

THE TOMBS OF ENGLISH ARTISTS.

No. I.—WILLIAM ETTY, R.A.

THERE is an indefinable charm about true greatness that associates itself even with the inanimate objects by which it was surrounded in life. Hence we make pilgrimages to the homes, and haunts, and tombs of those who have gone before us, and have left enduring monuments of their undying mental powers for our behoof, gratification, or improvement. There is no more touching homage paid to genius than this desire to recall its existence, as well as the imagination can do it when assisted by such mementoes. Many weary miles have been travelled for this gratification; and that it is a great one few can doubt, who have visited in a loving spirit the birth-place or grave of a Shakspeare or a Raffaele. But minor men share in a minor degree this Art-worship, and few Englishmen will fail to take an interest in the memorials that the time-honoured city of York afford of our English Titian—WILLIAM ETTY.

Etty published in the ART-JOURNAL, in the year 1849, a charming piece of autobiography, having all the simplicity and freshness that such biography only retains. He notes there his great regard for his native city. He says,—“Like my favourite hero, Robinson Crusoe, I was born in the city of York—so he says, so say I, only he was born in 1632, I in 1787, March 10, of an honest and industrious family. Like Rembrandt and Constable, my father also was a miller, and his mill was standing, till this year, on the old York road to London, about half a mile from York. My first panels on which I drew were the boards of my father's shop-floor, my first crayon a farthing's worth of white chalk.” This he wrote in the house depicted in our engraving. During all his wanderings his heart was in Yorkshire, and he went back to live and die in the historic city he loved so well.

It truly deserves the name of an historic city, inasmuch as the records of York carry us back to the earliest period of authentic history—the written



ETTY'S HOUSE, YORK.

history of the Roman Invasion. When Suetonius Paulinus had the command of the Britanic army of occupation at the beginning of the reign of Nero, the ninth legion of troops was stationed at York. This legion, in accordance with the policy of the Roman government, was composed of Spaniards, for it was considered wisest to have no native soldiers in the cohort placed in a conquered province. It is most interesting to see in the York Museum the simple tombs, constructed of tiles, and laid over the bodies of some of these soldiers by their companions. The ashes of the deceased soldier had been placed in its urn, and over all these tiles were laid, edge to edge, like the sloping roof of a house, and each tile has been stamped with the title of this cohort thus—LEG. IX. HISP.—for *Legio nona Hispanica*. The same museum contains the records of many Romans who have died here young, affected no doubt by the severe climate of Britain. Among them is the stone sarcophagus of Theodorianus, who died here at the age of thirty, and who is stated, in the inscription upon it, to have been a native of Nomentum, a small city of Ancient Latium. Agricola rested here with his victorious army, which had subjugated the whole of the rebellious tribes of Britain in one summer's campaign. Severus again marched through the land, and died at York, A.D. 210, worn out by anxiety, fatigue, and disease. At the early part of the succeeding century, Constantine Chlorus fixed his residence at York, and also died there; but the greatest event enacted here in connection with the old masters of the world, was the proclamation of Constantine the Great, as Emperor, by the army at York, where he was at the time of his father's death, and where he is said by some to have been born. Altogether no city in England possesses more attraction for the scholar and the antiquary than the ancient city of York, which is still surrounded by its mediæval walls, with their gates and barbicans, indicative of a state of warfare long gone by. Etty might be proud of his native city.

The visitor to York who would desire a ready clue through its labyrinthine streets to the retired nook where the last home of Etty still stands, should pass the ferry from the railway station, and take the road opposite the gate of the Museum gardens; it leads direct to Coney Street: a short distance down this street there stands, on the right hand, the Church of St. Martin, a decorative piece of architecture, to which the attention is at once directed by one of

those projecting clocks, a reigning favourite with our great grandfathers. This is supported by massive iron-work, formed into foliage and flowers, and possessing more claim to attention on the score of artistic excellence than is usual in such works. It is surmounted by a quaint figure of a naval officer, in the costume of Queen Anne's era, using an astrolabe. Turning into the small square which is beside this church, we see in front a modest mansion, with heavy carved door, solid window frames, and a deeply-pitched roof. It may have been the parsonage house at one period, it seems fitted for the Dr. Primrose of Goldsmith's immortal story. It is, however, the house in which Etty lived and died. Shortly before his death he had attended the funeral of a friend in the church-yard of St. Olave, and he then desired to be buried in that spot provided he died in York; both events happened, and we will retrace our steps to visit the last resting-place of the painter: few lie in a more picturesque locality.

The church-yard of St. Olave adjoins the beautiful grounds of the Yorkshire Philosophical Society, where one of the most interesting local museums in the kingdom is situated, as well as fragments of antique building, including a portion of the Roman wall of the city of York; the noble multangular tower, one of its defences, and the elegant ruins of the Benedictine Abbey of St. Mary. The original foundation of this once large and opulent establishment was prior to the Norman Conquest; the ruins we now look upon are the remains of the work of the Abbot Simon de Warwick, completed in the latter half of the 13th century, the Augustan age of Gothic architecture in England, when it exhibited the chastest proportion and the most elegant conception, combined with an amount of decorative enrichment controlled by the truest taste. These walls, beautiful in decay, bound the church-yard of St. Olave, the church being partly constructed of its stones; a series of arcades occupy the lower portion of



ETTY'S TOMB, YORK.

the walls, and about their centre is a pointed arch, once acting as the northern entrance to the choir. This arch was closed until recently; it has now been opened, that the tomb of Etty may be seen from the grounds. It stands exactly opposite the arch, and is slightly ornamented with Gothic panels and quatrefoils, forming a frame to the simple inscription—

“WILLIAM ETTY, ROYAL ACADEMICIAN.”

Trees wave over it and peep beneath the arch; no fitter “frame-work” could have been desired for a painter's tomb; few have one in a more picturesque locality, fewer still have been thus publicly honoured by their fellow-townsmen as Etty has been by the men of York. They are “honoured in honouring him,” and it is pleasant that this true aphorism is now more generally felt in England than it used to be. The arts of peace do most for us in an era when happily the art of war is less generally called into action, and never willingly.

Etty had that wisdom which few men possess, the wisdom of a contented mind. He loved his quiet home, in his own provincial birth-place, better than the bustle of London, or the notoriety he might obtain by a residence there. His character and his talent would ensure him attention and deference anywhere, but he preferred his own nook by the old church in York. He probably felt with the old poet, that

“The wind is strongest on the highest hills,
The quiet life is in the vale below.”

This would be no place to criticise the art of William Etty, its merits or its defects—suffice to say, it achieved its own peculiar place in the English school, and rivalled the glories of that of Venice. Bold and brilliant in style, it possessed graces of conception and beauty of composition in an eminent degree; and we have no living painter, except Mulready, who so perfectly understands the management of vivid colour. This was Etty's great forte—he was the Turner of figure painters.

F. W. FAIRHOLT.