TOMBS OF ENGLISH ARTISTS.

No. 15.—SAMUEL COOPER.

METROPOLITAN changes, since the commencement of the present century, are among the most marvellous in their extent and variety of any that have occurred since the days of Elizabeth. Take any map of London published about 1810, and there we find "fresh fields and pastures" where now are densely-populated streets. Quiet localities that, by some strange chance, were allowed to sleep on unmolested by the march of bricks and mortar, have suddenly become the centres of streets, and bid an eternal adieu to rurality. Such a district is St. Pancras.

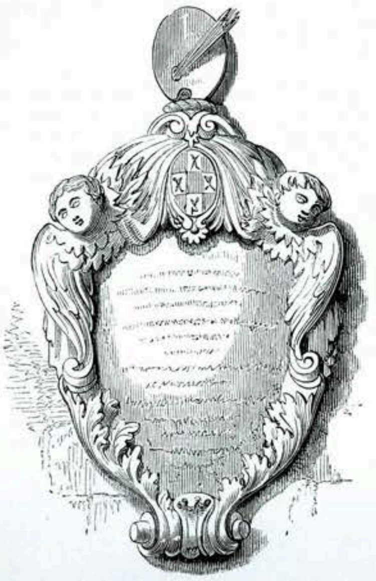
The readers of Ben Jonson will not fail to remember his quaint "Tale of a Tub," that curious picture of "country life" in the immediate vicinity of the London of his day, in which "Sir Hugh," the vicar of Pancras, helps to plot for his own benefit with Justice Bramble, of "Maribone," and the High Constable of Kentish-town; and the denizens of Kilburn and Islington talk a sort of Somersetshire dialect, which seems to breathe of a pure pastoral style; aided by such scenic directions as "the country near Maribone," or "the country near Kentish-town." Where is the country now? At that time St. Pancras was a little village church, a long way off in the fields, with lonely, but pleasant lanes, leading to the high land of Hampstead and Highgate—far-away localities, to be seen from St. Paul's steeple, but rarely visited by Londoners, who must have thought of a journey there as we now think of one to Yorkshire. Pancras retained its lonely character longer than any other London vicinity. Norden, in the time of Ben Jonson, speaks of it as "forsaken of all; and true men seldom frequent the same, but upon divine occasions; yet it is visited by thieves, who assemble not there to pray, but to wait for prey; and many fall into their hands clothed, that are glad when they are escaped naked: walk not there too late." Venturous citizens who neglected this warning ran great dangers in getting from thence toward Gray's Inn Lane; in Walker's "Lives of the Highwaymen," published in the time of Queen Anne, is a characteristic picture of a highway robbery committed at some distance on the London side of "St. Pancras in the Fields."

Even so recently as thirty years ago, this little church, which Norden described in 1593 as "standing all alone, utterly forsaken, old and weather-beaten," retained its lonely look. Paved streets, rows of houses, and neat squares, now cover the fields then used for grazing the cows of "Rhodes's Dairy;" and just opposite the cemetery gates were the remains of intrenchments, which the learned Dr. Stukely dreamed over as the veritable camp of Cæsar himself, and which was principally composed of a square mound surrounded by a ditch filled by the waters of the Fleet River, then an open stream, meandering from the high land north of London toward the "sweet south" of Bagnigge Wells and Fleet Street. There is a view of St. Pancras Church, from a drawing by J. P. Neale, dated as recently as July, 1815, representing a group of young men bathing here. The Fleet River is now one vast common sewer.

Our view of the church is copied from a print by Chatelain, drawn about 1740. At that time there were wells near the church celebrated for their sanitary virtue; and people walked out there to test their curative virtue, as they did to Sadler's Wells, the Cold Bath, or Islington—a weaker kind of Tunbridge water, that served as an imaginary remedy for minor illnesses. There is still a "St. Chad's Well" in Gray's-Inn Lane; there were many more on this side of London.

