

Lid of Piano.

SIR EDWARD BURNE-JONES.

Illustrated with reproductions of Sir Edward Burne-Jones's pictures from photographs by Fred Hollyer, Pembroke Square, W.

THE fact that Burne-Jones was born in Birmingham in 1833 seems to explain the problem of his temperament, the splendours and the limitations of his art. He, with all the beauty-craving of the true Celt in his veins, was brought up on the most rigid lines of English Protestantism, in a home where beauty was regarded as a vain and earthly good, and where art was probably only not tabooed because no one ever thought about it. In the Birmingham of that date were no picture-galleries, no art-schools, no opportunities of satisfying or developing a natural taste; nothing but factories, chimney-pots, and the monotonous hammering of hardware into money. One can imagine the boy's amusements, his Sundays, his clothes, his picture-books. His inborn passion for beauty must have been possessed of extraordinary vitality, since it was not extinguished beneath such a load of hopeless, unconscious ugliness.

It was settled that the young Burne-Jones should take Orders; and he, ignorant of his own needs and his own powers, allowed his future to be thus marked out for him. Having won an exhibition at Exeter College, he came up to Oxford on the same day as William Morris, and, as

fate would have it, the two became friends. From that moment the clerical project was doomed, though the family at Birmingham remained in blissful ignorance of the fact. Morris's ideas on the subject of his future were in an unsettled state; he had not yet discovered that he was a poet, while Burne-Jones had no idea that he himself was a painter. The first sight of some of Rossetti's drawings was the beginning of a new epoch in the lives of both young men. A hitherto undreamt-of world lay open before them, and they were eager to enter in and take possession. Burne-Jones felt the artistic impulse leap to life within him, but he wanted faith in himself and his own possibilities. He longed to see this new apostle, to sit at his feet and consult him in the affairs of life. He was at the age that seeks a master and glories in discipleship.

In the winter vacation of 1855 Burne-Jones came up to town to try to see Rossetti, and found him at the newly started Working Men's College, where he was taking a class. Rossetti was kind, invited the young man to visit him, and encouraged his artistic aspirations. That visit settled the question of a career, for Rossetti, honestly believing that art was the "be all" and "end all" of man, airily advised that all thoughts of a degree should be abandoned, that Oxford should be forsaken, and that the painter's should be the chosen profession. And his counsel was followed

unhesitatingly. What Birmingham said to the change of plans has not been recorded, but Birmingham's influence was as naught compared with that of the painter-poet. There was only one art, and Rossetti was its prophet. The young man was kept in countenance by another backslider in the person of William Morris, who came up to town in the summer of 1856, and joined his friend in a house in Red Lion Square, intending to work at architecture under Street.

It is to be doubted whether Rossetti was altogether well adapted for the training of youthful talent. Unquestionably his enthusiasm was a splendid stimulative, and it was a revelation to watch him at work; but his own strongly marked personality was only too apt to colour that of his disciples, while he believed that originality was destroyed by systematic instruction. He held that an artist should find out his own methods for himself, and that he should

begin by expressing himself, however falteringly, in colour before he learned to draw. It is difficult to accept these theories in their entirety, more especially when we reflect that a knowledge of grammar is not supposed to destroy a poet's originality, nor a knowledge of counterpoint that of a composer. Genius will out, training or no training; but genius disciplined, genius strengthened by technique and based on sure foundations, is surely better than genius run wild. Burne-Jones very soon felt the disadvantage of his lack of technical training, and at twenty-five, when, as he said, he was only fifteen where his art was concerned, he set resolutely to work to make up his deficiencies.

It is remarkable how soon the practically untrained artist obtained commissions for his work and attracted the notice of the more distinguished among his contemporaries. Through Rossetti's influence he got orders for designs for stained-glass windows, while Ruskin bought his drawings and publicly proclaimed his admiration of the young painter. In 1857 he was associated with Rossetti, Morris, and two or



DOROTHY DREW.



PADEREWSKI.

three other artists in the ill-fated attempt to decorate the walls of the Union at Oxford with frescoes illustrative of the "Morte d'Arthur." None of the painters knew anything about tempera and the necessary preparation of the walls; consequently, before the work was finished the paintings were peeling off, and are now almost entirely effaced.

