends confirmed him in this. His attorney, Franklin B. Gowen, formerly President of the Reading Railroad, and a friend in whose judgment he had the greatest confidence—was one of those who urged him not to wait, arguing among other things that if he carried out his purpose while living a collateral inheritance tax would be saved. And there were the examples of other men, either as warning or inspiration—the long



controversy over the will of Samuel J. Tilden, illustrating with peculiar force the old story of the uncertainty of bequests; or the experience of Peter Cooper, on the other hand, who for years had the pleasure of seeing Cooper Institute thronged with young men and women who were being fitted, through his bounty, for lives of useful industry. Men before Isaiah Williamson, and men who have come after him, have distributed a large part of their wealth while living; and who can say that his example may not have played some part in shaping the later policy of such men as Andrew Carnegie, with his free libraries scattered all over the land; of Anthony J. Drexel, with the Drexel Institute of West Philadelphia; of P. A. B. Widener, with the Home for Crippled Children, on Old York Road; of Jacob Tome, with the splendid school since located at Port Deposit, Maryland; and of others like them, far and near.

Mr. Helmbold, in consequence of his close relation to Isaiah Williamson as private secretary, knew something of the mental process that had gone on, and of the changed decision in favor of a life-time foundation. Realizing

also, more than those who were not in hourly contact with him, his increasing feebleness, the secretary's fear was that it might be put off, until it was too late, and for a year or more, so far as he felt at liberty to do so, he had been urging the aged philanthropist to immediate action of some sort. One day, scarcely half a year before his death, Williamson returned to the office enfeebled after a slight illness, and brought up the subject again, asking his secretary:

“Who do you think would be a good man to take up his matter?”

Mr. Helmbold's relief can be imagined. As he expressed it: “I jumped at anybody.” Various names were mentioned, showing how definitely that Williamson had been thinking. But the imperative thing was to get the project going at once.

From that time it was pushed forward with all speed. Within a few weeks the trustees were selected and their consent to serve gained; the two millions of securities were picked out; and the foundation deed was drawn up in all its minute details. This paper, however, bears no marks of haste. Any

intelligent man, reading it for the first time, must confess that it is an extraordinary document, striking out here and there on new lines, with nothing similar for a pattern. Aside from legal phraseology that the attorney necessarily gave to it in its final form, the individuality of the donor stamps it throughout, in processes of thought, forms of expression, and completeness of detail. In its original pamphlet form it fills some thirty octavo pages. Following the preamble stating its purpose, the name of the school, the appointment of the trustees and the fiscal trustee—(the Pennsylvania Company for Insurances on Lives and Granting Annuities), is a schedule of the securities transferred, capital and preferred stocks in banks, railroads and navigation companies, insurance and industrial companies, having a par value of \$1,596,000, and later appraised at about \$2,100,000; directions are then given for that appraisement at their market value, and a division of the total sum into two parts, one-fifth for a building fund and four-fifths for an endowment fund, the securities “most readily and advantageously salable” to be set aside

for the building fund; also regarding the use and investment of those funds, and of accretions by income or future bequests; the purchase of a site, and the erection and outfitting of buildings for the school; the employment of teachers and helpers; the conditions of admission of scholars, and their obligations, care, training, discipline, and records of achievement after leaving the school; closing with provisions for public annual reports of "the operations" of the school, for filling vacancies in the Board of Trustees, and for incorporation if so desired. The core of this document, however—its peculiar and original feature—is of course the part which outlines the nature of the School, as follows:

"C. I direct that the said School shall be known and designated as 'The Williamson Free School of Mechanical Trades.'

"D. The Trustees shall employ from time to time, at proper compensation to be fixed and established by the Trustees, competent officers, teachers, instructors, agents, mechanics, workmen, and servants to take charge of the said School, and to feed, clothe, educate, and instruct in trades as hereinafter provided all who may be admitted as scholars to the School.

"E. When the School is prepared to receive scholars the Trustees shall from time to time receive and admit to

the School as scholars as many able-bodied and healthy young male persons of good moral character, of such ages between sixteen and eighteen years, as may from time to time be determined by the Trustees, as in the opinion of the Trustees the extent, capacity, and income of the School will provide for. Preference shall be given, in the admission of scholars: First, to those born in the city of Philadelphia; second, to those born in the county of Bucks, State of Pennsylvania; third, to those born in Montgomery or Delaware Counties, Pennsylvania; fourth, to those born elsewhere in Pennsylvania; fifth, to those born in the State of New Jersey; sixth, to those born elsewhere in the United States. And in all cases, other things being equal, in the order of preference, the preference shall always be given to the poor. But I especially direct that no scholar who has been properly admitted with reference to the order of preference, shall thereafter be displaced to make way for any later or subsequent applicant who may be higher in the order of preference hereinabove directed to be observed. And the decision of the Trustees as to the number of scholars to be admitted, and as to the conflicting claims of any or all rival candidates for admission, shall be final and conclusive upon all parties. All scholars admitted to the School shall be bound as indentured apprentices to the Trustees, by their parents or guardians or other competent authority, for such respective periods as the Trustees may from time to time determine: Provided, That no indenture shall be for less than three years nor extend beyond the minority of the scholar.

“ F. All scholars admitted to the School shall be fed with good, wholesome food; plainly, neatly, and comfortably clad, and decently and fitly housed and lodged. They shall also, if in the opinion of the Trustees they have

not been sufficiently educated before their admission, be thoroughly instructed and grounded in the rudiments of a good common-school English education, embracing spelling, reading, writing, arithmetic, grammar, geography, history, particularly of the United States, and also such of the natural and physical sciences and lower mathematics as in the opinion of the Trustees it may be important for them to acquire, to fit themselves for the trades they are to learn. In describing this course of English education I do not intend to make it obligatory that all the branches I have named shall be taught, or that those not named shall be excluded, nor do I intend that any one fixed or established course shall be taken by all the scholars, I leave all this to the discretion of the Trustees, but I request that they shall at all times bear in mind the fact that the main object I have in view is to train young men to mechanical trades, so that they may earn their own living, and that while the acquisition of any branches of an English education which may be of aid to them in their several trades is necessary and important, any higher or advanced knowledge which might render them dissatisfied with or unfit for their employments is unnecessary and may be disadvantageous. I expressly direct that each and every scholar shall be compelled to learn and be thoroughly instructed in one good mechanical trade, so that when they leave the School on the completion of their indentures they may be able to support themselves by the labor of their own hands.

“ I leave to the discretion of the Trustees the selection of the several kinds of mechanical trades to be taught, and the determination of the particular one that shall be taught to and acquired by each scholar, but I particularly desire that the taste, capacity, intelligence, and adaptability of

each scholar be ascertained and considered before assigning him to any particular trade. Among the trades which may be taught are those of baker, blacksmith, bricklayer, butcher, cabinet-maker, car-builder, carpenter, carriage-maker, coppersmith, the crafts of constructing, managing, and repairing electrical appliances and apparatus, foundryman, gas-fitter, gold-beater, harness-maker, hatter, locksmith, machinist, marble-mason, moulder, painter, paper-hanger, pattern-maker, plasterer, plumber, printer, saddler, shoemaker, steam engineer, slater, stone-cutter, stonemason, tailor, tinsmith, tiler, turner, wheelwright, and many others. In mentioning these several trades I do not intend to make it obligatory upon the Trustees to teach all of them, nor do I intend to exclude any of those which are not mentioned, and I authorize the Trustees to the extent that the cultivation, care, and adornment of the lands and grounds connected with the School will admit, to instruct such of the scholars as show taste and capacity for the occupation, in the art of farming and gardening, or either.

“ I desire and direct that the moral and religious training of the scholars shall be properly looked after and cared for by the Trustees, but that there be no attempt by the Trustees at proselytism among the scholars, and no favoritism shown by the Trustees to any particular sect or creed. I especially direct that each scholar shall be taught to speak the truth at all times, and I particularly direct and charge as an imperative duty upon the Trustees that each and every scholar shall be thoroughly trained in habits of frugality, economy, and industry, as above all others the one great lesson which I desire to have impressed upon every scholar and inmate of the School is that in this country every able-bodied, healthy young man who

has learned a good mechanical trade, and is truthful, honest, frugal, temperate, and industrious, is certain to succeed in life, and to become a useful and respected member of society.

“ I desire and direct that the physical training of the scholars shall be carefully attended to, that they shall have proper exercise and recreation, so that so far as such a result can be brought about by training and care, each one may grow up with a sound mind in a sound body.

“ I direct that the boarding, lodging, clothing, education, instruction in trades, and all other advantages to be derived by the scholars under this deed, shall in all respects be gratuitous, and that under no circumstances shall any charge be made to any scholar for the same, or any fees, rewards, or other compensations be accepted by the Trustees from or on account of any scholar.