St. Pancras in the Fields, originally a humble village fane, has been from time to time enlarged; but its most recent enlargement, in 1848, has still left it a small building, converting it into a kind of toy gothic edifice, and destroying its modest old features. The fourteenth century is conjectured to have been the era of the erection of the old church, which simply consisted of a nave and chancel. It contained many monuments: none more interesting than that of Samuel Cooper, who has been appropriately designated the Vandyck of miniature-painters. It is a modest monument, surmounted by the painter's palette; beneath is a coat-of-arms—*not* those of the painter, but of Sir E. Turner, the Speaker of the House of Commons in the reign of Charles II., who placed the monument here, and took this extraordinary mode of recording the good action.

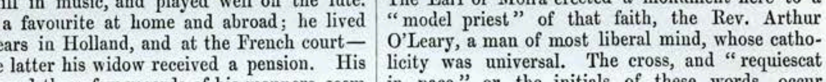
Cooper died on the 5th of May, 1672, at the ripe age of sixty-three. Walpole says, "the anecdotes of Cooper's life are few; nor does it signify—his works are his history." The brevity and the justice of these few words will bear an amplification of reflection. His works are his best history, and have a charm in their truth and beauty still. To his pencil we owe the best and truest portrait of a great Englishman—Oliver Cromwell; in it we seem to see the mind of the man.[*] This is the true greatness of Cooper's works. Walpole has compared them with those of the earlier miniature painter, Oliver, whose works were diminutively conceived, as well as minutely painted; but, he adds, "If a glass could expand Cooper's pictures to the size of Vandyck's, they would appear to have been painted for that proportion. If his portrait of Cromwell could be so enlarged, I don't know but Vandyck would appear less great by comparison." Cooper was busily employed during his life, and at high prices. Pepys says, in his amusing diary, that he gave him £30 for his wife's miniature. He tells us "he is a most admirable workman, and good company." It is elsewhere recorded that he had great skill in music, and played well on the lute. He was a favourite at home and abroad; he lived many years in Holland, and at the French court—from the latter his widow received a pension. His portrait, and these few records of his manners, seem to combine in presenting us with the agreeable picture of a quiet, prosperous, industrious, and genial man, one of unostentatious talent and cheerful manners, happy in a calm course of life—a life few but artists are privileged to lead: they should be happy and grateful men, for many of the noble and rich envy them.



COOPER'S MONUMENT.

Before we leave this ancient spot, let us note the many celebrated names that appear on tombs in this crowded churchyard, where for several centuries the dead have congregated. Of artists, Ravenet and Woollett; of authors, he who is supposed to have written "The whole Duty of Man;" Theobald, the editor of Shakspere, and the hero of Pope's original "Dunciad;" Collier, who wrote against the Stage; Walker, who gave us our best pronouncing dictionary; William Godwin, and his equally famed wife; all rest here. One of the most extraordinary persons here interred was the Chevalier D'Eon, who for many years lived as a woman in England, after much diplomatic continental employ. Another politician, Pascal de Paoli, the friend of Johnson's Boswell, is also buried here; he was chief of the Corsicans in their struggles with the French. The churchyard has always been a favourite resting-place with our Roman Catholic brethren. The reasons given are that it was the last church in England where mass was performed after the Reformation, and that masses were said for the souls of such as were buried here in a church dedicated to the same saint in the south of France. The Earl of Moira erected a monument here to a "model priest" of that faith, the Rev. Arthur O'Leary, a man of most liberal mind, whose catholicity was universal. The cross, and "requiescat in pace," or the initials of these words, occur on many monuments here: would that the peace of the old churchyard could be paralleled among the living sects, that they might "rest in their faith among their fellow men," as they do "after life's fitful fever" here! A quiet walk back to London in the old days must have produced wholesome thoughts after a pilgrimage to Pancras; now the turmoil of noisy London is thick around it, and our reflections must be made at home; but the thoughts are good everywhere that result from visits like these. It is well to turn aside—and not unfrequently, too—from the active and busy scenes of life, to hold converse with ourselves, as well as with those who have gone from us.

F. W. FAIRHOLT.



ST. PANCRAS CHURCH.

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[*] In Mr. Stanley's edition of Bryan's "Dictionary of Painters and Engravers," he mentions a portrait, by Cooper, of Milton, as "recently discovered, and in the possession of the Duke of Buccleuch. His grace owes it to the country to have it engraved, as that formerly in Sir Joshua Reynolds's possession, and engraved by Caroline Watson, with his sanction, is not the portrait of the divine poet, but of one of his great contemporaries."