

## CHAPTER IV

Or from the bridge I lean'd to hear  
The mill dam rushing down with noise,  
And see the minnows everywhere  
In crystal eddies glance and poise. . . .

I loved the brimming wave that swam  
Through quiet meadows round the mill,  
The sleepy pool above the dam,  
The pool beneath it never still,  
The meal-sacks on the whiten'd floor,  
The dark round of the dripping wheel,  
The very air about the door  
Made misty with the floating meal.

*Miller's Daughter*, TENNYSON.

Give me quickly the cold water flowing forth from the Lake of Memory.—*Orphic Tablets*, GILBERT MURRAY.

EWELL—Ye well—in Surrey, at the time I speak of, had a true claim to be a home of repose. The fount in its slab-formed cradle at the entrance of the village was, in fact, only the public appearance of the newly-born stream, the true *fons* being on the left side of the road hidden by a garden wall. And yet when the pedestrian, a-dust, athirst, and sun-dazed, stepped within the surrounding rails of the crystal well, his eyes rested on the refreshing waters ere he raised them to his parched lips. The wide earth's thank-offering of a spring of water out-pouring in its sparkling purity is ever a delight to the soul of man. The village itself had no sense of modern bustling or hurry; all was arranged spaciouly, all work

executed with deliberation, and with such unostentation that externally there was but little to distinguish the chemist's shop from the baker's, or any other tradesman's house from that of his neighbour. On the outskirts of the trading centre there were gentlemen's homes and farmsteads; and Nonsuch Park, of Elizabethan fame, still gave a stately grace farther afield, although the quaint palace had long since gone from sight. Banstead and



A. Hughes.

EWELL SPRING.

Epsom Downs formed the horizon to the south. The water from the spring bore itself away in an opposite direction, first carolling along a pebble-strewed channel into a shallow pool crossed by a flat bridge, whence by the quiet searcher might be seen red-spotted trout poised in mid-water, and casting their sleeping sun-shadows on to the mossy gravel below, steady as though painted there. In the region beyond, the stream expanded bordered by well-tended lawns, and patterned with gaily flowered garden beds; between these widened borders lay an islet with



weeping willows kissing the surface of the water. Peering down between the reflected boughs into the varnished shadows of the forest of weeds, the loiterer, lightly tip-toeing forward, might see the suspicious fish flitting lightning-like into unsearchable caverns. A stone's-throw off, the pulsing wheel drew one's attention, and enticed one's steps along a road to the face of the mill, where whitened men bearing sacks of flour descended and ascended inclined planks between upper doorways and vans. A further mill was so walled-up as to conceal the water in its channel. In the meadows below, the young current revelled in freedom, oftentimes taking a double course around mounds of earth well furnished with flourishing growth, then joining again and channelling itself through ditch-divided banks, under a forest of willows, with but occasional signs of any master's control. An opening in the wooded hollow led to a track of cart-ruts, winding round into the river, where it broadened out into a shallow ford; the wheel-marks led the way and tempted reckless feet to ford the transparent glaze of shining water, leading to a road bordered by blossoming trees and an ancient orchard, the herald of a farmhouse telling of past centuries. Beyond the house was a nave of noble elms extending in perspective to the sky-line. Stopping at the entrance to the avenue, any lover of nature's shy creatures would be drawn towards a large lonely tarn, well-nigh carpeted with duckweed and white blossom wherever the reeds and flags had not pierced through the surface; or where far, or near, the wild-fowl, or farm ducks and geese, had not cleared a domain for themselves. The wild-fowl met their domestic cousins on the common plain, although not with trust and unreserve, unless indeed the cackling recognition of the inquisitive intruder was intended to be, as it certainly was, the signal for the uprising of an inconceivably large flock of shy birds from the further extremity of the lakelet, the brood fleeing away beyond pursuit of sight.

Our little river below had to narrow itself to pass

under the span of a brick-built arch made for neat-booted lasses and swains; it then deepened and passed between banks, husbanding the current's force for man's further will; it rippled along, circling in dimples as it was driven under sheltering willows, its banks strewn with long-disused mill-stones, discarded roller-beams, and ruined timber cog-wheels. Soon the flood was imprisoned by sluice gates; close at hand were abandoned huts, shuttered, overgrown, and choked with rank weeds. Here the kingfisher arrowed his way, the wild pigeon chattered and cooed, and the distant cuckoo voice noted the season. Between all could now be heard the plash and cranking of a near water-wheel. Now cut off from confiding trust, not even the lonely angler ventured thus far; the region was out of the ordinary world; being thus beyond the limits of common experience when, in the remoter solitude, a being, black as a creature of dark Avernus, passed by, he seemed fitly to haunt the scene. He was, however, only one who, for extra pay and much idleness, passed the day and night in turn with another man visiting at intervals a neighbouring gunpowder mill, shovelling up the deadly mixture always being ground by a revolving crusher on a circular platform. The water served two neighbouring mills, and then for a mile or so it revelled in wanton freedom, cutting deep down into hollow meadows, nearly covered by border tangle. It emerged again between well-trimmed banks for further mill service before it got finally free in wide meadow-land.