“ G. If, in the opinion of the Trustees, any scholar should become incompetent to learn or master a trade, or become intractable or insubordinate, or be guilty of vice or crime, he may be expelled from the School by the Trustees, and I direct that all indentures shall be so drawn as to permit this to be done. I particularly direct that the decision of the Trustees as to whether a scholar deserves expulsion under this article G shall be final and conclusive upon the subject. And I further direct that the Trustees, by and with the consent of the other party to any indenture, and of the scholar, may cancel the indentures of any scholar for any reason which in the judgment of the Trustees is good and sufficient.

“ H. All scholars who have not been previously expelled, or whose indentures have not been canceled as provided for in article G shall leave the institution as scholars and cease to be the recipients of its benefits on



the completion of the periods of their several indentures. But nothing in this article contained shall be construed to prevent the Trustees from employing as agents, teachers, instructors, workmen, or in any capacity, any scholar who has served his full time in the School and has left the same with a good character. And the Trustees may in their discretion provide for such a system of money premiums and rewards dependent upon good character and proficiency as shall enable those of the scholars entitled to its benefits to receive from the Trustees, when they leave the School at the full expiration of their indentures, a sum of money not exceeding in the aggregate fifty dollars to any one scholar, which sum of money shall be paid by the Trustees out of any of the moneys received by them as income of the School."

Aside from the deed of trust Isaiah Williamson repeatedly expressed his views, less formally but no less clearly, by letter or in conversation. In a letter dated December 13, a copy of which was sent to each Trustee, the founder said: "I have thought it proper and fitting that, at the beginning of the undertaking, I should bring to your attention my own views about the details of the establishment and the management of the School, and submit for your consideration some suggestions of my own, which have been the result of patient and careful consideration of the subject which is now committed to your hands."

He then mentions his preferences in regard to a site; suggests that it would be well not to bother themselves about the question of buildings until the location has been finally chosen; advocates the "Home Life" method for the School; suggests that farm buildings on whatever property purchased should be utilized, if possible; and the boys might be set at work at once, making bricks or quarry stone on the place, for new buildings; that the erection of a large central building with lecture rooms and the like, might be deferred "until it is demonstrated that the School will be a success, and until the number of inmates is sufficient to justify the expenditure"; and gives his opinion that it would be well to locate the School near some flourishing village or town, where the boys could attend churches of different denominations, according to their preferences. "I have prepared this letter," he says in conclusion, "with no intention of controlling your own judgments upon the various matters touched upon." The reasons he gives for the "Home Life" idea are of special interest:

"I am decidedly in favor of what is called 'Home Life,' as distinguished from that of one large institution; and, from all I have read and reflected upon the subject, I think the advantages of the former System are as follows:

"1. The boys will be under better moral control by being inmates of small homes and having the advantages of home life.

"2. It avoids the necessity of large structures, and the consequent temptation to erect imposing buildings and make an architectural display.

"3. It enables you to feel your way, and to provide from time to time only such buildings as can readily be filled by scholars; whereas, if the other plan of one large institute is adopted, there might be a much larger expenditure made than could actually be required for those who apply for admission."

The seven trustees chosen by Williamson were not only men of demonstrated ability in large affairs, but belonged to his circle of friends.

John Baird was a successful and wealthy marble merchant, who had begun with hard work, polishing marble by his own toil in the cellar of his building on Ridge Avenue, and had a wide practical knowledge of the field of mechanical trades. At this time he was President of the City Bank.

James C. Brooks, as president of the Southwark Foundry and Machine Company, also contributed a valuable technical knowledge. Though the youngest man on the Board—forty-five at that time—he had had large experience as an iron-worker, was known for remarkable executive ability, and was an intimate friend of Longstreth as well as of Williamson.

With Lemuel Coffin, Williamson had close business relations in the early days of the drygoods business, his great abilities eventually admitting him to partnership in the firm that had been Williamson, Burroughs & Company; and at this time he was head of the drygoods firm of Coffin, Altemus & Company, a vestryman of Holy Trinity Church, and devoted to church work.

Edward Longstreth's acquaintance with Williamson had not been so long as that of the other trustees, but he was a special friend of Mr. E. Y. Townsend, through whose recommendation and influence he consented to serve. He had a machine-shop experience to contribute, from the time he started as an

apprentice in the Baldwin Locomotive Works until he became the General Manager and a partner—on physician's order retiring in middle life, with a fortune.

William C. Ludwig, as already noted, had been closely associated with Williamson for many years in charitable work; also in business in former years, and on the corporation boards of various railroads. He began life as a compositor on a newspaper in Reading, where he was born. Like Williamson, on attaining his majority, he went to Philadelphia, started in drygoods on Third Street, and retired with a fortune at about the end of the Civil War. Later he busied himself in various banking, insurance and railroad enterprises. In social intercourse, or summer outings at Bryn Mawr and elsewhere, they had often talked over the scheme of the industrial school, Ludwig making many valuable suggestions.

The only lawyer on the board was Henry C. Townsend. His brother, E. Y. Townsend, of the Cambria Iron Company, was one of Williamson's longest and closest friends, and

he himself had for many years enjoyed his friendship and confidence. He was a man of the quiet sort, rarely seen in Court, having a lucrative law practice in administering large estates, and thoroughly conversant with the real estate business, knowledge which proved most valuable in the future work of the board.

John Wanamaker had for years been closely attached to Isaiah Williamson. A strong affection had gradually developed between the older and the younger man, revealing mutual humor, and sympathetic points of view, especially regarding efforts in behalf of "the boys." The subject of industrial schools for boys was the occasion of many and long conferences together. His confidence in Wanamaker showed itself in more ways than one. Sometimes when they sat together at some board meeting or public assembly, he would whisper: "Thee will speak for me, as well as for thyself, John, at this meeting."

A preliminary meeting of the Trustees was called for November 24, 1888, in this form:

"A Meeting of the Trustees to be appointed under

the Deed of Trust from I. V. Williamson, founding and endowing the Williamson Free School, will be held at the office of the Cambria Iron Company, South Fourth Street, on Saturday the 24th of November. You, having kindly consented to act as one of such Trustees, are requested to be present at that meeting."

This meeting was mainly devoted to an informal discussion of the donor's plans, and some slight changes in the proposed deed of trust were suggested.

The red-letter day, however, was December 1, 1888, when the Trustees met again with Isaiah Williamson, at the office of the Cambria Iron Company, to accept the foundation deed and sign its conditions. The old man had to be wheeled in from his carriage in a rolling chair, but his spirit was alert and joyful. Mr. Gowen and Mr. Helmbold were also present. John Wanamaker presided at the opening, though declining a nomination as permanent president. Upon the formal organization of the board, Mr. Baird was chosen president, Mr. Brooks treasurer, and, according to Mr. Williamson's suggestion in the deed, Mr. Helmbold was selected as secretary. Mr. Gowen read the deed, Mr. Wil-

Williamson's plans were freely discussed, the necessary papers were signed, and the deed was ordered printed for the use of the Trustees and for limited circulation.

Reports of this meeting of course appeared at once in the city papers, and the news went around the world. A few days later the Foundation deed, also, was printed in full in the daily papers. With scarcely an exception the newspaper reports and editorial comments were full of appreciation and praise for the philanthropist, both for the greatness of the idea and for his purpose to get it partly realized, at least, while living. Here and there, however, a discordant note was heard. Some of the Trades Union people were at first inclined to criticize the apprenticeship features, as was to be expected. One editorial writer asked indignantly why Isaiah Williamson proposed "to spend all his money upon big, strapping boys, and let the poor delicate girls take care of themselves"; suggested that it was questionable whether Girard College had really been a benefit to those raised and educated in it; and predicted that "Williamson's



institution" would become "a great pauper factory instead of a place where boys could be taught to fight the battle of life successfully." Some thought it would be a great mistake to locate such a school out in the country, and that it should be in the city at the very center of industrial enterprises. Others hailed the quiet, shy, reticent little man as one of the greatest philanthropists and benefactors of the race, to be named with such men as Astor, Cooper, Girard, and Peabody.

