

## TOMBS OF ENGLISH ARTISTS.

No. 12.—WILLIAM COLLINS, R.A.

ALL Englishmen who feel honest pride in their own beautiful country and its best class of peasantry, must have a veneration for the painter who has delineated both so well. Its leafy lanes, filled with little merry rustics, sometimes swinging on the gates, each one "happy as a king," or crowded round the cottage door, with kindly welcome to the timid "stray kitten" that creeps doubtfully toward the pan of milk so hospitably placed for its refection; or the life of the sea-beach, with its young "shrimpers" and fisher-boys, with their thickest forms and ruddy faces,—all delineate the best features of the great Anglo-Saxon race to which it is an honour to belong. Never was the sea-side, or the country-life of England better painted than by William Collins; and it is a pleasure to look upon his pictures in the foggy winter days of a London December, and dream of visiting some such pleasant spots, and chat with such rosy villagers when June comes round again.

It is a noble thing to have wealth to spare,—but only so when it is put to noble uses. The men who spend their superfluity on fine pictures lay up a pleasure for all time—a refining "joy for ever" to all who look on them. It has but one drawback—its exclusiveness; for fine works are sometimes little seen but by their possessors, and often are buried in galleries all but unvisited. But when men who love Art, and buy wisely, make a free gift of their tasteful gatherings for the good of their fellow-countrymen, ennobling the humblest by teaching them to contemplate works kings might covet, how great a debt of gratitude do we owe to them! Such men are the late Mr. Vernon and the living Mr. Sheepshanks,—men who must ever be regarded as national benefactors; they have aided in enlightening, through the medium of the Arts, a large body of their countrymen, and the good work will be continued long after their contemporaries have passed away. They have also given English Art a public station it had not before, for we had no special galleries devoted to our native school of painting, until their munificence gave us one, to which we might take a foreigner, and show him what our artists have done. If the British people have reason to be grateful for such gifts, the British artists owe a deeper debt of gratitude to these two gentlemen.

Some of Collins's best cabinet pictures may be seen in the collections at Marlborough House and Kensington,—pictures redolent of happy country life, or of breezy glowing sea-beaches. Collins never painted "storms in harvest," or "storms at sea,"—his nature was essentially happy. As you feel the calm sunny influence of his pictures on the mind, you are impressed with the certainty of the pleasure he must have felt in painting them. Had he been an author instead of an artist, you feel he would never depict village life after the fashion of Crabbe, but rather rival Miss Mitford.

There is a pleasant life of Collins, written by his son (who by his talent adds another proof of the fallacy of the idea that a clever father seldom has a clever son), and to that memoir we must refer our reader, who may require fuller details of the artist's life than we can give; it is a well-told narrative of an honourable career, a true picture of the early struggles and ultimate triumphs of an artist of whom England may be proud. It must have been an agreeable task for such a son to write of such a father. A short memoir of Collins, as our readers will remember, appeared in the volume of the *Art-Journal* for 1855, in our series of "British Artists."

Collins was born in London,—and it is somewhat remarkable that our best delineators of country boys, Collins and Hunt, were both born not far asunder, and in localities not apparently propitious; the first in Great Titchfield Street, the second in Bolton Street (now called Endell Street), Long Acre. Collins is an example of the mixed marriages which produce "true-born Englishmen." His father was an Irishman, a native of Wicklow, his mother a Scottish lady from the vicinity of Edinburgh. Collins senior laboured unceasingly as a man of letters and a picture-dealer; his



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best literary works were "Memoirs of a Picture," in which he detailed the tricks of the trade in picture-dealing and picture-stealing, and a "Life of Morland," with whom he was intimate, and whose advice and assistance he sought for the early instruction of young William, who in after life was of opinion that he gained more from his father's advice and guidance than from that of the dissolute, but more highly-gifted Morland.

Drawing was the boy's delight from earliest youth, "whatever natural object he perceived he endeavoured to imitate upon paper;



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even a group of old blacking-bottles, picturesquely arranged by his friend Linnell, supplied him with a fund of material too precious to be disdained." By all the means which a clever and earnest boy will make use of, he carried on his studies. He sketched from nature in the fields round London. In 1807 he entered the Royal Academy as a student, and the first views he contributed to the walls of their exhibition were sketched at Millbank, then a

Dutch-looking suburb of London. His industry was untiring, and ultimately led to attention,—his works, when better known, had excellences which riveted it. He succeeded in making a position for himself, but his career was an arduous one; the poor son of a poor father, at whose death he had only the bequest of his family's wants. Yet through all he kept a brave heart and a steady hand, and years of perseverance brought ultimate reward.

Late in life Collins went to Bayswater to reside; the locality had been recommended by his physician as the driest and healthiest in London. He took the house No. 85, Oxford Terrace, in 1840; but, finding it too small for his requirements, he removed, in 1843, to another adjacent and larger abode at No. 1, Devonport Street. Of its external aspect our cut will furnish an idea; it is one of the thousand houses builders run up in the suburbs; but to the painter it had "the unusual attraction of containing a room capable of being converted into a spacious and convenient studio:" these are the words of his son, who adds—"It is not one of the least curious passages in his life, that he had never possessed a comfortable painting-room up to this period of his career. In all his changes of abode he had been contented with taking any apartment in the house that afforded a tolerable light, resigning every other advantage of high roofs and fine skylights. His first sea-coast scenes were painted in a garret of his house in New Cavendish Street. The 'Fisherman's Departure,' Sir Robert Peel's 'Frost Scene,' and a long series of other remarkable pictures, were produced in a little bedroom of his first abode at Hampstead." His son records the pleasure he felt in his studio. "Once established in the new locality of his labours, with more of his sketches, his designs, his relics of Art about him than he had ever been able to range in any former studio—with his painting-table, that had belonged to Gainsborough, with his little model of an old woman, dressed by the same great painter's hand, with the favourite palettes of Lawrence and Wilkie, hung up before him; with all the other curiosities, experiments, and studies in Art that he had collected, now for the first time conveniently disposed around him—his enjoyment of his new painting-room was complete." But "like Wilkie, he laboured only a brief space in the first painting-room that he had ever completely prepared for his own occupation, before the hand of death arrested his pencil for ever!"

A long and wearying illness, denoting a break up of the system, at last conquered his healthy nature; and the artist died on the 17th of February, 1847. He is buried in the cemetery of the Church of St. Mary, Paddington. The grave is marked by a marble cross, on the base of which these words are inscribed:—"In testimony of their affection for his memory, their remembrance of his virtues, and their respect for his genius as the painter of the coast scenery and cottage life of his native land, his widow and his two sons have raised this monument on the site of one which he erected to his mother and brother, with whom he is now buried." The spot possesses more of the elements of the picturesque than we find in suburban graveyards; and the tomb itself is characterised by its pure and simple taste. It is no melancholy pilgrimage to the painter's grave: trees wave near it in the green summer-time, and it speaks only of hopeful, happy rest.

In Mr. Wilkie Collins's *Life of his Father* is a list of the pictures painted by the latter, arranged chronologically from the earliest exhibited work, bearing date, 1807, to the latest, 1846, with the names of the purchasers and the prices paid for them.

F. W. FAIRHOLT.