CHAPTER VII

1858–1859, 1860

There are so many tender and holy emotions flying about in our inward world, which like angels, can never assume the body of an outward act; so many rich and lovely flowers spring up which bear no seed, that it is a happiness Poetry was invented, which receives into its limbus all these incorporeal spirits, and the perfume of all these flowers.—JEAN PAUL RICHTER.

ONCE, when I had been confessing to Woolner that I was worn out with work, Mrs. Tennyson sent me an urgent invitation to come and stay with her and her lord at Farringford. I put aside all obstacles and went. It was the noon of summer, and every mile of the journey soothed my tired spirits. On this occasion I saw Mrs. Tennyson for the first time. She was a fitting lady to be helpmate even to such a man as the kingly Poet. I was struck by her bearing an exalted likeness to Queen Elizabeth. She had two beautiful boys with dusky golden locks, full of frolic and fun. The house had not long been built; it was furnished with comfort, but devoid of expensive luxury. Tennyson told me it was paid for with his first earnings. He said that an American to whom he had mentioned this fact, had said, "Ah! had the opportunity been known in the States, the money would have been subscribed for you with a handsome margin, and they would feel honoured to do so, even now." Said Tennyson, "Had this been done, and the money forwarded

to me without any previous knowledge of it, I would have written over the door—

Populi Americani donum."

He was intent on questioning me about the East, and we spent most of our time in his study talking.

On some small panes of glass which would have had no outlook but on bare brick, Tennyson had tried his hand on colour decoration (young Millais, it will be remembered, had for the same object painted subjects of knightly and saintly story). The poet had introduced writhing monsters of different sizes and shapes, swirling about as in the deep. This had been done with remarkable taste and judgment. The paints, which in amateur hands generally have an abominable habit of negativing one another, had here been most happily combined to make mysterious tints, and the definition of forms had been judiciously relinquished when only a general suggestion had been achieved. Thus the pigments had not lost their preciousness by over-elaboration, which would have destroyed the decorative quality. His absolute kindness and candour were illustrated by his interest in a page-boy, who occasionally came into the room. When the boy was out of hearing, Tennyson once asked me whether I had made out his real character. I confessed I had not given him any thought, and could not fairly express an opinion. "I ask you," he pursued, "because I have altogether lost his respect." "His respect," I blurted out, "how?" "Well," continued the poet, "when the boy came into the house, I thought that perhaps I might make his life more interesting to him, and I asked him whether I could lend him any book. He looked bewildered and answered, 'No.' Thinking the reply might proceed from shyness, I enumerated several books that I thought might be attractive to such a lad, but he would not borrow any! From that attempt to treat him like a fellow human being, I have lost all his esteem. Had he gone to Mr. ——'s, my neighbour, he would have had

no attention paid him, the master would scarcely have noticed him as a stranger in the house, and the boy would have respected him as a proper master; because I departed from this rule, he despises me altogether. My house is not so grand as others in the neighbourhood, so the boy concludes that I am not a real gentleman, and he shows his low estimate of me by his grumpiness. There are no doubt men of the lowest class without education at all who are of excellent common-sense, and even superior judgment, and there are men who have had all the advantages of good position and education who are imbeciles. Withal the old feud between the conquered Saxon and the Norman still operates; this boy has the bitterness of the Saxon. He is ready to do his work, black the boots, or brush the clothes, but he resents the show of kindness as condescension from a Norman master."

Astonished, I replied, "Isn't it a question whether the boy has ever heard about the Conquest?"

"It is very possible he has never heard of it, but he has inherited the bitterness of feeling, and he acts upon it," persisted the mournful master, so the matter dropped.

One morning we went up to the beacon on the cliff, and after enjoying the wind for an hour or so, he inquired of me whether I could detect what a flying creature could be that we saw in the distance. I said, "I too have been watching it some minutes. I believe it's an eagle."

"That is scarcely possible, we don't have eagles here," he said.

But I said that I had seen too many of the royal birds to be deceived as to their flight and form. When it passed over our head Tennyson was convinced, and a few days later I read of an eagle being shot in Hampshire.

Tennyson's short-sightedness, which made him bend his head forward when reading, had probably contributed to his bearing, which was the reverse of defiant. At first

acquaintance with the poet, I thought that later in my knowledge of him I should see some phases of the reined-back pose of Woolner's bust, but this I was unable to do. A casual example of the pains he took to overcome the disadvantages of his short-sight occurred, as we descended to the house. A shining fragment in the path arrested his steps. He stooped, picked up the glittering morsel, and placed it in his right hand close to his eyes, rolling it in the palm with the forefinger of his left hand, he then saw it to be a portion of a large pebble lately splintered to bits. The outside surface was still thickly encrusted with a concrete-like shell, but the shattered part was in facets of pale ruby colour, resplendent in its transparency. "Many of the most priceless jewels," he observed, "are disguised as this lustrous crystal was, till the violence came which broke it up. No one would have suspected, in seeing this unsightly stone lying with clumsy boulders, that inside there could be such a gorgeous gem." And when he had exhausted his examination of its varied phases, he carefully put it back into the path saying that it ought to be left there, that others might feel delight in seeing it. When we were near to the house, the luncheon bell ringing, he stopped and pointed along the road, asking whether there were not excursionists waiting to intercept our approach. I said that there were some apparently inoffensive people near the house. Hearing this, Tennyson turned aside and went a long way round to escape observation, telling me by the way that when he was doing any work in the garden, he would hear voices saying, "There he is—look," and half-a-dozen heads, male and female, would appear in a row above the wall. A man had once got into the garden, and when they were at luncheon, the intruder was seen with flattened nose against the window-pane, and was heard to say, "You can see him well from here."