The leading journals of other cities all over the country added their tribute of praise. The New York *Tribune's* editorial ended in this way: "The gift is as sensible as it is magnificent. It is at least open to doubt whether the man who makes two colleges stand where one was enough before has rendered a real service; but a school like this will fill a great want, and is a sign of a wise reaction. The venerable man who lightens up his closing years with an act of such splendid magnificence may take some pleasure in the thought that he has illustrated the existence of the purest motives that can guide

the human soul, and has helped to give men a better opinion of mankind." The *New York Sun*, assuming that the total gift to the School would eventually be from five to fifteen millions, said: "There never was anything in the Girard bequest; at its lowest figures it is fitting, therefore, that there should be nothing in history like Mr. Williamson's vast gift. It surpasses in magnitude the aggregate benefactions of Peabody; it exceeds the magnificent Girard bequest; at its lowest figures it is larger than the entire endowment of Harvard, Yale or Columbia; and at its largest limit it equals the combined wealth of these three great universities. Yet, with characteristic modesty, the donor calls his institution a School. Such figures stagger the imagination. Only two gifts in human history stand in the same rank. One is the application by Senator Leland Stanford of \$22,000,000 of his fabulous wealth to found a university; and the other is the gift of 50,000,000 francs, or \$10,000,000, by Baron Hirsch, the great Vienna banker, in aid of the Hebrew charities of Europe."

While these comments were based on too large an assumption, it is a fair indication of the approval expressed throughout the nation at that time.

## VIII

### FOUNDING THE WILLIAMSON SCHOOL



THE Board of Trustees took an office in the Forrest Building, on Fourth Street, making it their headquarters. At a meeting held there on December 10th, two committees were appointed:—one on “Grounds, buildings and improvements,” consisting of Mr. Wanamaker, chairman, Mr. Longstreth and Mr. Brooks; the other on “Finance,” consisting of Mr. Coffin, chairman, Mr. Ludwig and Mr. Townsend. Mr. Baird, as president of the Board was *ex-officio* a member of both committees. The preliminary work was pushed forward. In spite of wintry conditions and the exactions of the holiday season, the first consideration was to choose a suitable suburban site. The founder’s natural preference for Bucks County, his birthplace, and long dear to him by many associations, was held in abeyance to the judgment of the Trustees.

From the first he sought to give them an absolutely free hand, whether in large things or small. He had picked his men, and he felt that he could safely put on their shoulders the burden of management. Some of the Trustees doubted the wisdom of placing the School in the country. Mr. Baird particularly favored a city location. But all deferred to the feeling of the donor. As soon as the school scheme became known in a general way, they were, of course, beset with offers of country estates, and something like two hundred possible sites eventually came under discussion.

The first actual trip of inspection occurred toward the end of January, when Isaiah Williamson accompanied the Trustees in a special train, to examine the old Sharon Farm in Bucks County. They were shown every courtesy by officials of the Newtown Railroad and local representatives. The farm was seen to be admirable in many ways, but its distance of a mile or so from the railroad operated against it in the final choice. Williamson, though physically feeble and needing to be

assisted in and out of the car, was mentally as bright and companionable as ever, and responded quickly to any humorous remark. He especially enjoyed meeting some old friends in the country whom he had not seen for forty or fifty years.

In the next two or three weeks several other trips of inspection were made by members of the Board, notwithstanding their many pressing business cares; for they were resolved to make no mistakes.

On the 25th of February, 1889, Williamson made another trip with the Trustees—this time to Delaware County, to inspect the Armstrong Farm. But it was not until Friday, March 1, only six days before his death, that an inspection was made of the properties near Media, which several of the Trustees had seen before, and which were subsequently chosen. On that trip all the Trustees were present except Mr. Baird and Mr. Wanamaker. Mr. Williamson had provided for a special train and accompanied the party, who drove over farms in carriages. It was evident that the site pleased the founder; but about all

that he said, in his non-talkative way, was: "The place is very nice."

Isaiah Williamson had been for years peculiarly susceptible to cold. It is not at all improbable that the effort of this winter trip was too great, and that it had much to do with his sudden illness and death six days later. The last thing that he spoke of before sinking into final unconsciousness was the Media site, expressing to H. C. Townsend his approval of the Trustees in practically agreeing upon it the preceding day, and bidding Mr. Townsend: "Be sure and get from the railroad company a distinct statement and guarantee in writing of the privileges they propose to grant in connection with the school."

This was his last business act, and almost his last word, spoken smilingly, and eminently characteristic—the ruling passion strong in death.

How unexpected and sudden was Williamson's illness may be seen from a letter which Mr. Ludwig wrote to him on Monday of that week, regarding the option on the Media property:

Philada., March 4/89.

“ My dear Mr. Williamson:

The Board of Trustees will hold a special meeting on Tuesday (tomorrow) at 12 o'clock, noon; and it is very desirable that you should be present, and get your views as to the propriety of purchasing the property near Media, which, we visited, with you, on Friday last. As our option to take the property will expire in a few days, and cannot be extended any further, it is highly important that prompt action be taken, or lose the opportunity of buying it.

Hoping you will be able to attend the meeting, I remain,

Very truly yours,

W. C. LUDWIG.”

On the Monday when this letter was written, Williamson was at his office on Bank Street, and there in the afternoon he suffered from several fainting attacks. He was taken to his boarding house, and was unconscious all day Tuesday; he revived somewhat on Wednesday, and gave that last injunction to Townsend; and on Thursday morning at four o'clock (March 7, 1889) he quietly passed away.

The Trustees had virtually decided for the Media property at the Tuesday meeting; and having the further sanction of the founder's dying words, they took action at once.



Before March had closed they were in possession of signed papers necessary to secure the several parts of the site since occupied by the school buildings.

To understand the value, work and usefulness of The Williamson Free School of Mechanical Trades, a visit to the plant and a glance at the history of the past nineteen years is the best educator. One will find abundant evidence of the founder's wisdom and far-sightedness; of the practical value of the apprentice system established in the school, as an offset in some degree to the lapse of the old apprentice system. The eminent success of its graduates and the constant demand for their services in the world of work prove the thoroughness and excellence of the education the schools afford, largely due to the President, John M. Shrigley, who has been in charge of the school from the first.<sup>10</sup> He was chosen as one of the secretaries of the Board of Trustees before Mr. Williamson's death, and took an active part in the search made for a suitable site; he was elected to the school

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<sup>10</sup> President Shrigley retired April 1, 1912, and was succeeded by Mr. Harry S. Bitting. On April 1, 1922, Mr. James A. Pratt became the third president.

presidency later in that year, and was closely identified with all the work of laying out the grounds and erecting the buildings; he has been at the head of the management of the School in all the particulars of arranging its curriculum, selecting instructors and helpers, and providing for the study and work of the students, and their physical, mental and moral development from the beginning to this time.

A visitor to the school today may take a train on the West Chester branch of the Pennsylvania Railroad to "Williamson School Station," established on the school grounds soon after their purchase, in 1889.

Possibly the president, or one of the officers of the school, would meet him at the station and first take the visitor over the two hundred and eleven acres to give him a general view of the grounds bounded by the State Road (or Baltimore Pike) on the north, and Penn's Grove Road on the south. The original tract purchased by the Board of Trustees—and for which they received the deeds May 17, 1889, at a cost of \$46,489.80—consisted mainly of the homesteads of Hiram Schofield, the brothers John and Jesse Hibberd, and

Caspar W. Grey. This purchase included several smaller lots bought from other landholders, in order to make the school property virtually square.

Like everyone else the visitor would quickly concede that it is a beautiful spot—this gently rolling country with its springs and water courses, its broad pastures, its woodland acres of old oaks and chestnuts, its distant views of fertile farms, thriving towns—natural beauties enhanced by wise and not overdone landscape gardening, winding macadamized drives, and an artistic as well as convenient grouping of the various school buildings. The great reservoir at the highest point of the grounds—some 380 feet above Delaware tidewater—would be noticed. Fed from native springs, it furnishes a strong flow of water, by gravity, through pipes to the buildings standing on somewhat lower levels.

The stranger is shown around through these school buildings. He is taken into one of the eight or ten cottages where the young men live, each cottage having its large living room and its sleeping accommodations for

twenty-four students, aside from the family in charge. While the cottages, like all the buildings, are simple and plain architecturally, they are thoroughly convenient and homelike. All these students take their meals in the common dining hall in the main building.

After a glance at the power-house and laundry, the electric light building and other minor features of the school plant, a visit would be paid to the three different shops where more than two hundred picked young men spend specified hours of each day in learning and practicing trades they have elected to learn. Every new student spends six months in the wood-working department before entering upon the course of his chosen trade. These trades are classified in three principal divisions: woodworking, including carpentering, pattern and cabinet making, house finishing, the construction of roofs, doorways and the like; building, including the mixing of mortar and cement, the laying of stone and brick, the setting of ranges, furnaces and boilers, laying tiles and the building of arches and tunnels; and machinery, including the use of tools and appliances, accurate



ADMINISTRATION BUILDING AND CAMPTS



bench work, steam fitting, steam and electrical engineering, and practical training in how to run steam and electrical engines or plants. The students are encouraged to make original designs in many instances, and to work out their own drawings. Thus the graduate goes forth thoroughly versed in the latest and best methods of his particular trade, as well as trained to manual dexterity through long practice.