In 1859 Burne-Jones made his first pilgrimage to Italy—a land that he must often have visited in his dreams—and stayed at Florence, Pisa, and Siena. He has of

course frequently been accused of imitating the Early Italian painters, but it is probable that he found in them rather kindred spirits than subjects for imitation. In any case, that first Italian journey must have had a stimulating and fertilising effect upon his genius, and it was certainly followed by a remarkable advance in his artistic development.

On his return to London he began a series of cartoons for a window in the Latin Chapel of Christ Church Cathedral, the subjects being taken from the life of St. Frideswide, the foundress of Oxford

Priory. In June of the same year he married Miss Macdonald, and settled in Russell Place. Curiously enough, both Rossetti and Morris were also married in 1859.

During the next year or two Burne-Jones

Rossetti was still apparent in all his work, while he had not yet fully mastered the technical difficulties of his art.

In 1861 William Morris founded his art-furnishing establishment, and thenceforward



A STUDY.

Painted several small pictures taken from incidents in the "Morte d'Arthur," while Chaucer's poems—more especially "The Legend of Good Women"—were another source of inspiration. The influence of

all Burne-Jones's cartoons for windows were executed in stained glass by the firm, which also carried out his numerous designs for tapestry and other hangings.

In 1862 Mr. and Mrs. Burne-Jones, together



"DIES DOMINI."

with Mr. Ruskin, journeyed to Italy, where they spent some time at Milan and Venice. During his stay in Venice, Burne-Jones copied some of Ruskin's favourite Tintoretto's, though he was himself more in sympathy with the old Venetians; and he drew Ruskin's attention to "Carpaccio," whom the great critic had not yet "discovered," but who was afterwards to become the subject of some of his most eloquent panegyrics. When Ruskin re-visited Venice seven years later, he wrote to Burne-Jones that "there was nothing like 'Carpaccio,'" who, he declared, was a new world to him, though he did not give up his Tintoretto's.

In 1864 Burne-Jones was elected a member of the Society of Painters in Water-

Colours, and during the next few years he exhibited at the Pall Mall Gallery a series of pictures in which may be traced the gradual unfolding of his own artistic personality, uncoloured now by the influence of Rossetti, and distinct from that of any of his contemporaries. Among these pictures was "Fair Rosamond" (which was bought by Ruskin's father in ignorance of the fact that it was by his son's friend), "The Christ Kissing the Merciful Knight," and the beautiful "Chant d'Amour." In 1870 a dispute arose amongst certain of the members concerning a picture of Burne-Jones's, the purport of which was not fully understood. The upshot of the matter was that the artist withdrew his picture and resigned

his membership. The mistake was only rectified eighteen years later, when he was re-elected.

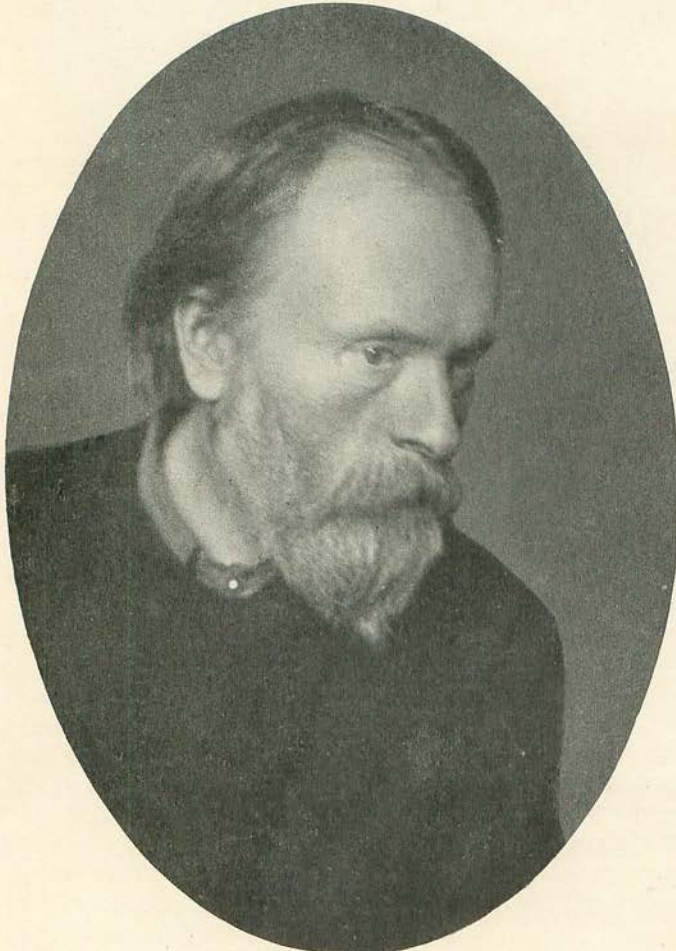
During the next seven years Burne-Jones worked out his own conceptions untrammelled by the strictures or applause of critics. He was represented at none of the London exhibitions, and his very name was almost forgotten by the public. In 1867 he had taken The Grange, Hammersmith, the house formerly occupied by Samuel Richardson, and here, in silence and obscurity, he was painting the long series of masterpieces that were one day to astonish the world. Nor did his pictures represent by any means the whole of his output at this time. His designs for windows, his book illustrations, his decorations for pianos and cabinets, his