All this luscious and lonely charm of dell and meadow had very early a fascination for me, and it was natural that I should attempt to register some of its mystery by my art. Accordingly, I began a painting of the pool above one of the first mills, with the sun glistening down and penetrating through every nook of the landscape. The difference between the scene as it was presented to my untutored sight, and any single landscape by the great painters that I knew, suggested the doubt, when I had begun the subject on my drawing-board, whether it was not one



which a practical painter should avoid. This doubt was not removed when it grew increasingly evident that, spite of perseverance, the time remaining for the completion of my view would in no way suffice for its accomplishment. The fact was that no more than two or three days could be allotted to this work, and to achieve it in the manner in which it was begun would have needed about six weeks. I left off, blaming only my want of masterliness, when in fact it was more the lack of opportunity to persist in my course that was at fault.

A dear uncle and aunt who then lived at the Rectory Farm were my hosts in this pleasant place of retreat. Sometimes a cousin was also a visitor. He had a riding cob kept in the stables, and with this we made excursions, travelling ride and tie. Sometimes, with an extra mount for myself, we scampered over Banstead Downs to Epsom racecourse and to Ashford Park, and so I saw every variety of the country within miles of the weeping "eyne" of the valley.

Arriving on a visit to this favourite spot, while I was getting my canvases from the train, the gentleman known to me by sight as Captain Lemprière introduced himself, inquiring politely about my work, and referring to his young friend John Millais as a student whom I should be sure to know, and who, he added, frequently visited him. It will easily be understood how the delights of this locality afterwards became a frequent theme of enthusiastic appreciation between Millais and myself.

The old church was condemned to demolition, and the Rev. Sir George Glynn, the Rector, engaged me to make a painting of it. While I was doing this, an Art Union prizewinner wrote offering me for my "Woodstock" picture the twenty pounds he had gained, and although I had asked double the amount, my uncle wisely persuaded me that a stranger's recognition of a first picture was worth the twenty missing pounds. The money, with my other gains, I determined to apply to the painting of a work nearer in spirit to my personal ambition; all previous

subjects had of necessity been chosen from consideration of their inexpensiveness for models and accessories during progress, and their saleability in the end.

But while I was deciding on a subject, an event of the greatest importance occurred to me. One student—Telfer—with whom, wherever he wanders, be everlasting peace!—spoke to me of Ruskin's *Modern Painters*, and when he recognised my eagerness to learn of its teachings, all he could tell me, he gained permission from Cardinal Wiseman, to whom it belonged, to lend it to me for twenty-four hours.

Up to that day I had been compelled to think that the sober modern world tolerated art only as a sort of vagabondish cleverness, that in England it was a disgrace, charitably modified in very exceptional cases, to have a professional passion for it, and that if toleration of it lingered at all, it would not be in intellectual and elevated circles. The avowal reveals ignorance of the existence of the few dilettanti still remaining of the band which, at George III.'s initiative, had proclaimed a cult for art, and of those younger men like Lord Egremont, who with unaffected enthusiasm cherished that taste which in the survey of prehistoric eras at once distinguishes man from the brute. To get through the book I sat up most of the night, and I had to return it ere I made acquaintance with a quota of the good there was in it. But of all its readers none could have felt more strongly than myself that it was written expressly for him. When it had gone, the echo of its words stayed with me, and they gained a further value and meaning whenever my more solemn feelings were touched.

Shortly before this time Millais contracted a standing engagement with Ralph Thomas, the Chartist barrister, who lived in Stratford Place, and had turned picture-dealer, to paint for him daily, at a remuneration of one guinea per diem, every day or two a picture being finished for the employer. The young painter stayed to dinner, and during the meal the patron and his wife discussed the



subject to be treated on the morrow. This was essentially of simple character, a mountebank showing his tricks, girls gathering fruit in an orchard, a shepherd driving sheep, a tired tramp having water given to him by children at a cottage door, and such-like. The preliminary business was to decide what models and objects would be needed in the morning, and these the employer undertook to procure. The enterprise bore good fruit to the painter



*J. E. Millais.*

THE CONJUROR (1844).

in cultivating aptness and ready wit, in manipulation, and in the production of some remarkably clever pictures which brought ample profit to the dealer. Seeing this last essential advantage, Thomas's desire was to make the bargain a standing one. When Millais' attendance had been regular for some months, his parents began to question the prudence of its continuance, and urged the increasing importance of discontinuing these hurried pictures, which could not serve for exhibition, and would

not extend their son's reputation. Millais at first defended his course on account of its lucrativeness, but finding this argument not accepted for long, he blurted out that he had signed a contract with Thomas to work at the rate arranged for a year or more, and that therefore he must go on with the engagement. The father laughed derisively, saying that Thomas was not such a bad lawyer as not to know that an agreement with a boy under age was not worth the paper it covered; and so the work ended.