Coming at length to the main (or Administration) building, of three stories, built of granite quarried on the grounds, here are found the offices and committee rooms; the dining hall, or "commons," for all the students; the library, with its volumes; a number of class and recitation rooms where the students pursue their regular three-years' course in such studies as arithmetic, algebra and geometry, physical and political geography, English literature, history and civil government, physical science, chemistry, physiology and hygiene, elocution and vocal music, mechanical and free-hand drawing; and on the second floor the large assembly hall, where simple chapel services are held every morn-

ing, lectures and entertainments given from time to time, and commencements celebrated.

The tablet to Isaiah Williamson's memory, and the spot where he is buried in the entrance corridor, would be pointed out, as well as his portrait, his gold watch, and other souvenirs of his life's history.

This Administration building was completed in October, 1891, and for convenience and usability has well stood the test of all the subsequent years. Soon after the purchase of the land, in 1889, Mr. Wanamaker, Chairman of the Building Committee, requested several Philadelphia architects to submit plans, all to be equally compensated whether their work was accepted or not. Of that group, the architects eventually chosen were Furness, Evans & Company. Their final plans for the Administration building, the shops, and two or three of the cottages were largely based on suggestions and drawings offered by Mr. Baird, then President of the Board of Trustees, as the result not only of his long practical experience but of special investigation by Mr. Longstreth and himself of other schools at the time. Carrying out the



founder's idea, Mr. Baird sought to avoid unnecessary ornamentation, to secure simplicity of construction, and the most perfect adaptation possible to the work to be carried on. In these ideas the Board heartily concurred. As granite of an excellent quality had been found on the school tract, it was decided to use that to a large extent, and quarries were opened.

Ground was broken on the first of May, 1890. In the presence of several of the Trustees, architects and contractors, Mr. H. C. Townsend turned over the first earth with a shovel, since kept among the school's trophies. A large force of men was soon put at work excavating, under the contractor, P. E. Jeferis, of West Chester. President Shrigley and Lieutenant Robert Crawford (for several years the enthusiastic and popular Superintendent of the School) gave the building their constant personal attention. On Saturday afternoon, November 8th, the corner-stone was laid, the Board of Trustees being represented by Messrs. Townsend, Longstreth, Brooks and Catherwood. A copper box in the stone contained a historical

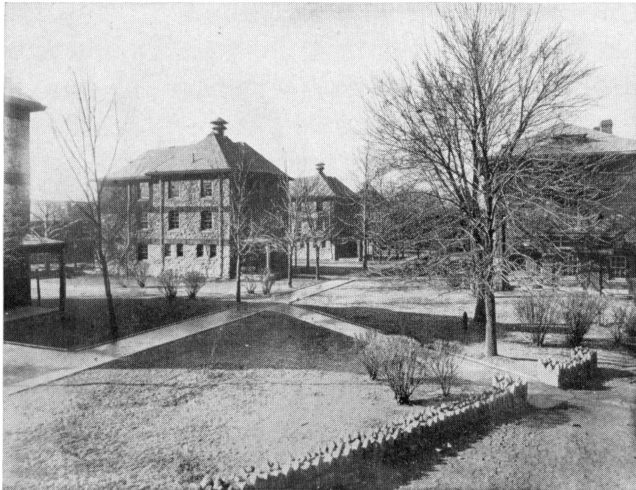
sketch of the School, and copies of the plans, the Will and the Deed of Trust, the names and photographs of all the Trustees, and numerous writings and newspapers bearing upon the history of the enterprise. After Mr. Townsend and Mr. Longstreth had placed the stone in position, and the latter had made a few appropriate remarks regarding Isaiah Williamson and his purpose, the masons cemented the stone in place, and the visitors inspected the grounds and such of the buildings as were then in process of erection.

A year later, in October, 1891, the building was completed and ready for occupancy. Long before that time there had been many applications for admission to the School. Of these, seventy-two young men, in ages from fifteen to eighteen, had successfully passed the entrance examinations, had been enrolled, and since September, had been engaged in regular study and work. The other buildings at this time completed, or nearly so, were the engine and boiler house, Shop No. 1, the Superintendent's residence, and three cottages.

The formal opening of the School occurred on the 31st of October. A special train from



INDUSTRIAL BUILDINGS



APPRENTICES' DORMITORIES



Broad Street carried a distinguished company of guests. They assembled in the auditorium of the Administration building. Samuel B. Huey, one of the Trustees, presided, and prayer was offered by B. B. Comegys. The President of the Board, H. C. Townsend, gave a long, carefully prepared and interesting address, in which he touched upon the history of education in Pennsylvania, and especially of trade schools; the idea of the Williamson School as developed by the donor before his death, and the methods of governing the Trustees; the life and character of Isaiah Williamson from long and intimate acquaintance; and an appropriate appeal to the young men beginning the work of the School's first class. Other addresses were made by Professor George F. Baker, of the University of Pennsylvania, and by John Wanamaker, the latter paying a personal tribute of love to Isaiah Williamson and making it very clear that this was an historic day in more ways than one. Following the exercises the guests inspected the new buildings with great satisfaction.

The first commencement occurred on the

2d of April, 1894. Again a special train brought a large company of prominent people, including the Governor of the State of Pennsylvania and the Mayor of Philadelphia. Of the Trustees, Messrs. Brooks, Catherwood, Longstreth, Townsend and Wanamaker were present. Gathered in the decorated auditorium, Mr. Wanamaker presided, and made the welcoming address, after the opening prayer by the Rev. Dr. H. Clay Trumbull. Addresses were also made by Governor Pattison, Mayor Stuart, Stacy Reeves, president of the Builders' Exchange, and by two members of the graduating class. Prizes and diplomas were distributed to the fifty-nine graduates, whose average age was nineteen.

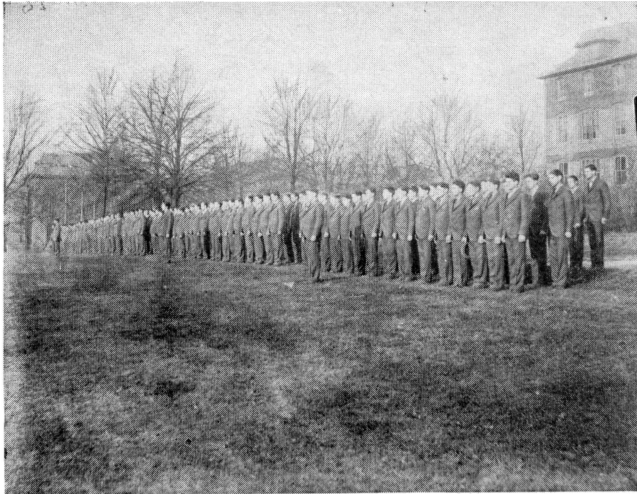
This was the forerunner of a series of brilliant commencements, honored by the presence of eminent men representative of all circles of the professions, commerce and trade. At the second commencement, in 1895, Governor Hastings made the principal address, dwelling upon the history of education in Pennsylvania; followed by J. Howard Wilson, president of the Jackson-Sharp Company, of Wilmington, who, among other things, said

that the graduates of the School could always find positions in his shops. Addresses in similar vein were made by D. M. Anderson, president of the Bricklayers' Protective Association, and George Watson, ex-president of the Master Builders' Exchange. At the third commencement, 1896, the addresses were given by three members of the graduating class, Louis H. Coxe, Lyndon H. Wheeler, and Harry Barton. The attendance was very large in 1897, at the graduation of the fourth class. Mr. Brooks presided, and Mr. Wanamaker made an address in which he said, in urging upon the students to be worthy of their election, that Isaiah Williamson, if he knew, would never be satisfied to have a thousand dollars of his money spent upon a ten-cent boy, which seems to have been wrought into the fundamental work of the School. Among the many distinguished guests present was Jacob Tome, who had recently given more than a million of dollars to establish a similar school at Port Deposit, Maryland. At the fifth commencement (1898), Hampton L. Carson was the speaker of the occasion. The next year, the sixth commencement, 1899, Isaac H.