On one occasion he spoke with lively pain of a review of one of his recent poems in an important journal. This, it seemed, had not only condemned his versification with

the assumption of a masterful judgment, but had made a comparison of his poem with those of a period when all society was corrupted, leaving the reader to adopt the suggestions which such comparison was sure to convey. I had seen the review, and had contemptuously put it behind the fire. Tennyson bemoaned that other copies had escaped the flames, and had gone forth with their poison. He looked upon perverse criticism as a constant discouragement to writing, but I remarked that he gave too much attention to stings of such small insects as the writer of the scandalous article. "The man probably has a personal grudge against you," I said, "and being lifted to the throne of Jupiter he uses his thunder without scruple, many, be assured, pass by his malicious nonsense unnoted. It is doomed to forgetfulness, to that limbo to which all spitefulness, and the authors thereof, are bound in the end."

"Yes," said Tennyson, "but when I have earnestly tried to sift out of the store of deeply imprinted impressions the reflections that present themselves as having living value, it is natural that I should be discouraged from all hope of influencing them when a man, who is evidently educated, and has some knowledge of poetry, being entrusted with a position of authority, misinterprets my purpose and makes it convey a meaning odious to my whole soul."

"Such a state of things is indeed disheartening, not to say more," I reflected, "but somehow good work, like all truth, does get recognised in time; the whole of history is made up of wrong verdicts revised."

"Yes," he said, "but while the grass grows the steed starves is true also."

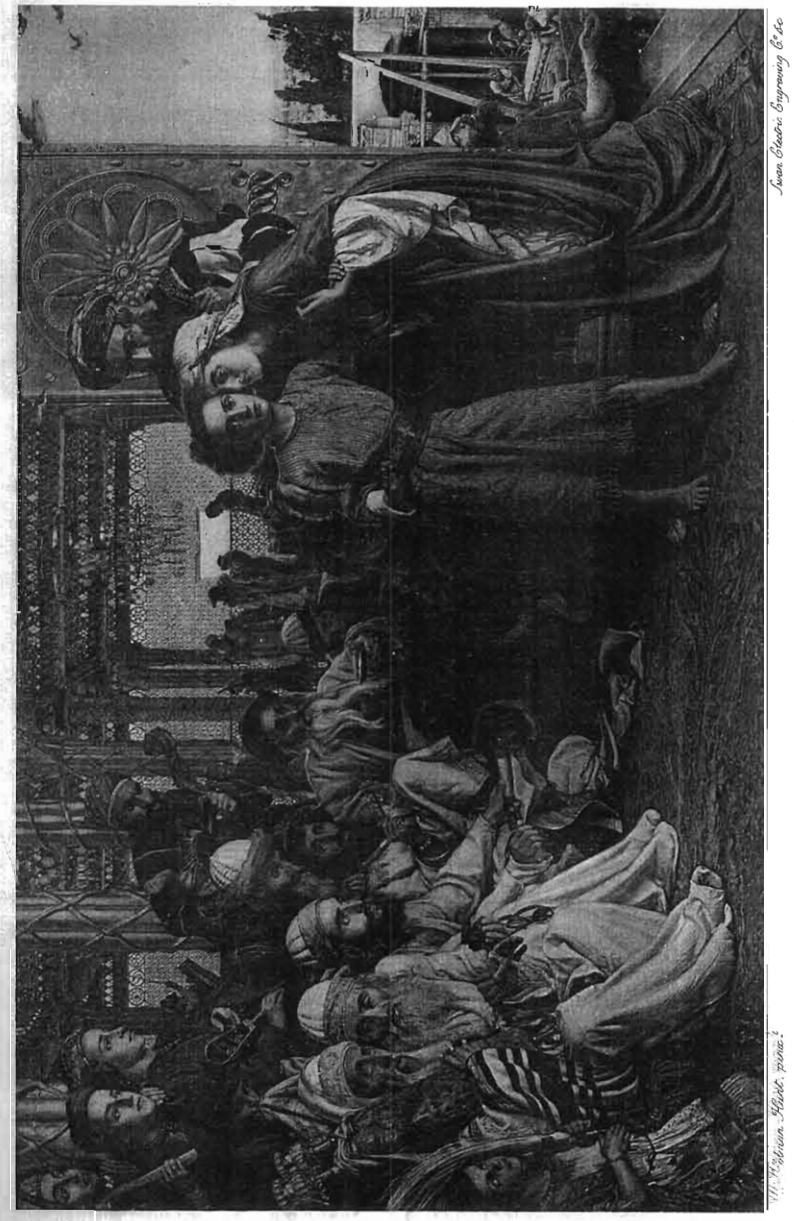
"But," I urged, "the ordeal of professional criticism upon art is apparently a decree of modern Providence; and on the whole the complications entailed upon our branch of art are more arduous than on yours; you may respect the faculties of your reviewer in his degree of literary proficiency. Our reviewer gives no such proof of his knowledge of the subject he

descants upon; he has the pen of a ready writer, and this, with some chit-chat about Gainsborough's 'Blue Boy,' or some other worn-out gossip or phraseology, is his only diploma. Among the lovers of art there are many who are not influenced by such oracles, and these often declare their admiration of a condemned work, but they are generally young professional men, too poor to be patrons, while the rich collector is often timid as to his own judgment, and wants only that which is popular at the time. Thus the painter may be wrecked in his career for want of support. Poets who are too good for their immediate day have to suffer a penalty from the displeasure of their too hasty judges; but there remains for them also independent connoisseurs who could not afford to buy pictures, yet can purchase a book. But perhaps from an impulse to make the wrong you suffer less bitter, I am dwelling too egotistically on the grievances of my own profession."