We will now return to the time when interest was directed to the result of the Academy's decision upon the relative merits of the pictures sent in for competition illustrating "The Sons of Benjamin seizing the Daughters of Shiloh."

Before the momentous 10th of December arrived, the paintings for the gold medal award were arranged on the walls of the Lecture Room. The only picture that stood in the balance with Millais' was by a student of about twenty-five. The two works might be contrasted thus:—Millais' bore evidence of influence from the Etty cult of the day in being in "round-hand" taste as to arrangement both of form and colour, and in its lightness of handling in the accessories and background. Here the discipleship might be said to stop; in other respects the picture showed wonderful thoroughness and honesty of execution. The other was an example of proud competition with Etty himself in his latest and most unbridled indulgence in a puppet-show display of the beauty of favourite pigments, all put on with showy bravura in sweeping brush-marks and palette-knife plasterings. It was undoubtedly a dexterous counter-coinage, and some of the students believed that its ingenious fabricator would be the successor of J. C. Hook, the victor in the last contest. Mr. George Jones occupied the President's rostrum. When the decision that Millais was the successful candidate was announced, the works were commented upon by the Keeper with instructive frankness. He cautioned the

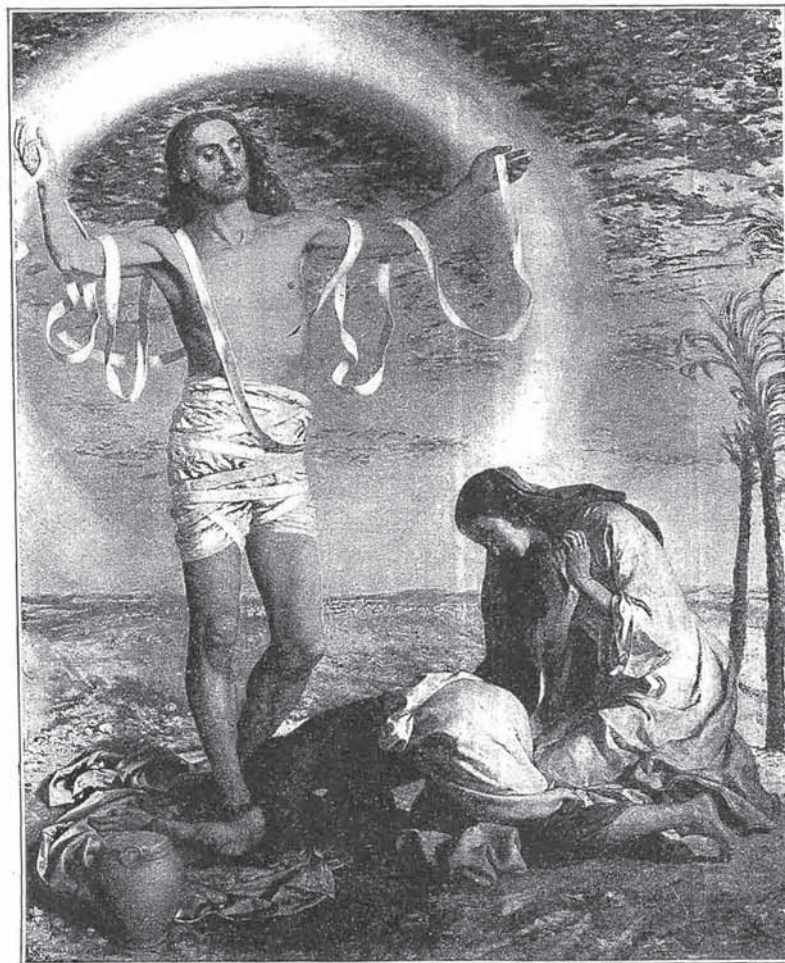


young against the course followed by the imitator of the unequalled colourist of the English School, pointing out with much discrimination how Etty reached his pre-eminence only by a course of struggles to overcome difficulties, and that this discipline continued for years, while any young artist emulating his present consummate power precipitately, could only acquire a mere superficial dexterity—a handful of tricks doomed to failure and disappointment; in the work of the successful student in this contest, he said, the judicious would find qualities that promised not ephemeral, but lasting triumph. While I appreciated the tenor of these remarks I felt sympathy for the losing candidate in his painful humiliation.