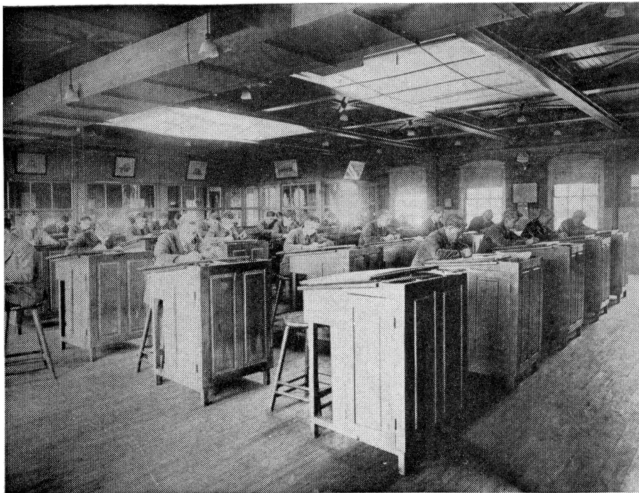
Clothier, of the Board of Trustees, made the address, among other things taking occasion to say that "when the history of this School comes to be written, two names will be associated side by side—the founder and the father, Isaiah V. Williamson; the organizer, the godfather, Edward Longstreth." Again President Shrigley reported the constantly increasing demand for the services of the graduates, a point particularly emphasized some years later at the tenth commencement, by John M. Dodge, president of the Link Belt Engineering Works, of Philadelphia, who said: "Our firm has employed in the past several graduates of the Williamson School, and about the only mistake in the transaction we can now discover is that we did not take more of them." This expressed the general attitude in trade circles. At that time, President Shrigley again reported that it was impossible to supply the demand for graduates; that the first hesitation to employ them had long since passed away, and for years the graduates had usually been engaged before they received their diplomas.

Many letters from graduates are on file,





APPRENTICES AT INSPECTION



A CLASS OF APPRENTICES



telling of their successes and expressing gratitude to the School and its founder, such as the following from a machinist: "I am getting along nicely, making \$100 per month, and expect an advance soon. I never can thank the Williamson School enough for its helping hand. I fully realize that it was the moulding and making of my life and character. Such institutions are scarce in our land, and one appreciates the good done by ours."

## IX

### THE LITTLE MAN OF LARGE SOUL



ON THE 7th of March, 1889, Isaiah V. Williamson journeyed on, and after many days, the city in which he lived woke to some realization of its loss. For eighty-six years he had lived most of his days in Philadelphia, and yet few knew or cared to know him until the last five years of his life. Big men were too busy with their own affairs and little men too narrow to do more than point to him as a shabby, stingy, old man, as if the bent figure and clothes were all of the man or as though the quoting of some one word or act of his indicated the whole of the man. The visible is not always final. Color blindness to character and worth is much more common than the ordinary defective vision. There is nothing simpler than to judge by appearances and burn a human being at the stake of mistaken judgment.

From Fallsington Four Corners' Village

Store to Philadelphia's foremost place as merchant and philanthropist had been a walk of upwards of fourscore years.

From the day he came down the Doyles-town and Old York Road turnpike with his little bundle of two thousand dollars of savings, to begin business in Philadelphia, to the day sixty years later, when he went into the Fidelity Insurance Trust & Safe Deposit Company and voluntarily took out of his iron box two million one hundred thousand dollars in good securities and handed them over to the Trust he had created to establish the new apprenticeship School for young men, that they might ride in his golden chariot of good-will and fatherliness to success, was a long journey of self-denial, frugality, patience, and tireless energy.

It would seem as if every man might, in his own way, be permitted to study himself deeply in peace, especially if the key he seeks and finds is to unlock a gate to the betterment of the world, in his own day, and the time to come for those who follow him.

The country boy just entering into the city today might be another Isaiah V. Williamson,

with a heart that could do even better work than he, if free to choose and use without criticism, the sling and stones he can handle best to fight his battle.

How much the little man from Bucks County, low in stature, high in thinking, deep in feeling, suffered in the forty years of dignity, patience and silence while he was in the wilderness of public opinion, nobody knows. It is only certain that the breath of his neighbors, by prejudice and carping, kept his thermometer close to zero. The obituaries, after the man travelled into the bourne beyond, might have added fuller, brighter, longer years to his life and enabled him to do what he had left undone, if anything like their contents could have been published for him to see while he was walking through the street, conscious of being misunderstood as an unfeeling speculator, if not forgotten altogether.

When the right word is spoken, it will help and not hurt. The poorest little man that lives and does something to help his neighbor is more than the finest bronze statue planted in the park or on the plaza. It is not the gun, but the man behind the gun, that counts. It

is not the money left by Isaiah Williamson but the man back of the money that we want to remember.

All who enjoy such benefactions as this earnest Quaker, and men like him, have given, under conditions that can be accepted by self-respecting young men, should learn to know their benefactor well enough to accord him much more honor than the mere politeness of ordinary gratitude. The man himself can become a living friend to every young man who will stop to think that the past had in it a man who willed his life, his earnings, and his example to them in the hope that thereby he may make the way of life easier for them. Well brought up and cultivated enough to enjoy the luxuries of life, he called himself off from them to a life of great labor and frugality, that he might have the luxury of being their servant.

He set for all young men a splendid example in walking as a youth from his mother's door to the last day of his life on the straight road of unspotted honor, truthfulness and highest integrity. A good beginning makes a good ending.

The great musician, Ole Bull, the first violinist of his time, when playing at the Royal Court, was summoned after one of his matchless performances and asked to explain to the King where he obtained the harmonies he produced upon his instrument. Ole Bull replied: "Sire, I got them in the mountains of my country when I was a boy and I have never forgotten them." Isaiah Williamson never for a day of all his long life lost the sweetness, gentleness, and dignity of his little country Quaker mother, nor did he forget the stalwart, rugged manliness, strict honesty, and fairness of his father.

These stood him in good stead all his life. He was an upright apprentice and never filched his employer's time or goods. He committed thefts neither with his tongue nor with his hands. His fellow clerks were his neighbors' sons; he valued their good opinion and his influence over them.

He did not let the poison get into the spring at the beginning of his life. He started by killing bad habits in the germ, by choking them in his thoughts when the temptation was young. Sure enough, the man that picks a



lock or breaks open a cash drawer does it first in his thoughts before he gets through the door where it is.

Young Williamson despised shams and make-believes. He never kept bad company. If he could not have friends of the best class, he preferred to be without any.

He planned his life and always worked towards the object he had before him.

There were no riddles in his life. The results were answers to tireless thinking and toiling.

At the end of his life, there were no old judgments of any kind recorded against him to be satisfied or documents to be destroyed.

The Honorable Wayne MacVeagh, in an eloquent address, on the occasion of the dedication of the Drexel Institute at Philadelphia, said in commendation of Anthony J. Drexel's gift, that not a penny of the money given by Drexel represented ill-gotten gains. These words, so true of Drexel, are absolutely true of Isaiah V. Williamson's wealth.

It is to be remembered, too, that all his money was of his own earning. He had not inherited any business established by his

parents. He was the sole architect and maker of his own great fortune.

His methods of business were beyond criticism or reproach. While scrupulously exact, strictly claiming all that was fairly his right, he would take nothing more, always keeping clear of enterprises that bordered on sharp practices or uncertain foundations, counting the loss of possible gains as nothing to the risk of staining his good name.

He had a curious habit of holding up in his office the propositions that were made to him. Instead of following an impulse or yielding to importunity for a quick decision, he deferred his conclusions by saying, "I must take time to think of this a little further." He would walk all round the proposition and look at it from all sides before he would act.

Stradivarius, the greatest of violin-makers of the olden time, it is said on good authority, used to go out into the forests and cut pieces of wood from half a hundred trees. These pieces he began testing and kept on trying until the last vestige of sap dried out and the elasticity of the wood became no longer a factor. Then he knew the wood. He knew

that the violin he made would ring true, not in the present alone, but in the centuries to come. He built his violins to sing down through the ages, true and fine and sweet. He began right.

So did Isaiah Williamson begin right and, therefore, he was half done when he began. He never forgot to complete the details before he laid down any work he took up.

His life was not a drab monotony of money-grabbing, as some people supposed. Without going too much into detail, it will doubtless be of interest to quote a few paragraphs from the Philadelphia daily newspapers, called forth by Isaiah Williamson's brief sickness, sudden death, the failure to sign the codicil, and the publication of his will.

The *Evening Telegraph* said in its editorial columns: "When a Rothschild, a Girard, or a Williamson dies, it is a public rather than a private event. No one would here wish in the least to intrude upon privacy; but we all know the noble thoughts which have filled Mr. Williamson's heart, and what he fully meant to do;—that being the simple fact, the desire to know how completely his wishes are

to be carried out is entirely natural. A short time probably will settle all uncertainty, but in the meanwhile Philadelphians can unite in a feeling commemoration of one of their most generous citizens. Nor will the reputation of his great undertaking be only local. As the name of Girard is national, so will the name of Isaiah V. Williamson be familiar all over the land as one who loved his fellowmen, and who held exceptional wealth only in trust for the general good."

