

## TOMBS OF ENGLISH ARTISTS.

No. 8.—RICHARD COSWAY, R.A.

ANCIENT ART seems to have known no such persons as "fashionable painters;" men followed Art then because they felt their genius impel them to the course; and they were rewarded by fame or fortune, as their works compelled patrons to reverence the talent they displayed. Their genius made the laws which all others have followed: and how powerful they were in their strength of mind, and pure independence of action, our museums and galleries of Art can show. "Fashionable" artists, butterflies of an era, are of a totally different genus; called into practice by the sickly taste of over-refinement, they trim nature as a Dutch gardener does his trees, with a foolish notion of improving her; yet although their errors often are solely on the side of elegance, they are offensive to educated tastes by an exaggeration of refinement and beauty, and their works consequently do not possess the vigour and vitality which can carry them beyond the patronage of their own day.

Cosway, with much ability, and with a host of friends among the titled and wealthy—commanding the highest prices, and living as luxuriously as a prince, is already more than half forgotten. A refined draughtsman, and a patient manipulator, his works suited the boudoir of the beauty, or the cabinet of the *dilettanti*; but the people of this world are fashioned in a rougher mould, and the "faultless monsters" of the pencil, with their conventional prettiness, must endure the fate of other "Cynthias of the minute;" they are to Art what the rhymes of a "Rosa Matilda" are to poetry—insipidity is the most fatal quality in either art; the errors of power are more readily forgiven by the world than those of weakness. Between Barry and Cosway how great is the distance; yet the former starved over his great works, while the latter lived nobly on his little ones. They pass from the scene of their trials or their pleasures, and an unbiassed justice reverses the doom under which they lived.

It must not, however, be imagined that Cosway's talent is here denied—he had much; but he had not that higher gift of genius that will give enduring fame to an artist's work after his death, though it obtain for him friends and fortune during his life. These remarks more naturally arise when speaking of him, because his position was so eminently above other and greater English artists. His career was a remarkable one, and might have secured enduring fame had he been less self-satisfied, and less under the influence of the false "refinements" of a taste that strove to "throw a perfume o'er the violet." Brought up in Devonshire, he seems to have led the life of an ordinary country lad; neglecting the teaching of his father, a schoolmaster at Tiverton (where Richard was born in 1740), and taking to drawing at all opportunities, by the time he had reached the age of thirteen he had shown so much ability that he was placed under Hudson, the master of Sir Joshua Reynolds, the expense being defrayed by a rich uncle until he was enabled to obtain employment, which soon came, for his drawings were always possessed of that refinement of *chiaroscuro* and minuteness of finish that chiefly delight the half-educated patrons of Art. He was employed to make drawings of heads for shops, fancy miniatures, subjects for snuff-boxes, for the jewellers; "and," says J. T. Smith, "from the money he gained, and the gaiety of the company he kept, he rose from one of the dirtiest of boys to one of the smartest of men."

Life was henceforth one long success to him. He studied no more of Art than would enable him to please the tastes of his patrons, and they came in never-ceasing succession. Wealth followed rapidly to the courtly artist, and he spent it lavishly on his establishment, which soon rivalled that of a nobleman. He delighted in dress to an extent that made him the subject of caricature.\* Smith has left us his remembrance of Cosway, "full dressed, in his sword and bag, with a small three-cornered hat on the

\* The best of these were drawn by Dighton, engraved in mezzotint by Earlom, and published by Bowles and Carver, then the most popular print-publishers. It is called "The Macaroni Painter," and represents Cosway in the most fashionable costume of the day, as worn by that class of fops then called "Macaronis" (from a style of dress imported by a silly English nobleman from Italy), employed on the portrait of another fop even more extravagantly dressed.

top of his powdered *toupee*, and a mulberry silk coat profusely embroidered with scarlet strawberries."

His marriage with a lady born in Italy\* increased his taste for display; for she gave large parties, to which the nobility and the heir-apparent came. She was herself an excellent artist, on a par with her husband, and, like him, attached solely to the extreme refinements of Art. Their house is described

as most luxuriously furnished, overloaded with buhl and marqueterie, carpeted and hung with the best products from the looms of Persia and France; sculpture, bronzes, china, and choice articles of *vertu* crowded the tables and cabinets. At this time he lived at the corner of Stratford Place, Oxford Street, in what was then considered one of the best London mansions. To give effect to the entrance to this



COSWAY'S HOUSE.

stately group of houses, the architect had placed figures of lions on each side of the street; this gave occasion to some wicked wit to draw an unpleasant comparison between the painter inside, and the lion outside his residence, in these rhymes:—

"When a man to a fair for a show brings a lion,  
'Tis usual a monkey the sign-post to tie on;  
But here the old custom reversed is seen,  
For the lion's without, and the monkey's within."

Cosway was not happy in all his splendour. He felt the sneers of his brother artists, who, possessing much greater ability, never secured a tithe of his patronage. As he grew older, he became querulous, and his vanity increased so greatly that he reported imaginary conversations he fancied he held with the great of old, who came to compliment his genius. He desired to be buried with Rubens, at Antwerp, as the only artist in talent and princely tastes



COSWAY'S MONUMENTAL TABLET.

worthy to be his fellow in the grave; but fate ordered otherwise, and he lies in the vaults of Marylebone Church. His death occurred in 1821, while taking a drive in a carriage, in his eightieth year. A monument was erected to his memory by his

widow, who soon afterwards left England for her native Italy. The sculpture represents a medallion of Cosway, surrounded by figures of genii, emblematic of Art, Taste, and Genius, thus alluded to in the lines beneath:—

\* Her maiden name was Maria Hadfield, and her parents were English hotelkeepers, who had become wealthy. On the death of her father, her mother returned to England, and introduced her daughter to Angelica Kauffman, and thus she became known to Cosway; at his death she returned to Italy, and kept a ladies' school at Lodi.

"Art weeps, Taste mourns, and Genius drops the tear,  
O'er him so long they loved, who slumbers here.  
While colours last, and time allows to give  
The all-resembling grace, his name shall live."

F. W. FAIRHOLT.