His laments were anon varied by recitation, or rather intonation, of poems to which I had made special allusion; his organ-like voice gave these with the fullest grandeur.

Sir John Simeon frequently called at Farringford and discoursed of the experiences and observations of his naval life, all which interested the poet as much as myself. One day, when out for a stroll, we visited the descendant of the officer to whom Cromwell had consigned the care of Charles the First when a prisoner at Carisbrook Castle, and who, from scruples as to his right to be the king's gaoler, gave up his appointment.

I had been abroad when Tennyson one evening in town had read *Maud* to a company including some of my friends; but when at Farringford I had the opportunity of listening to other poems which he would speak of as having been composed by him on some subject which chanced to engage our passing attention. If I remarked that I had never read it, his reply was that he had never written the verses down but could remember them, and this he would do, without faltering a syllable, although



The Finding of Christ in the Temple.

often the words had been composed twenty or more years ago. Many poems he told me he had finished and retained only in his memory. Once I offered for his judgment the idea of a great monarch, who sees only the glories of his rule, and not the miseries that are concealed from his sight, likening him to the sun, which never sees the shadows produced by the interception of its rays. "Yes," he said, "the comparison is complete; I would have used it had it occurred to me, but now it would be Holman Hunt's and not Alfred Tennyson's."

After my visit I recalled to mind many matters which I should have liked to discuss with this king of gentle nature; the opportunity of being with him alone was precious and I valued it as a sacred privilege. I was profoundly impressed by the unpretending nature of this large thinker and consummate poet, who, deeply conversant with the character and forms of preceding singers of all races and time, yet adopted for his themes the scenes, moral feeling, and science of his own day and country. His simplicity of manner was by some dwelt upon as childish; there was a truth underlying the comment, for his frankness of speech was like that of a child, whose unembarrassed penetration surprises the conventional mind. My holiday brought balm and health to me, and I went back to my work with renewed zest.

It has been said that Millais was unreasonable in that he showed discontent at the want of substantial recognition of the more ambitious work he was producing; for example, when his picture of "The Vale of Rest" did not immediately find admirers and a purchaser, he was impatient, while the commentators say that in fact he had but little time to wait before the picture was sold. Time will, I feel sure, justify the answer I have to give to that reproof. This artist was so exceptional in excellence among those of any age or any country that the question is not whether he obtained a ready market year by year, but whether our nation was making proper use of

his genius. Before he was twenty he had painted a picture which bore signs of more capacious ability in conception, composition, drawing, colour, and technical qualities combined than any painter ever displayed at such youthful age. He had now been before the world in varying, but always great power for ten or more years, he had added to the glory of modern art, and he had a right to expect that he should gain in return the ampler opportunities of exercising his genius which the old masters had universally been afforded, instead of merely securing a tardy livelihood. But critics had hung about his heels, and often so far impeded him that, instead of large or laborious efforts, he had been forced to do humbler works that would more easily come within the taste and the means of the general dealer and buyer. In no other age would such an artist have been left without some national opportunity of exercising his genius. There were indeed painters and sculptors being employed to decorate the Palace at Westminster, but no public minister amidst the clamour that had been raised against our "heresy" would, however much he might have been instigated by his own taste, have had the courage to employ any one of us in public work, and Millais was never asked by any church dignitaries to paint for them. While his works were still vehemently abused by the press, those of artists of mediocrity were lauded to the skies, and certain of these painters were favoured by Parliamentary Commissioners of Fine Art. Now, persons of superficial reflection often say that Millais ought not under any temptation to have swerved from his higher inspirations, but great art cannot be produced even by men of the purest genius, if they are not supported by the country's demand for their work; the nation must be behind them, just as it must equip and provide for the soldier fighting for its cause. Raphael, when commissioned by the Pope to paint the "Stanze," was only twenty-five years of age, and there can be no sober doubt that he had not then done work of such original power as Millais had shown before he was that age.

Had Raphael died before his work in the Vatican was undertaken, his earlier paintings facile and obediently learned as they were, would have placed him only in the second rank of Italian artists. Surely a man of genius has a right to marry when he has established his commanding position, and being married he is called upon to support his family. Millais in this position found himself driven to despair and want of faith, in the possibility of teaching his countrymen the value of poetic art. "I have striven hard," he said to me, "in the hope that in time people would understand me and estimate my best productions at their true worth, but they (the public and private patrons) go like a flock of sheep after any silly bell-wether who clinks before them. I have, up to now, generally painted in the hope of converting them to something better, but I see they won't be taught, and as I *must* live, they shall have what they want, instead of what I know would be best for them. A physician sugars his pill, and I must do the same." There was a great rage at the time, under the direction of a certain leader of the rout, that painters should do works only of contemporary subjects. The incidents that are historically important are rarely recognised to be so till many years afterwards. On the day that rough George Stephenson arrived in London, no one saw that his coming was the most important event in Europe, that a complete change in the civilisation of all the races on the planet was thus heralded. Modern subjects that are paintable are generally of no historic moment. The demand for representations of trivial incidents was steady, and Millais being encouraged to seek these, often displayed great taste in their selection and treatment. His "Apple Blossoms" (1859) was an excellent example of this class, "Trust Me" had many pictorial excellences, and "My First Sermon" and "My Second Sermon" were endearing efforts of his power in this strain; but some which it is needless to instance, however excellent in workmanship, must have been done simply to meet the vulgar demand. Up to the year 1859

he painted in Perth, then he settled in Cromwell Place and finished "The Vale of Rest," and "The Love of James the First of Scotland."