"His plan, it will be observed," said the *Evening Herald*, "was not a scheme of almsgiving, as humiliating to honest poverty as it would be injurious to the indolent, but was intended to help men to use their own energies and to aid them in self-reliance and self-respect. This is the soul of benevolence, and one of the best means whereby men of wealth can assist in the onward march of humanity. The lesson of the life just ended is complete in itself; but should his design of establishing his great school be carried on in its fullness, thousands who owe him a happier, fuller life will yet call the name of Williamson blessed."

From several columns in the Philadelphia

*Press*, this paragraph is fairly representative: "The general idea of Mr. Williamson was plainly that he was a miser; that he lived for the sake of money-getting, denying himself all luxuries, and even many comforts; that until the great project of his industrial school was formed and the trust deeds given to the trustees his charities were few; and that he lived a lonely, crabbed life, loving no one and loved by only a few. His intimate friends deny all such assertions, and point to the fact that he had given nearly a million and a half to charities and institutions since 1876, as a complete refutation of such statements. It is known also that his heart was one of the tenderest, and his nature genial. He had a streak of humor in him, but his religious propensities were never prominent."

The newspapers printed a number of amusing stories, to illustrate his so-called "miserliness" in the last few years of his life, most of which were either untrue or grossly exaggerated, and insofar as true were merely eccentricities of what was really a lovable old age. He was pictured as a little, weasened old man, walking slowly through the streets

around Bank and Elbow Lane, with bowed head and hands behind his back, carrying the same old umbrella with its years of associations, and plainly absorbed in deep thought. It was represented that except on rare occasions when he put on his old high hat and "best suit" to go to Clover Hill or elsewhere, he was usually seen in the same old suit, well worn, even shabby and ragged; and wearing a disreputable derby hat pulled well down to his ears, his thin white hair straggling out under its brim. And if Henry Lewis, or some other intimate friend, ventured a bantering remark: "I. V., you ought to get a new suit of clothes!" he would remark in the same facetious vein: "What's the matter with these? Don't they fit me all right?"

He was described in his little dingy back office, on Bank Street, where he spent thirty-five years or so, with its plain desk, three or four old trunks—relics of the European trip—stuffed with records and papers, its bare walls, and its general air of being a catch-all for rubbish—including the very shabby handbag in which the particular papers of the day were carried back and forth between the office

and the trust company's vaults. He was pictured, also, as the strange being who would go into a restaurant and get a five-cent lunch, or haggle with the woman at the sandwich counter to let him have six ten-cent sandwiches, one a day for a week, for a lump sum of fifty cents; and then would hasten back to his office to sign a check for \$5000 or \$10,000 for some charity.

In a little cubby-hole of a barber shop on Elbow Lane, it was said, he used to indulge in a weekly shave; but when the barber suggested that he needed a haircut, he replied with infinite gentleness that his niece cut his hair twice a year. For other sample stories, it was related that when he was summering at a hotel in one of the beautiful and fashionable suburbs of Philadelphia toward the end of his life, he used to bring back his soiled linen wrapped in a newspaper, as he could get his laundry done a few cents cheaper in town than at the hotel. Also, that when he found extortionate bus fare between the hotel and the station added to the first week's bill, which he had paid in advance, he refused to ride in the bus again, and walked back and forth

every day thereafter, rain and mud to the contrary notwithstanding. And attention was called to the fact that, although he was immensely wealthy, he kept no carriage of his own until the very last year or two when he was unable to walk, and that he did not incur the expense of his own coupé and personal attendant until he was simply forced to it by his physical feebleness.

Now, in a way, these very eccentricities of old age make his character more interesting, and even more lovable. The simple fact is that he liked his old clothes; he liked his old office furnished with old desks, trunks and shelves, and having the associations of so many years. He liked the old umbrella and the shabby hand-bag. He felt "at home" with them all, just as he felt at home with his old friends. And really there is nothing strange about this. Old people generally feel that way, in their homes as in their offices, not as a matter of economy necessarily, but of personal comfort and ease of mind.

No doubt he disliked conventionalities; but it is not as if he were slovenly regarding personal care of himself. Those who were



near to him are emphatic on this point. It is true that in later years Williamson, finding that two meals a day agreed better with his health, ate usually two or three graham wafers or a sandwich at noon. Thousands of middle-aged and elderly men today do the same thing regularly, not primarily for economy but for physical and mental vigor. That is what Williamson thought. He had studied the laws of health in general and of his own health in particular; and he used to say what is now being so much emphasized by scientists, physicians and the people's newspapers: "People eat too much!"

As to the reply to the barber about having his hair cut, even if he ever said it, it is quite conceivable that he was having his little joke. All through life ran that vein of gentle, quiet humor, one of the sure signs of a nature full of feeling, and without which it is very doubtful if any man can be truly great, least of all a philanthropist. Humor lies next to pathos, and the one who can appreciate the humorous element in life is the one that most quickly responds to its pathetic side.

It was this sense of humor that made him

instantly responsive to a good story, or led him often to express himself in a droll or unexpected way. When he was wheeled into the directors' meetings of the big corporations he would call out: "A clear track for the through express!" Mr. Helmbold says that in the frequent visits to the vaults of the safe department of a trust company, where he kept his securities, he would exclaim to the clerks in charge, as he was slowly wheeled in: "Make way, make way! Here I come with my usual impetuosity!" And there was a pathetic touch in his humorous remarks to H. C. Townsend toward the end of his life, when they met one day in the office of the Cambria Iron Company. Isaiah Williamson had in his hand a check for \$100,000, and when Mr. Townsend rallied him on its size, he asked:

"Do you want to earn that check?"

"I'm your man!"

"Make me a young man again!"

As to the eccentric way in which he protested at what he deemed extortion in the suburban hotel, there is another side to that story, which the papers did not get hold of. While he refused to use the hotel's convey-

ance again, he established a friendship with the driver and engaged him to take him on short drives in the evening on his own account. The fare would be twenty-five or fifty cents, according to the time out; but Isaiah Williamson invariably gave the driver a dollar, on the first occasion explaining his act in such words as these:

“You have earned what you charged me, and I have no right to dictate to you what you shall do with your earnings. But what I give you over your earnings I have earned, and have a right to speak about. I don't want you to waste it, but take it home to your wife and put it to good use.”

The driver has said that this lesson in thrift and saving taught him by the eccentric hotel guest proved of great help to him in later years. And it is fair to presume that this was only one of many similar instances of personal influence which never came to light. How many lives he stimulated in his quiet way we have no means of knowing.

Speaking of his private carriage, it is true that in the latter part of his life, until he became too feeble, he was a confirmed pedes-

trian. He was fond of walking. Occasionally he took a cab or a carriage for some special reason, though generally he used the street cars if going some distance. But as his activities were chiefly confined within a few blocks of his office, such as daily visits to the Stock Exchange and the trust company, he preferred walking as a matter of convenience as well as of health. He was simply doing what he liked to do, entirely aside from any question of economy. That was his old-fashioned way, and it was one reason of his lengthened vigor and activity.

An editorial in the *Public Ledger* of April 12th, after the inventory of the Williamson estate had been filed, ridiculed the suggestion of miserliness: "The *living* man, if he is inclined to be 'miserly,' does not give away money in millions, in thousands, in hundreds, or even in tens. The 'miser' hoards money and *keeps* it; and he hoards it for the sole *purpose* of keeping it as long as he lives—just as long as he can. He never gives away any of it for charitable purposes or any other. What a monstrous misapplication of terms it therefore is to couple such words as 'close-

fisted,' 'mean,' or 'miserly' with the name of Isaiah Williamson, who distributed, while he was yet alive and might have had other uses for the money, four millions in charitable gifts for almost every form of benefaction that would relieve the suffering, that would help the needy, that would shelter the houseless and homeless, that would succor and support the helpless, that would stimulate talent by education, that would encourage the worthy, that would reward merit, that would build up industry, that would enlighten and uplift the rising generation of working! ”

These incidents have been dwelt upon to bring Isaiah Williamson's personality more vividly to mind, and to show his large-heartedness. To the last there was a certain boyishness in the standing order to George, his attendant and coachman, to buy every Saturday a supply of candy and apples, the candy for his master's own use, and the apples for the horse. And the story goes that certain horses on the street learned to look for his coming, to pat their noses and feed them bits of broken apple.

He used to say that no man could be a

good Christian who was not kind to animals, for "Christianity teaches love and kindness to man and beast."