bas-reliefs and panels in gesso or metal-work,—either of these might have been deemed sufficient to occupy the days of any ordinary man.

At the first exhibition held at the new Grosvenor Gallery in 1877, Burne-Jones reappeared, greatly to the surprise of both critics and public, with eight important pictures, including "The Mirror of Venus," "The Beguiling of Merlin," and "The Days of Creation," which proved the chief attraction of the exhibition.

While the enlightened lover of art and beauty "thanked God fasting" for the unexpected pleasure, a storm of obloquy and ridicule burst forth from the large portion of the public, to whom a novelty is little short of a crime. Burne-Jones's pictures were denounced as decadent, effeminate, morbid, unhealthy, even immoral. To admire them was to proclaim oneself an "æsthete," a follower of Postlethwaite. *Punch* soon laughed the mock æsthetics out of fashion, but Burne-Jones remained. Year after year, at the Grosvenor Gallery exhibitions, he was represented by an array of splendid works: the "Laus Veneris," "The Annunciation," the "Dies Domini," "The Golden Stair," "The Wheel of Fortune," and "King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid," to name only a few of the most admired.

In 1892 the exhibition of his collected works was held at the New Gallery, an occasion which for the first time revealed the artist in every phase of his genius, and came as a revelation to the many who had been unable to follow his career in detail, and who knew little or nothing of his work before his



From a photograph by Fred Hollyer, Pembroke Square, W.

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reappearance at the opening show of the Grosvenor Gallery some fifteen years before. A comparison between the pictures painted in early youth and his later work showed with what constancy he had clung to his early ideals, how little he had changed in close upon forty years of professional life. Except for his increased mastery over the technicalities of his art, it was evident that time had had no power to dull his imagination, nor adverse criticism to blunt his purpose. Throughout his career he had painted to please himself, and had aimed at the most perfect presentment of his own conceptions of the highest beauty. He certainly put into practice the theory of his colleague, Sir Edward Poynter, that "the true object of art is to create a world, not to imitate one that is before our eyes." We may not all agree with this theory, but we can hardly blame an artist who, following out his own temperament, has given us the ideal loveliness of his dreams rather than the prosaic facts of everyday life.

His whole life had been devoted to the creation of beauty in a variety of forms, and though, unlike certain of his colleagues, he never tried to point a moral or preach a sermon with his brush, he felt that in leaving the world more beautiful than he found it he had fulfilled his highest

mission. In spite of his delicate, uncertain health, he was happy in being able to work with ease and pleasure; indeed, he is accustomed to say that the beginning of a new picture was in itself a holiday. Yet his work

was not undertaken lightly, as an account of his methods will abundantly prove. He began, we are told, by a careful drawing of his conception in chalk, and this was followed by a cartoon, painted in water-colours, of the same size as the proposed canvas, and finished elaborately from a small coloured sketch. From this the final work was copied, though several further studies were made before the painting was begun. Each stage was allowed to dry before another was proceeded with, and when the whole was finished it was left for months, or even years, before it was varnished.

Burne-Jones, like every true artist, was the severest critic of his own work. The Himalayas, he used to say, were still in front of him, and the Graal still beckoned him onwards.

Unlike so many successful artists, Burne-Jones was something more than

an artist. Ruskin used to say of him that he was the most cultured painter he had ever known, while Lowell declared that he was a great man independently of his painting.



"THE GOLDEN STAIR."