We perhaps beyond other artists were saddened to hear that C. R. Leslie was in danger and had to undergo a serious operation which unhappily did not save his life. A few days after his death his son George Leslie called upon Millais specially to deliver a message from the dying artist. The charge was :—

"Go to Millais and tell him that the future of English art is in his hands, and beg him to exercise his fullest power to sustain its honour and glory."

This generous recognition of Millais and his aspirations marked a departure from the mistrust of most of the Academicians towards even that one of us who was a member of their own Body.

Watts up to this time had been treated with only prejudiced toleration, his pictures being put high up, in corners, and unfavourable places. Indeed it was said that one of the Academicians always remarked, "Oh, there's a Watts, let us sky it." In the year 1858 he determined to conceal his identity, and sent in two large portraits of somewhat unusual style for him under the name F. W. George ; these were admirably placed, and widely recognised. The following is a reference by Walter Thornbury in the *Athenæum* to P.R.B. works :—

EXHIBITION AT R.A., 1858

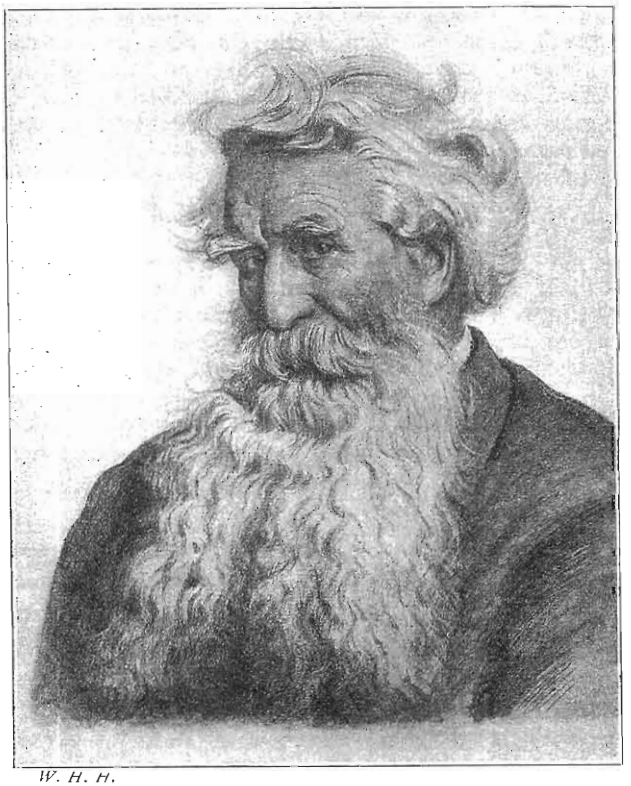
. . . In portraits there are the Pre-Raphaelite ones by a new name, Mr. George (we believe a mere masquerade), full of merit. . . . The two best portraits in the exhibition are by Mr. George (assumed name), really the works of Mr. Watts, a known cartoon drawer. They are Miss Senior (167) and Miss Eden (185). They are, in fact, great and daring experiments of introducing a Pre-Raphaelite finish of accessories into portraits—laurel bushes, box borders, gravel walks and flowers, instead of the venerable and immemorial books, curtains, pillars, and sloppy green distances. Paint furniture well and faces well, and the face will maintain the old superiority all the world over. Let Mr. Pickersgill paint red blobs and call them roses, for fear well-painted flowers should detract from his spotted, unfinished faces. In the one picture, Miss Senior, with a thoughtful, fine face, walks like a Miss Brontë's heroine down a garden, in a gown of a curious brown purple colour, every plait and fold carefully but not pedantically drawn. In the other, a lady is kneeling upon a chair, watering flowers, her figure cutting daringly enough with certain red and orange draperies against a wall of bright green. Oh remember, portrait painters, men of industry, talent, and perhaps still some faint, foolish, lurking ambition, if you do not paint more like Mr. George, the inevitable gravitation towards the garret or the broker's of your now applauded pictures !

EXHIBITION AT R.A., 1859

. . . Mr. Watts's "Isabella" (438) is a pretty portrait, painted in the manner of Sir C. Eastlake, turned, if it were possible, P.R.B. The painting is a little flat and over-cautious, but there is a great charm about it ; it is the only good idealised portrait in the exhibition, and it is well and fairly hung too, which is miraculous.

When in finishing the landscape details of my sketches of earlier pictures, the doing of which most readily brought grist to the mill, I was glad of the opportunity of enjoying the hospitality of Mr. and Mrs. Combe. In the Colleges I found, what all returned truants experience, that much of the known life had vanished, leaving the background nought but a sad memorial of the past. I felt glad that the University Press was on the confines of the town towards Godstow and Wolvercott, where my painting ground lay. Mr. and Mrs. Combe were always angels of cheerful benevolence and piety. Attending constantly the Infirmary, where the patients were made intimate friends, the need of a chapel soon became evident to Mrs. Combe. The building of this they entrusted to Arthur Blomfield, and soon after its completion, finding the neighbourhood called "Jericho" increasing greatly in its population, they engaged the same architect to build a church and schools there, dedicated to St. Barnabas. A new duty, the consideration of which cost considerable anxiety, arose out of the question how Mr. Combe

could keep the University Press a continuing source of profit instead of loss, as before his management it had been ; the University had made him an M.A. in recognition of his improvement of their affairs. The looming trouble



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THOMAS COMBE, M.A.

which had to be met was the approaching cessation of the monopoly enjoyed by the University of the printing of Bibles and Prayer Books, so that the surplus earned by him, and threatened by this outer competition, might not be lost. He knew that no modern Parliament would continue the University privilege, and he was driven to

consider whether the papermakers' profit might not be saved by manufacturing it themselves, but the University was debarred from engaging in business. One way that remained was for him to make the venture himself, and

