

## TOMBS OF ENGLISH ARTISTS.

No. 14.—J. M. W. TURNER, R.A.

POET and painter were combined in the mental organization of Joseph Mallord William Turner; his works can never be fully appreciated until they are taught to be considered not merely as pictures (however high the class to which they are assigned), but as poems; for that they undoubtedly are, and as much lifted above the ordinary world as the thought and action of a fine poem must ever be. England has reason to be proud of her landscape painters; they have outlasted all rivalry, and have won a tardy acknowledgment of superiority from the general world: but among the worthiest we shall look in vain for a power like Turner's, capable of elevating into the ideal the most commonplace subjects, and turning, by the alchemy of his genius, "the basest lead to solid gold."

It is pleasant to form an ideal picture of the man studious of beauty, devoting a life to the most exquisite delineation of nature in its most beautiful moods. He lived, by choice, so much alone that few knew him, and it had been well if the reserve he coveted had been never broken by biographic notes, as it is impossible to conceive a more anti-poetical person than Turner himself. All reminiscences of him are decidedly unpleasant, in person and in manners, and worse than all in habit; his parsimony was excessive. Altogether, it is best to know him only by his works, and keep an ideal Turner for the mind to dwell upon. Many anecdotes of his "ruling passion" float about in artistic circles, it is almost to be hoped no one will collect them for the press, though some have been so gathered; they only serve to lower the man, and are but records of the evil which, more or less, weighs down human nature. Let the "earthy part" of Turner rest in his parent earth, and let us only know his sublime mind—in the bequest he has made to the nation. Here, at least, he has behaved nobly; the sun broke through the clouds in setting!

Maiden Lane, Covent Garden, was the home of a small barber in the latter half of the last century. It is a narrow crowded way, through which carriages cannot pass; at that period this neighbourhood was a dense labyrinth of courts and alleys from St. Martin's Lane to Covent Garden. Here was an abundant population; all the stories, or even



BIRTH-PLACE OF TURNER.

rooms, of the houses held separate families; it was, therefore, a fitting locality for a busy hair-dresser. His name was Turner, and his parti-coloured pole hung beside the archway leading into Hand Court; the house is a small one, with only one window in front; it is now added as a storehouse to adjoining premises, but is unaltered in its general features. Here the painter was born, in the year 1775, and christened in the adjoining church of St. Paul's Covent Garden, on the 14th of March. His early days were spent in this squalid district, the flowers he saw were among the rickety sheds of

Covent Garden market; and the neglected grass-grown enclosure, which then occupied the centre of St. James's Park, was his nearest glimpse of country life. But his early aspirations towards Art were proudly talked of by his parent,—whose profession naturally led to the communicative,—and got to the ears of Dr. Munro, an Art-amateur, who had gathered a large collection of drawings, and added to his stores by engaging young artists to work in



TURNER'S RESIDENCE.

his house on an evening at the rate of a shilling an hour. The Doctor was useful in his time to many; the cash, though little, was valuable, as the "overtime" earnings of poor lads, and he liberally lent his drawings by great masters, for their use by day. Girtin, Varley, Edridge, and others began with the Doctor, and looked back in after life, not unpleasantly, to the evenings spent in working, chatting, and learning with him. At this time water-colour drawing was restricted to a half-mechanical style of washing in positive shadows by a series of middle-tints, which brought out the body of the design; it was heightened by simple washes of warmer colour, or strengthened by brown shadows. The early drawings of Turner, like those of Dayes, Hearne, and Rooker, are all formed on this model. Turner resided with his father, in Maiden Lane, until the year 1800, when he was elected an Associate of the Royal Academy; two years after this he was "an R.A." He had entered as a student there in 1789, his first oil-picture was hung in the exhibition in 1793. When he left Maiden Lane for the north of London (the artistic quarter), his father went with him, and the old man who answered the door, and took a sixpence from a visitor, is said to have been the same person. Neither father nor son ever lost a chance of securing or saving the smallest trifle. The painter has been known to take to a private purchaser a picture for which a thousand pounds has been paid, and then ask for the fare of the hackney-coach in addition.

Turner never allowed a visitor or a brother artist to see him at work, or to enter his painting-room. Slowly he emerged from his early style, and the works he executed at the beginning of the present century are among his best; they combine fancy with fact; ultimately he let his poetry so far predominate that "fact" could scarcely be recognised in his works; he lived to caricature his own greatness. The want of discrimination in the mass of the world, and the large reputation the painter had earned, gave a fictitious value to all his works. His cold formal early drawings now sell for high prices, while better works of the same calibre and era in Art are comparatively valueless; his later gorgeous dreams of colour, ill-defined, and hardly to be comprehended, are also bought at high prices. Neither deserve to be placed beside such earnest and truthful poems as his "Carthage," in the National Gallery, or his "Ulysses" in the "Turner Collection."

Turner's last residence was No. 47, Queen Anne

Street, Cavendish Square. It is a gloomy house, with dull blank walls, and few windows; it was known by its state of dirty neglect for many years. Here were stowed away the great mass of pictures, sketches, and prints from his works, which Turner amassed carefully, but did not "preserve," for many were found injured by dust and damp, the result of the neglect of cleanliness and comfort which had no charms for him. A curious instance of the value he attached to the merest trifle from his own hand, and the dislike he had to any person trading by chance with it, was related by an eminent printseller, into whose shop he once walked, to purchase, if possible, an engraving made many years before from one of his pictures. His description of the subject he aided by a few rude lines, scrawled with a pen on a loose piece of paper, which flew behind the counter in turning over the portfolios to look for the print. The painter ultimately got his print, and, missing the scrap of paper, eagerly demanded it of the unconscious printseller, whose confusion redoubled Turner's anxiety, which was only appeased when the scrap of paper was recovered from a dark corner, and carefully wrapped with the engraving. In justice, however, to Turner, it must be admitted, from the facts which have been revealed to the public since his death, that he had a motive—and a worthy one too—in exercising this apparently avaricious and grasping disposition: he knew well that everything from his pencil, however insignificant in character, would realize money when he was gone; and he sought to accumulate it in every way for beneficent purposes.

The illness which led to Turner's death required him to take a change of air; but he dreaded expense, though now a rich man, and he found by chance a small lodging to let in a little house fronting the Thames, near Cremorne Gardens, Chelsea. Retaining his dislike of visitors, he never gave his name to the mistress of the house, nor did she know it until after his death, which happened here on the 19th of December, 1851. On a bright winter's day, a very short time before, the painter was carried to the first floor window to see the sun set with a calm glow over the Thames. On the 30th of the same month he was buried in the crypt of St. Paul's Cathedral, by the side of Sir Joshua Reynolds, whom he highly esteemed,



HOUSE IN WHICH TURNER DIED.

and by whom he desired to find a last resting-place. The funeral was attended by the President of the Royal Academy, very many of its members and associates, and a large number of others, anxious to do honour to the memory of one, who did as much as ever artist did, to elevate the British school honourably among the nations. To no painter was there ever given so large a power of appreciating and portraying the beautiful in nature; and there is no name in Art more widely and universally known and revered.

F. W. FAIRHOLT.