His thoughtfulness also for the men about him was well known and characteristic, showing many kindnesses to such helpers as his coachman, and the janitor of the building in which he had his office so long. This office was in the store of Samuel W. Roop, commission merchant, afterward the firm of Roop & Washington, and later Billings, Roop & Washington. From 1850 to 1881 Mr. Williamson was a special partner, or had money invested in this firm, under its different names. One of the men who entered Roop's store in 1853, as a young clerk, and met Williamson intimately for about thirty years thereafter, says that in all those years "he never saw such an even and sweet-tempered gentleman"; and he gives a bit of personal experience that is illuminating. It seems that along about 1877, Williamson noticed that this man appeared very despondent, and upon inquiry learned that he was worried over certain losses in the business, in which he was at this time one of the partners. Williamson said to him:

“Brooding over losses is not the way to make money. It unfits you for future business. You must not look back over the gloomy past.” Going to his safe, Williamson brought out a bundle of papers, saying: “That bundle represents hundreds of thousands of dollars which I have lost—much of it through misplaced confidence in friends. The worst of it was, I not only lost the money but in many cases the friendship, and yet I never in my life sued a man for a debt. And so, of late years, I have resolved never to loan a man money without taking security; then I am sure not to lose both my money and the man’s friendship. But I am going to break this rule with you, my friend. Tell me how much money you need to tide you over, and you shall have it.”

All this shows that the way in which the Philadelphia *Record* pictured Mr. Williamson the year before he died is the more accurate delineation. Its sketch closes in this way: “As a capitalist he has been identified with a large number of commercial, financial and railroad enterprises. In all he has been a director. That he has been earnestly solicited

to accept the presidency of many, that his remarkable executive ability, his singular magnetic influence, and his unswerving integrity have been appreciated, everybody knows; but his refusal as a rule to take the first place is interesting because it is the key to the man's nature. That nature may be read in a face which retains in a surpassing degree its original sweetness and purity of expression. The marks with which the battle of business life scars most faces, can be traced in his only in the 'busy wrinkles,' not 'round' but at the corners of 'the eyes.' Intelligence of a high order, with blended firmness and gentleness, are to be read in Mr. Williamson's features, and in his expression the simplicity and modesty which have ever made distasteful to him all display, whether of the wealth he has amassed or the millions he has already bestowed in charity."

There are not many ten talent men to be found in one's lifetime, here and there one of two talents and the majority of men possess but one talent or even a half talent, much out of repair from non-use. The story of Isaiah



Williamson's life is the word of an honest man, speaking modestly and kindly to us, saying, "Here is what I did with my one talent. I found myself with few tools but I made all the use of them possible for nearly a century. My first books were the fields and forests and my first and best teachers were the Quaker mother and father, whose lessons of principle and practice were the sheet anchors of my life. They knew what a shy boy needed and they gave it to me, not so much in words as in deeds; it was their gentleness, patience and religion, of which they never spoke, that I absorbed in our home more than anything in the Fallsington Meeting House or St. Peter's Church, at Third and Pine Streets. From them I learned not to be idle, not to hurry and how to work and to save. They taught me that the way to have anything to spend or give away was to first put it into storage and never to take out as much as I put in.

"From a godly father and mother, I learned that looking silently and inwardly at myself, I would find a light from heaven and that meditation led to prayer and guidance.

“ I found that obedience to the truth given to me answered my desire to be shown the path for my life.

“ So did my mother’s and father’s hands rest upon my head all my long life. My calling was only to do common things, which I tried to do humbly, but in an uncommon way. My work was to me as sacred as it would have been had I been called to teach or work upon canvas or stone.

“ When I fully understood the talent I possessed, I regarded it as a crowning of power, not for self, and I consecrated it to Him who gave it to me to uplift the man and boy next to me as far as I could reach.

“ In my business life, I never used my sickle to cut down a fellow man. I never lent a hand to help scuttle another’s ship.

“ I never made haste to be rich.

“ I nursed the money-making instinct as God’s gift and rooted myself where it grew as the one thing given to me to study and work with, but I lived in another room without idols of any kind.

“ To me, great riches meant more hos-

pitals, homes for aged and incurables, more schools and colleges, institutions for industrial education.”

So speaks the little man of large soul out of the solitariness of his life; but for every man good and true, young or old, struggling to do his best work, there is an open door between earth and heaven.

A well-known Englishman, maker of tiles and pottery, who had risen from poverty to wealth, built for himself a magnificent palace in the midst of a great park of forest trees and botanical gardens. His fences were made with open gates that his many work-people might go in and out and enjoy the noble house and its grounds, fountains, pavilions and galleries, and find pleasure and education in its beauties.

Mr. Williamson has built nobly and none need go away without a piece of wholesome bread.

THE END

## APPENDIX A

In the original project of his biography Mr. Wanamaker intended to include voluminous extracts from the diaries and family correspondence of Isaiah Williamson. But in the end he decided to include as an appendix only a few letters, written between 1876 and 1879. These, he felt, would illustrate the human side of Isaiah Williamson at a time when the writer of the letters was growing old and had amassed great wealth.

Philada., Feby. 12th, 1876.

Dear Brother:—

I have been thinking that during the winter is perhaps the best time to buy a Horse, and if you think "old Black" will not be able to do duty the coming Summer, I wish to propose to you that if you will buy a good, quiet, safe and suitable Horse for such *old fellows* as you and I to ride behind, at a price not exceeding \$200, that I will pay for him. I at first thought I would say "*buy a Horse and I will pay for him,*" but then it occurred to me that you might go and buy a \$20,000 Horse that would trot a mile in *two minutes* or *less*, which neither of us would feel at home in riding after; in truth such an one might take us a *great way from home* contrary to our wishes. Then the question arises, if you get another Horse what will be done with "old Black."

You would not like to sell him for fear he might get into possession of some Huckster of Fish or other things, who would not appreciate him as we do, and starve and abuse him; and I do not suppose you would like to kill him; so the question to me is difficult of solution.

I heard from brother John's widow a few days since who, in acknowledging receipt of check sent her, stated they were all well.

The weather here today is delightful and makes us think of the near approach of Spring. When I next visit "Clover Hill" I expect it will be by the new R. R.,— as they expect to commence running during April, the "Frog and Bridge War" to the contrary notwithstanding. Give my love to Anna Mary and Emily, and tell Anna Mary I should like to have a letter from her.

Your affectionate Brother

I. V. WILLIAMSON.

(The "Frog and Bridge War" mentioned in this letter, is a reference to the effort which the Pennsylvania Railroad was making to prevent the new Bound Brook line from running between Philadelphia and New York.)

Philadelphia, Oct. 11th, 1876.

Dear Brother:—

Please meet Clinton and myself at *Langhorne Station* on Saturday next (14th inst.) at 4 O'clock P. M., as we expect to be there by that time.

I was at the "Centennial Exhibition" this morning, and "*finished it up*" in precisely 2 hours and 35 minutes. Talk about spending 3 or 4 weeks on it is all humbug; there is nothing like going at it in earnest and doing it up at once.

Yours affectionately,

I. V. WILLIAMSON.

Philada., Feby. 24, 1877.

My dear Anna Mary:—

For a long time past I have been counting the months, weeks, and even the days, until the weather will probably be pleasant enough for me to visit "Clover Hill." I long to see Nature in her New Spring Bonnet and Dress. Although she makes no change in Colors and Styles from year to year, with Bustles, Chignons, etc., as do our Fashionable Chestnut St. Belles, still her style is always neat, in good taste, and beautiful. I think she must belong to "Friends Meeting."

I never could understand why so many people sacrifice time, talent and money to obtain *Copies* of Nature, when the *originals* which ought to be, and are, so much more beautiful, are open and free to all without money and without price. What I refer to more particularly is that numbers of persons will travel all over Europe visiting the different Galleries for the purpose in a great measure of seeing the most celebrated Pictures, many of which are Landscapes and Marine Views, while in numerous cases they pass by the originals (in seeking the Copies) without even a passing notice. Suppose one of the most celebrated Artists of Europe, or of the World, were to paint a Landscape from a view taken on the line of Rail Road between this City and Pittsburg where thousands of persons pass daily, and place the *Copy* on exhibition in this City, there would probably be ten persons to see the *Copy* where there would be one that would *see*, or *look for*, the *original*; and what makes it the more surprising that this should be so, is that *God* is the Author and *Man* the Artist.

I often think of the old adage, "*Once a man and*

*twice a child,"* and how fully it has been verified in my own case. When I first left home, and for many, *very* many years thereafter, nothing gave me so much real pleasure and enjoyment as to visit Home; but after becoming immersed in business this Home feeling gradually died out, and for a long time I felt very little interest in the scenes of my boyhood. But *now* this Home feeling is returning *stronger* and *stronger* every year, and for the present and sometime past nothing gives me more real pleasure than to visit Home, which I now call "Clover Hill."