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MRS. THOMAS COMBE.

when the enterprise should become a sound undertaking, as partner to the University, to hand over the factory to the authorities as part of their established printing industry. There was a mill then out of use at Wolvercott, and we had wended our way there not infrequently in the character of searchers after the picturesque. Eventually the mill was

taken, adapted for the change of work, and a cheery manager, one Mr. Stacey, was installed in the little cottage. This had two rooms always reserved for Mrs. Combe's tea when she came over in the pony carriage. The neighbourhood was perfect for such work as I had to do, I rode over Port Meadows in the morning, and made the fields of Godstow my studio till sunset, when, generally, there was assembled a pleasant party with whom to return by twilight.

Still, for what seemed a long time there was doubt about this project in the Squire's mind—Mr. Combe was always thus called—and the difficulties became a subject of talk with him, although it never clouded either the master's or mistress's face to the recipients of their bounty, either at Jericho or at the Mill. Gradually I could gather that prospects were getting better, but they were not yet realised, when late in the year Mr. Combe said to me, "Come on my left side, I am not deaf there. I think under your circumstances, with so much real property existing in the far-advanced Temple picture, your horror of becoming a borrower is a virtue carried to the extent of a vice. You may get three hundred guineas for your little replica of 'The Hireling Shepherd' when it is finished, this will take another month or two, eh? But I gather the profit will almost be swallowed in rent and back claims. Well, what will you do then, unless you set to at some other pot-boiler? And so you will lose next season, and 'The Temple' will never be finished. Now you take my advice, Hunt. You really think you could finish it in another six months; I think so too. Well, borrow £300; that would keep you going, and when you finish and sell the picture, you'll get out of difficulties sooner than you would in any other way."

"But grant all this," I said, "you don't mean that Coutts would advance me the money on my unfinished picture?"

"No, but I could manage it easily now, and I should not want any security," said he, as he looked at me under

his eyebrows with a dart of merry triumph in a way that drove all further scruples from my mind.

I was now free on going back to town to work on the Temple picture for a longer period than I had been able to do since my return from the East, and was lavish in my arrangement, obtaining models far ahead for the remaining figures to be painted, and when my friends outside asked me whether my picture would ever be done, I could reply bravely in a way that defied bantering.

The position of ourselves in relation to Dickens was a delicate one. His attack in *Household Words* upon Millais' picture of 1851 had revealed the strongest animus against our purpose, and thus our partiality for him was exercised only by the reading of his works; but he was a great friend of Wilkie Collins and of his family, their good-souled mother, in the years of my absence, had arranged a meeting of Millais and the great author at dinner, it resulted in removing all estrangement, and in making Dickens understand and express his sense of the power of Millais' genius and character.

Millais always spoke of the meeting with satisfaction, but a letter written by Dickens a few days after the dinner needlessly and ungraciously endorsed the sentiments of the original violent article, and so again alienated the confidence of our circle from him.[1]

Wilkie Collins began his reputation by writing the life of his father, and by the novel entitled *Antonina*. He had made previous essays in painting; one example by him was exhibited in 1849.

The biography and his classical romance were the trial pacings of his Pegasus, and he was now exercising his powers in serial Christmas numbers and the like. At the time that he was writing *Mr. Ray's Cash-box*, Millais painted the admirable little portrait of the young author now in the National Portrait Gallery, which remained to the end of his days the best likeness of him. It will be seen he had a prominent forehead, and in full

[1] See *Life of Sir John E. Millais*, by his Son.

face the portrait would have revealed that the right side of his cranium outbalanced in prominence that of the left. Dickens contracted the closest friendship with Wilkie, and they were collaborators together in Christmas numbers—in this kind of work the younger writer became a favourite of the first order. Personally Wilkie was entirely without ambition to take a place in the competition of society, and avoided plans of life which necessitated the making up of his mind enough to forecast the future. In this respect he left all to circumstance; but although a generous spender at all times, he was prudent with money affairs. No one could be more jolly than he as the lord of the feast in his own house, where the dinner was prepared by a *chef*, the wines plentiful, and the cigars of choicest brand. The talk became rollicking and the most sedate joined in the hilarity; laughter long and loud crossed from opposite ends of the room and all went home brimful of good stories. When you made a chance call in the day, he would look at you through his spectacles, getting up from his chair to greet you with warm welcome. He would sit down again, his two hands stretched forward inside the front of his knees, rocking himself backwards and forwards, asking with deep concern where you came from last. If he saw your eyes wandering, he would burst out: "Ah! you might well admire that masterpiece; it was done by that great painter Wilkie Collins, and it put him so completely at the head of landscape painters that he determined to retire from the profession in compassion for the rest. The Royal Academy were so affected by its supreme excellence and its capacity to teach, that they carefully avoided putting it where taller people in front might obscure the view, but instead placed it high up, that all the world could without difficulty survey it. Admire, I beg you, sir, the way in which those colours stand; no cracking in that *chef-d'œuvre*, and no tones ever fail. Admire the brilliancy of that lake reflecting the azure sky; well, sir, the painter of that picture has no petty jealousies, that unrivalled tone

was compounded simply with Prussian blue and flake white, it was put on you say by a master hand, yes but it will show what simple materials in such a hand will achieve. I wish all masterpieces had defied time so triumphantly."

