

TOMBS OF ENGLISH ARTISTS.

No. 10.—THOMAS GAINSBOROUGH, R.A.

BRITISH ART is well typified in the person of Gainsborough. His earliest studies were in his native Suffolk fields; his latest in the metropolis, where his talent assumed its highest position. About all his works there is a striking earnestness, and the discrimination of true genius, which casts no dishonest reflex from courtly to cottage life. Gainsborough's peasants are true peasants, they are not the refined and unnatural beings who seem but aristocrats in disguise, such as occasionally emanate from the ateliers of fashionable artists, and which never existed but in their fertile brains. Gainsborough's cottage children can be appreciated for their truth, by cottagers as well as connoisseurs in Art; they bear the impress of nature—the same nature that laughs in such abundance of beauty in his rich landscapes.

Gainsborough's boyish years were spent at Sudbury, in Suffolk. His early bias was so strongly toward Art that he was allowed to follow it. His sketches were of the most vigorous and truthful kind. At the early age of fourteen he left his native place for London, that he might there obtain the instruction he required to finish what nature had begun. He studied under two artists, who are now principally known from the drawings they contributed to the adornment of books. One was Francis Hayman, a friend and companion of Hogarth; the other was Henry Gravelot: and those who are conversant with the editions of popular authors, published at the earlier half of the last century, will frequently meet with their names at the corners of frontispieces and copper-plates. They were industrious men, but "the ingenious Mr. Hayman," as the booksellers often termed him, and Gravelot, the designer of mythic groups for encyclopædias, were not the men to do much for the genius of Gainsborough, except to teach him the mere manipulation of Art—a valuable thing in its way to a country lad, but not of sufficient importance to affect his style. He returned to his father's house after four years' residence in London, and went back to Nature as his school-mistress. Before he reached his majority he married; the match was not so imprudent as it at first sight appears: the young lady had an annuity of two hundred pounds, and the rent of the house they first inhabited at Ipswich was but six pounds per year. At Ipswich he remained for many years, but was induced about the year 1758 to go to the then great seat of fashion—Bath. He was now thirty-one years of age, his portraits procured him much employ, his prices were gradually raised, and he became a prosperous man. From this time his prosperity never ceased, and the calm tenor of his way leaves nothing for the biographer to record, except that he left Bath for London in 1774; coming to one of the best houses in Pall Mall, and dividing some share of the fashionable patronage bestowed on the president of the Royal Academy. A prosperous man's career is soon told.

Gainsborough's personal appearance was striking; he was a noble, gentlemanly man. His relaxation was music, in which he was a proficient; he would part with money or pictures for a favourite violin; and his house was always open to the musical profession. The profoundest feelings of his nature could be elated by "the concord of sweet sounds;" and a tale is told of the painter and Colonel Hamilton being once together, when the colonel, who was a first-rate violinist, played so exquisitely, that tears of pleasure rolled down the cheeks of the excited artist, who rewarded him by the gift of one of his best pictures, with which no money could previously induce him to part.

His studio in Pall Mall was "a most admired disorder" of old and new sketches, musical instruments, and all the odds and ends of an artist's room; after his death his widow arranged his works therein, which consisted of one hundred and fifty drawings and fifty pictures.

The house in which Gainsborough resided from 1777 to 1778, when he died, is one of the most remarkable old houses in London for its connection with men of note. In the painter's time it was, as at present, divided into three tenements; but it was originally one large mansion, and named after its first noble resident—Schomberg House; for here lived King William III.'s favourite general,

Frederick, Duke of Schomberg, who was killed fighting beside his sovereign, at the battle of the Boyne, in 1690. His son, the third and last duke, added various decorations to the house, and employed an artist named Berchett to paint the grand staircase with landscapes in lunettes. The house was afterwards the town residence of William, Duke of Cumberland; "the hero of Culloden," as he was termed by one party; the "butcher" as he was named by the other. He died in this house in 1760. John Astley the painter succeeded him, and was known by a more agreeable cognomen, "the Beau." He divided the house into three, retaining the cen-

tral part as his own residence, and placed over the doorway the bas-relief of Painting, which is still to be seen there. Another "beau" artist succeeded him in Richard Cosway. Astley converted the upper story at the back of the house into a convenient painting room of ample proportions, which commanded a view over the park, and to this and some other apartments he had a private staircase; he termed it his "country-house," and used to enjoy his *rus in urbe* by shutting himself in them whenever he felt disposed for retirement and uninterrupted work. In another part of the building once resided the famous quack, Dr. Graham; there he con-



SCHOMBERG HOUSE, PALL-MALL: THE RESIDENCE OF GAINSBOROUGH.

ducted his lectures and impostures on the gullible English public, who crowded to listen to the doctor's discourses on the wonderful powers of his specifics, and the virtues of his mud-baths; and were received on stated occasions at the doors by gigantic porters in magnificent liveries, to view the doctor, immersed in his favourite mud, with his wig in the first fashion, full dressed, and powdered *en grande tenue*. Beside him, in a full state of immersion, and an equally magnificent *coiffure*, was Emma Lyons—afterwards better known as Lady Hamilton, and the "ruling spirit" of Admiral Nelson. Graham at this time advertised her as the "rosy goddess of health," and

hired her as a living illustration to one of his lectures on "Health and Beauty." Here her loveliness attracted the notice of Romney the royal academician, and other artists, who, as well as Hayley the poet, all delineated or praised her beauty; here she became acquainted with Mr. Greville, the nephew of Sir William Hamilton, and ultimately became the wife of the latter.

The eastern wing of this house was pulled down in 1852; the western wing is still intact, and this was the portion tenanted by Gainsborough, who died in a back room on the second floor. His last desire was to be at peace with Sir Joshua Reynolds,



GAINSBOROUGH'S GRAVE.

who came to his bedside in time to see his happy and very "professional" end. His last words were, "We are all going to heaven, and Vandyke is of the company."

The painter's grave is marked by a large flat slab in the isolated churchyard of Kew. It is no unpleasant spot, for trees shadow it, and a free air is around; it is a more agreeable pilgrimage to perform than that to the place of greater honour, the crypt of St. Paul's, where so many of his brethren lie. He desired to be buried by his friend Kirby the artist, and author of a work on perspective, which was printed at the expense of George III.,

whose gravestone is close to the church wall. Reynolds and Sheridan saw him placed as he wished. He desired that his name only should be cut upon the stone; it is therefore simply inscribed "Thomas Gainsborough, Esq., died August the 2nd, 1788, aged 61 years." His widow reposes with him, and her death is thus recorded, "Margaret Gainsborough, wife of the above Thomas Gainsborough, died December the 17th, 1798, in the 72nd year of her age." The gravestone occupies the centre of our sketch: it is a plain slab, without ornament or decoration of any kind.

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