I have received several letters from you since I last wrote, and I assure you they have given me a *great deal of pleasure*; the first letter opened when I receive my mail is the one with the "Oxford Valley P.O." stamp, should there fortunately be one such.

Write whenever you have time, and do not wait for me, as my time is so fully occupied that I have very little time for anything but business. I would like to receive a letter from you every week.

Yours affectionately,

I. V. WILLIAMSON.

Philada., Mch. 16, 1877.

My Dear Anna Mary:—

What's in a name? They say "A Rose by any other name would smell as sweet." I was forcibly reminded of this a few days since when called upon to sign a petition to the North Penna. R.R. authorities to establish a Station at "*Glen Lake*." I was not in the office when the party called; he left the Paper, and when I signed it I said to Clinton that I had never heard of a Lake in that

vicinity and thought it must be a " *Mill Pond* "; which sure enough the party when he returned for the Paper said it was somebody's " *Mill Pond.*" I suppose the Glen-Lakeians intend to erect there a fine Hotel and make it a fashionable watering place; and instead of going to Atlantic City or Cape May during the Summer I can visit Glen Lake every other week, to bathe in its pure waters and amuse myself in Fishing for Bull Frogs, etc., and sailing on its placid waters. Of course they will have Sail-Boats, Yachts, etc., for the accommodation of visitors. How convenient it will be for *me particularly*, and I feel grateful to its projectors.

I think the old Residents of the County would understand the location better if the Glen Lakers had connected the name of a former owner of the Mill-Dam with their Lake—as " *Lake-Carlisle,*" " *Lake Sutton,*" " *Lake-Satterthwaite,*" etc.; then I for one would know pretty near where to find them.

When it is generally known by residents of the City that you have a " *Glen Lake* " in your vicinity, convenient of access by Rail Road, I should not be surprised if there would be a great demand for building sites for summer residences on the margin of Glen Lake; indeed it may increase the value of Land for miles around. Tell your Papa he ought to increase the price of " *Clover Hill* " ten dollars per acre at least.

Your last Letter of the 26th ultimo was duly received, for which I feel most grateful. Write soon again and often, telling me all the news, *particularly* about the success of the subscriptions to the new Reading Room, Library, etc., etc.

My general health is very good, and I am looking forward to the coming of warm and pleasant weather



with fond anticipation. It is now snowing here a little—I suppose the commencement of the annual “St. Patrick Day’s storm.”

Remember me to Emily; tell “Old Black” I long to see him; and believe me

Yours very affectionately,

I. V. WILLIAMSON.

Philada., Jany. 28, 1878.

My dear Anna Mary:—

Your most welcome Letters have *all* been received, and I *feel* and *confess* that I have been very remiss (unexcusably so) in not replying to them as a faithful and prompt correspondent should have done; but you know the ordinary excuse of business men for neglecting such duties, and you must allow me to avail myself of that, although I do not think that in many cases it is sufficient. However if you really knew the great pleasure it gives me to receive a Letter from “Clover Hill,” I will tell you what I think you would do; you would say to yourself, “Well! there is that old Bachelor uncle of mine whose time is fully occupied with business matters, and who *I know fully appreciates* my Letters. I don’t think I can do anything better than to afford him the pleasure of receiving one every *two weeks at least*, even if he should (for want of time) neglect to answer them.” And then to confirm the arrangement, I will imagine I hear one foot fall heavily to the floor, accompanied with the expression, “I’ll do it.” It is rather a one-sided bargain, but under all the circumstances I hope and believe you will come to the conclusion to carry it out to the *Letter*, or *Letters*. As a general thing I have *really* been *very* busy

since I saw you last, and I find that *Age* is beginning to claim its rights, as I discover that I cannot accomplish as much in the same time as I could *thirty years ago*.

I think of you all every day almost (*not* excepting "old Black") and imagine you all seated in the cosy little Sitting Room around the stove (excepting "old Black") discussing the news of the day and wondering if there will be Ice enough this winter to fill the "Ice House." It really begins to look a little dubious, although I believe some Ice has been gathered here from the Ponds during the last cold "snap."

My health thus far during the winter has been generally good; we have had as yet very little cold weather and scarcely any Snow. I suppose in the Country you are obliged to substitute *mud for snow*.

I visit Cousin Peter's about once a week; they are as well as usual. Had I known two or three days before Christmas that it would be as pleasant and mild as it proved to be, I think I should have written your Papa to meet me at Woodburn Station on that morning.

I enclose the result of Mr. Shaeffer's experience in raising different kinds of Potatoes, thinking perhaps your Papa may wish to avail himself of it before I see him. I did not receive it until after my last visit to the Country.

Oh! how I long for the time when I can write your Papa, "Please meet me at Woodburn on Saturday next, etc., etc." I like Springtime in the Country, with its Green Fields and Trees, and Singing Birds, and particularly its necessary accompaniment, "*Warm Weather*."

I hope you will ratify and confirm my proposed arrangement by writing *soon* and *very* often to your most affectionate *Old Uncle*.

Remember me most kindly to Emily, and I hope it will not be very long before we all meet again at "Clover Hill" and have a drink together of "*Lemonade with Ice*"—Adieu.

I. V. WILLIAMSON.

( $\frac{1}{2}$  past 7 P.M. at office)

Philada., Feby. 27, 1879.

My dear Anna Mary:—

Your most welcome letter of 19th Inst., as well as many others of previous dates, have all been recd., and you may be assured have all been highly appreciated. My Conscience smites me when I receive your Letters and think that you are doing all the correspondence for my exclusive benefit, without any return whatever on my part; and can only offer the old and stale excuse, which I fear you are heartily tired of hearing, that I *am* and *have been* very busy since I last saw you. I have quite as much or more to do than heretofore, but the great trouble now is that it takes me much longer to do the same amount of business than it required a few years ago; my sight is failing and am getting *old*; the 4th Feby. was my 76th Birthday. However, my general health is good and has been during the winter; scarcely a day but I have been able to attend to business; for all which I feel extremely thankful. You have kept me posted in regard to the Library and I agree with you fully in regard to the name of the "Hall," which had I been consulted would have objected to decidedly. I think of you all daily and am counting the months, weeks, and even the days, when I shall have the pleasure of seeing you. I have thought a great deal about your suggested visit to "Florida" to spend a

winter. *Wouldn't it be nice*, or even as the Boys say, "*Bully*," for us *seven* (I mean you and your Papa, Emily, myself, Old Black, Minnie and Grant)<sup>1</sup> to go down there and take a little Cottage to spend the winter. If I had the leisure I think it would be well worth taking into serious consideration. Having a Cottage or even a Log House to ourselves we should be perfectly independent, particularly so as we should have our own Horse, Cat and Dog. In a little over two months now, if nothing occurs to prevent, you will be received every two weeks Letters saying, "Please meet me at Woodburn Station on Saturday P.M.," signed I. V. Williamson.

P.S. Write often and keep me informed of all that is transpiring, as I feel a great interest in all that is going on in "old Bucks."

Yours affectionately,

I. V. W.

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<sup>1</sup>"Minnie" was the cat, and "Grant" the dog.

## APPENDIX B

Sources from which Mr. Wanamaker drew the data for the life of his old friend were many and varied. Aside from his visits to Bucks County, his general reading on the subject of Philadelphia and its mercantile life in the decades immediately preceding his own career, and his personal contact with Isaiah Williamson, the biographer's sources were as follows:

1. Diaries and letters of Isaiah V. Williamson.
2. Notes by Mr. Helmbold, Mr. Williamson's secretary, concerning his employer's habits and philanthropies.
3. Mr. Wanamaker's own autograph notes of conversations with Alfred Helmbold, and Frank Williamson, "regarding Isaiah V. Williamson."
4. Ms. biographical data of Williamson family, including many letters, and the will of William Williamson, filed January 22, 1721.
5. Account book of Isaiah V. Williamson.
6. Collection of mementoes of Isaiah V. Williamson.
7. One bound scrap book containing numerous newspaper clippings about Isaiah V. Williamson, and packages of news articles of various dates.
8. Collection of biographical data prepared by the *Evening Telegraph* staff at the time of Mr. Williamson's death in 1889.

9. Mass of data concerning the will of Isaiah V. Williamson.
10. Correspondence concerning the foundation and early history of the Williamson School, in which Mr. Wanamaker played an active rôle.
11. Collection of pamphlets, catalogues, and other printed matter concerning the Williamson School from its foundation to the date the biography was written.