There was a portrait of his mother by Mrs. Carpenter, her sister, which represented her in youth and girl-like beauty, and it reminded me how she had said that when young, at an evening party Samuel Taylor Coleridge had singled her out and had talked with her for twenty minutes in the highest strains of poetical philosophy, of which she understood not a word, nothing but that it flowed out of the mouth of a man with two large brilliant blue eyes. She wondered why he should have chosen to talk to her. The unpretending portrait explained the riddle.

Wilkie's room was hung with studies by his father, and beautiful coast scenes of the neighbourhood of the Bay of Naples.

"But tell me, Holman," he said once, "what are you going to do with this wonderfully elaborate work of yours begun in Jerusalem? You must take care and get a thundering big price for it or you will be left a beggar"; I replied, "The truth is, my dear Wilkie, I am rather getting reconciled to the prospect looming before me that I shall not sell it at all, for no price such as those which picture buyers are accustomed to give, £1000 or £1500 at the most, would put me into a position to recommence on another Eastern design, and I have no inclination to work to enrich picture dealers and publishers alone. I have many reasons to think that the public will be really interested in it, although the canvas is not a large one; I wish it were three times as big, it would have cost me less labour; I am told it will make an attractive and remunerative exhibition, and this will persuade some publisher to buy the copyright. I have no doubt that it will help my position as an artist, and bring purchasers for my other works. I shall soon pay outstanding claims, and have this picture to the good, yet I don't want to

waste my time on business, and I should be very glad to find some dealer to take it off my hands."

"Now," he demanded, "what would really pay you fairly, as a professional man?"

"Nothing less, I assure you, than 5500 guineas—a price that has never been given in England for a modern picture," I said.

"Well, you ought to be able to get that; have you any nibbles?"

"Yes, nibbles of small fry but no bites; private people have asked me to let them have the first refusal of it. They certainly expect that I shall ask a handsome price; I shall not tell them till it is practically finished, and then I know they will be scared off and give it up, and only one will remain—Gambart, the dealer, who is prepared to go farther than the others, but ruled by the usual standard he will shy at my figures."

"I will tell you what you should do," he suggested, "Dickens is not only a man of genius, he is a good business man; you go to him and ask him to tell you whether you could not make the terms so that, keeping to your price, you will still get what you want from the dealer. Gambart is a sharp man, but being sharp, he knows better than to lose your picture, but you must give him the offer in a practicable way, and Dickens will tell you how to do this."

"But, my dear Wilkie, although Mrs. Dickens was kind enough to ask me to her house to see your 'Frozen Deep' acted, and though when I have met Dickens he has been civil and pleasant, I have no reason to think that he has any kind of sympathy for my art, and accordingly I could not expect him to like being appealed to in this matter."

"Don't you have any such thought. I will speak to Dickens, and you will see he will be very glad to help you," rejoined my eager friend.

Shortly afterwards Dickens asked me to come and see him in Tavistock Square. He was then forty-eight years

of age. By his early portraits he had appeared to be a good-looking beau of the last Georgian days, and the portrait painters had seized little that bespoke firmness under a light and cheerful exterior; but in these later days all the bones of his face showed, giving it truly statuesque dignity, and every line on his brow and face were the records of past struggle and of present power to paint humanity in its numberless phases. It was a poor criticism of him, current at this time, that he would never in the future write anything equal to *Pickwick*.

He received me with a pleasant welcome, and after a few friendly words added, "I am glad you are exact—we will proceed to business at once. How many years have you had this picture of yours in hand?"

"Six, with many intervals on smaller works, executed to bring grist to the mill," said I.

"Will you tell me how long a time you employed on it in Jerusalem?"

I did my best to explain.

"Your journey and stay there cost you a good deal of money?"

I entered into the facts.

"Now you have got the picture nearly finished?"

"I may complete it in good time for the next Exhibition season."

"What will be the sources of revenue for your dealer, should he buy it?"

"He will be able to exhibit it at a shilling a head in his gallery in London; we may average as much as £20 or £30 a day, taken at the door. The rent at the best season is of course heavy, and he has a canvasser paid partly on results, and a toll-keeper. I should calculate that a fifth of the revenue should suffice for this. The canvasser will take the names of all people willing to subscribe for the plate; the impressions will bring £3, £5, and £8 each. He will have to pay the engraver, say £800 or so, for his work, and then there will be the cost of printing and distribution. When this had been done he

would get further income by the sale of the picture itself. There will, however, be the doubt whether the public will look with favour on the work, which may offend. As far as I can judge in my own studio, however, there is no prospect of this, but distinctly the contrary. Mr. Gambart frequently points out that I must not consider that this picture will fetch a price that would be a commensurate payment for my time; he tells me that I shall have to make a sacrifice for this, and be satisfied with the greater reputation it will give me, and make my profit on other works."

Dickens smiled ironically and said, "Yes, we inspired workers for the public entertainment ought to think of nothing so much as the duty of putting money into publishers' pockets, but we are a low-minded set, and we want a part of this filthy lucre for ourselves, for our landlords and our tradesmen, who most unfeelingly send us in bills as though we did nothing for their pleasure."

I went on, "To venture the business myself would perhaps be the fairest for all, in that case the loss or gain would fall on me alone, but then a business man has opportunities for carrying on such enterprises which the artist has not, and a painter wastes his life in it."

Dickens then said, "You say you want 5500 guineas —you ought to have it, and I decide that a business man can afford to give it to you, and your business man I feel pretty sure *will* give it to you, but you must consider that he will not get his return immediately, and you must give him time; let him pay you £1500 down, another £1000 in six months, and the other sums at periods extending over two and a half or three years. You will find he will not throw away the chance, but do not let it drag along, tell him that you want to be free to make other plans."

I was much touched by his full attention, and thanked him most sincerely. In one respect I missed an opportunity from false pride on my part and timid reading of his nature. I ought to have said, "Now, will you do me the further honour of coming as far as Kensington to see

this painting of mine," but I let the door shut without saying this, and I never had again the opportunity of learning how far we differed or agreed in the purpose I was carrying out in this picture, of attempting to realise the actual history of the divine Man.

The Duchess of Argyll, who was my neighbour in Kensington, had in the most agreeable manner, two years before, called upon me, and taken a genuine interest in my work, and other persons of the great world asked to see it. Certainly the reputation of the picture had grown.

When it was so far advanced that it needed only deliberate judgment for the last balancing and ripening tones and touches, Mr. Mulready came and made kind comments upon the work, and later the President of the Academy and Lady Eastlake did me the same honour; it would not have been possible for them to have been more complimentary and kind than they were, and in the end Sir Charles paused, saying, "It has been said that you are resolved not to exhibit the picture, and I feel impelled to explain that in my mind it would be very wrong were you not to do so." I was astonished, for I had never had such intention as that which Rossetti acted upon in showing his pictures only in his own studio, and I frankly repudiated the construction of future intention, arising, probably, from my enforced abstention from public exhibition for the last three years. The President expressed his approbation of my reply, adding most unexpectedly, "I am able to assure you that the picture shall have a post of honour, and that it shall be placed with a rail in front, such as Mr. Frith's 'Derby Day' had, to protect it from the press of people." It was only then that I understood how I was responsible for the rumour he had heard, and I felt pained in giving my explanation, dreading the suspicion that I gloried in uttering it vindictively. It was, that with a picture which had cost me so much, I must look to the special exhibition of it as one chance of remuneration, and that I could not, therefore, send it to the Academy and lose what should be an important part

of the property to me. He accepted my explanation most courteously.

Meanwhile my energetic dealer, Mr. Gambart, was impatient to know on what terms I would sell it to him, but I would not reveal this until the end.

After, according to my promise, offering the refusal to the other private collectors who had asked for it, I told Gambart that I was ready to treat with him. "Now," he said, "you will tell me your price, but I hope you will come and dine with me, and we will talk it over after dinner." When I came up to the fire after the ladies had gone, pouring out another glass of wine, he said, "Now then for this secret of yours. What is your price?"

I stated it.

"Oh, but it is impossible, no one ever heard of such a sum."

"I quite admit that," was my reply. "You are called upon only to consider whether you can afford it."

"It is quite impossible," said he, "but you must take less."

"I won't abate a farthing," I said. "Now let me understand, shall I conclude that you give it up?"

He waited and then said, "You must take time to consider."

My reply was, "I am called very obstinate by my companions, perhaps they are right; whether or no, you must not expect me to take anything less than I have said."

"Well," he said then, "leave it open for a week."

My response was, "The Exhibition season is nigh."

"Yes," he returned, "and I shall have to make up my mind soon that I may calculate how much money I have to spend on pictures going to the Academy."

In the end I gave him three or four days, and this led to his acceptance of my terms. To finish a long task and send it forth to the world is a greater lightening of the heart than many men apprehend. In this case there was a very magnified sense of relief.

The picture was ready towards the middle of April,

and ere the last touches were dry, private view cards had been sent out for an early date; Gambart had stipulated that I should be present; the attendance was extremely large and there seemed to be every prospect of an enthusiastic recognition of the work, yet the signing of our agreement had been deferred.

Millais came with me to the gallery on the morning of the first public day; it was early, and we were alone, my friend was full of generous recognition without limit, and said of "The Temple" picture (when seen for the first time in its frame designed by myself with ivory flat, in what I meant to be semi-barbaric splendour) that the work looked "like a jewel in a gorgeous setting."

The hour had come for the public to arrive, and still we were the only persons present; as we wondered, a timid lady presented herself at the half-opened door, with apologetic mien, she inquired where she should find the picture which she had been told was on exhibition there, and we asked her in. Very few others came, and it turned out that the business people had put no notices at the door, and not a single newspaper had a line of advertisement to inform the public. This I corrected promptly, and the visitors began to arrive in numbers of eight hundred to a thousand a day.

One morning the attendant recognised as the Prince Consort a gentleman who was leaving the gallery after trying in vain to see the picture. He approached His Royal Highness, and asked to be allowed to send it to Windsor for the inspection of the Queen. The Prince expressed his pleasure at the proposal, and accordingly, to my surprise, when I arrived in the evening, the announcement was on the door that my picture was removed by command, after which it came back with a gracious message of appreciation.

Gambart employed Signor Morelli to make a drawing of the picture in black and white for the use of his engraver, and it was a wondrously exact and elaborate transcript of the original. To make the tracing for him,

which I could not leave to other hands, I often was at the gallery at half-past five in the morning.

Disburdened of all my anxiety in launching my picture, one day I went earlier than usual for the full gathering of the Cosmopolitan Club. Thackeray and an intimate friend alone were there; as I approached the great man, he ejaculated, "God bless my living soul! here we are in the presence of the happiest man of the day. I hope that what I hear is true that you have sold a picture for 5500 guineas?"

"It *is* true, I'm glad to say, that I have now signed an agreement with Gambart," I returned.

"Now, you are still a young man," he continued, "and to have got so handsome a sum for one picture, and that I hear not a large one, is a truly wonderful piece of good fortune, and I congratulate you heartily; you have cause to be jubilant."

"But," I said, "I must not allow you to assume that I have suddenly become a wealthy adventurer; I began the work years ago, and to do it I had to risk not only my little store of worldly goods in going to the place, but also all the chances of success which I had gained before leaving England, and in truth the difficulties I had to overcome cost me so much, that ten or twelve paintings might have been done in the time. I am sure that I understate the case when I say that other men of my age have been saving more than I shall get at the best, even when this business is finished."

"But," urged Thackeray, "I thought it *was* finished."

I explained that I had yet received only a goodly earnest of the money, that I had to pay some heavy debts connected with the picture, while still the outstanding balance was withheld. "Painting subject pictures," I said, "is an expensive profession, and after my experience of going to the East on a small capital, I feel obliged to postpone returning there for further work until I have a little money invested to bring me in an income that will save me from daily fear that my means will be absorbed before my canvas has been turned into a picture."

Thackeray thereupon rejoined, "But you are a single man, and have but few expenses."

"I am only a poor bachelor," I confessed, "but a man who does work which the public are pleased to take interest in, ought to be paid so that he can at thirty-three have the choice of marrying, and if, as many other men have, I have family claims upon me, that is not the world's affair, and it has no right to refuse him the just reward, such as if married he must claim."

"Ha-ha, ha, then you know what it is to have claims upon your harvestings before they are gathered in perhaps, and I daresay you know something of other than blood relations who say 'Give, give, give, but count not me the herd'—the thought of them makes me wince."

"Yes," I laughed, "we know who are always ready to prove that you should, considering your unvarying good luck in comparison to theirs, let them have more and more."

"Yes, I know them all," he said, "with their constant remindings of your 'lucky star,' and that they were not born with your golden spoon, and how everything has been against them. Well, well," he said with a half-amused sigh, "they are a dispensation of Providence by which we are brought to reflect upon poor human nature, but then 5500 guineas at thirty-three, that is a good turning point in a man's fortune; I remember when I was about the same age I had been writing for some months for ——, and the magazine had, in consequence of my contributions, been restored from a state near collapse to increasing stability; at that juncture my wife fell ill, and the doctors assured me that she must be taken for a month to the sea-side. I had no funds for this, and thinking it not unreasonable, I wrote to the editor: 'Dear sir, I am in severe need of ready money, I shall be sending the usual copy for the end of the month, could you oblige me by advancing me £20 on the forthcoming contribution to your magazine, and thus greatly oblige, W. M. T.'

"The reply was prompt, it was to the effect that the

editor had made a rule never to pre-pay his writers, and that he was obliged to adhere to his regulation. *You* needn't, my dear fellow, be any longer thus driven from pillar to post to get such a sum, and I am sincerely glad of it. Ah me!" he sighed, getting up, and left me with our common friend, going to the opposite end of the room, while I followed his lordly back till he became lost in a *posse* of newcomers. In a few minutes Thackeray returned, saying, "But you are, after all, a lucky dog, for you have something more than a miserable remnant or salvage of a life in which to do your work."

It seemed, with his stalwart and manly frame before me, and with the knowledge of his daring independence of mind, an empty gibe at his additional years of life, but, alas! it was only three Christmas eves after this that I looked back upon this remark as a premonition that he felt the uncertainty of life more than he was disposed to admit. People often repeat that at heart he was a *snob*, and that he had admitted this himself. In the society of the club where we met he would have been sure to show this, had it been true, and I never saw any signs of the weakness. This assumption from his own words is like the conclusion that Keats was a dwarf, derived from his remark, "But who will care for the opinions of John Keats, five feet high?"

When I tendered the three hundred pounds advanced to me by Mr. Combe, he exclaimed, "No, I don't need it, but you have interested us in your friend Woolner, and we should like to tide him over his low-water difficulties. Go to him, and say I hope he will receive the sum from me, and that he will keep it as long as he likes"; and he added, "It does not matter if he never gives it back, the amount will have been twice well used, and if in this case it brings success, as in yours, I shall be better pleased for his sake."

This kindness enabled me to introduce the sculptor to my Oxford friends, and the increase of his circle at the University helped him as much as the money did. About

this time he finished a statue of Lord Bacon for the Oxford Museum.

Once, when I had gone to the Exhibition gallery of my picture to meet Gambart, I found Dyce there; he was generously appreciative of the work, but objected that it was "three pictures in one." Another artist of older standing was, however, not so approving of the treatment, but declared that the painting was nothing less than blasphemous, seeing "it was only a representation of a parcel of modern Turks in a café."

The *Times* did not print a line of notice of the picture. Tom Taylor, its critic, told Millais he had written a notice, but the editor would not insert it. If this was in the flippant spirit of his comments on "The Light of the World" it could well be spared. The attendance at the gallery proved the interest that the impartial public took in my effort.

Meeting Dickens at a party in the full swing of the season, I was greeted by him with, "You have caused my hatter to be madder than ever. He declares that you have choked up Bond Street with the carriages for your exhibition, so that none of his established customers can get to his shop."

Gambart asked me to write a short pamphlet on the story and object of Pre-Raphaelitism, to be sold in the gallery, to add to his profits. I objected that I could not undertake this, because there had been others actively bound up in the effort to bring about a purgation of art, each working on somewhat different lines, and that any such utterance of my own might appear as savouring of egoism. He next urged that I should write a memoir of myself. I declined on the ground that people should not regard an artist as a public character, except in his works, and I had a settled repugnance to obtrude the privacy of life behind the scenes, and argued that there was every reason for him to be satisfied with his success without any addition from extraneous excitement. He would not, however, be beaten back for more than a few days, and

he came, saying, "I have been thinking that you can't refuse to let your friend Stephens write the pamphlet on your life, and I would pay him thirty pounds for doing it." I had to yield, and in a few days the pamphlet was issued and sold in the room. Stephens was still dear to me as my old comrade and my friend.