Millais on his part was not inflated with pride; his habitual success gave this new triumph only the character of an ordinary step forward; it must not, however, be supposed that his priority did not provoke captious feeling on the part of his less brilliant compeers.

One evening Millais reminded me of his wish to come to my studio, and offered to accompany me at once; nothing could be more desirable to me, and I agreed; but when the time came to start, it turned out that another student was not so content. I had been helping him in some mechanical parts of drawings for his admission to the Life School, carried home from the Academy by us each evening, and worked upon for half the night. Now that the drawings were done, and it was simple friendliness in him to come for companionship only, he probably counted upon my being alone. When he could not doubt that the reigning student was coming out with us, he betrayed uneasiness, but yet kept close as we walked into the street. He had before shown most unaccountable prejudice against Millais, so I deemed it would be enough to say that he was coming home with me to see my picture; but as the passers-by were not disposed to let three men walk abreast, my discontented companion found opportunity to mutter, "Can't you get rid of your infant

prodigy?" My reply was that Millais' opinion of my picture would be of great value to me, and that already



W. H. H.

CHRIST AND THE TWO MARIES (1847). (*Unfinished.*)

the promised visit had been delayed. Coming into rank again, I talked to Millais, but finding the other grumbling



once more under his breath, yet loud enough to threaten inquiry, I made an excuse to let strangers come between us and Millais, and walked in the road a minute. "Why doesn't the precocious genius criticise his own productions better?" said our displeased companion.

"I have a higher estimate of his talent than you have," I replied, wishing to put a stop to the discussion.

"Pooh!" he continued.

I persisted that since my present picture was one of new character, Millais' opinion would be invaluable.

"What nonsense!" I heard grumbled; "how many medal students have there ever been who did anything afterwards?"

But Millais took up our talk with, "You know I always want you to speak to me candidly; well, I'll do the same with you. I've no fear, I can tell you. I know what you can do."

As we were now reaching a corner of the street, the other whispered his determination to leave me to myself with my "medal student," as he contemptuously termed him, whereupon he turned and wished me "Good-night."

I was not displeased, for his presence would have been a fatal hindrance to the unreserve with which it was desirable that the intended talk should be conducted.

I had grown dissatisfied with the principal figure in my picture of "Christ and the Two Maries" as it was painted at first; the canvas had had to be enlarged, and when it came back from the colourman's I found, now that the new design for this figure was ready, still more space was needed; so that, having spent all my money, and not seeing myself within reach of the picture's completion, I was disposed to be down-hearted. Whether to give it up for the time and begin another subject for the next exhibition was a question; but Millais gave me such hearty encouragement as to the character of the work that I was saved from the impatient conclusion tempting me that whatever I did was sure to fail. Relieved in mind on this point, I explained to him the system of painting

without dead colouring, which I had more than ever before been following in the progress of this work. I maintained that at least for my particular aims it seemed the most suitable practice, and that soon I hoped to be able to trust to it without any retouching.

While the autumn still lingered it was important to make studies of palm-trees to be introduced into my picture of "Christ and the Maries." Early one morning I went to Kew Gardens and worked industriously; seeing my enthusiasm, the curator in the evening considerably offered me a branch of about twelve feet in length lopped from the tree. My good fellow-student, James Key, was with me, and cheerfully made light of any difficulty in carrying it by undertaking to walk behind holding the tip while I carried the stem over my shoulder. We walked thus to Turnham Green in the increasing dusk, when suddenly my friend stopped, declaring that some mysteriously disagreeable object had fallen inside the collar of his coat down his back; it was as large as a hand, and seemed to crawl, cold and dry. I stopped, and examining into the mystery with care, eventually fished out a dead bat which had been carried unnoticed thus far in the swaying branches.

I had been talking to Millais of Keats, and one day took occasion to show him my design for "The Eve of St. Agnes," representing the escape of Porphyro and Madeleine from the castle; he confirmed me in the intention of painting this subject.

After this visit to my studio we became unreserved friends, and the father and mother treated me with great cordiality in my frequent visits to their house. He was now a tall youth; his bronze-coloured locks stood up, twisting and curling so thickly that the parting itself was lost; he dressed with exact conventionality so as to avoid in any degree courting attention as a genius. Gentle and affectionate as he was to his parents, he showed an increasing independence of judgment, so that I dismissed the thought of considering their prejudices



when talking to the son on matters of vital interest to our art.

My first attempt to communicate to Millais my enthusiasm for Keats was for the moment a ludicrous failure. Going to his studio, I took the volume of *Isabella* from my pocket, and asking him to sit down and listen, read some favourite stanzas. Either from the solemnity of the verses, or perhaps because I had unknowingly contracted a droning delivery, after half-a-dozen verses he burst out with, "It's like a parson!"

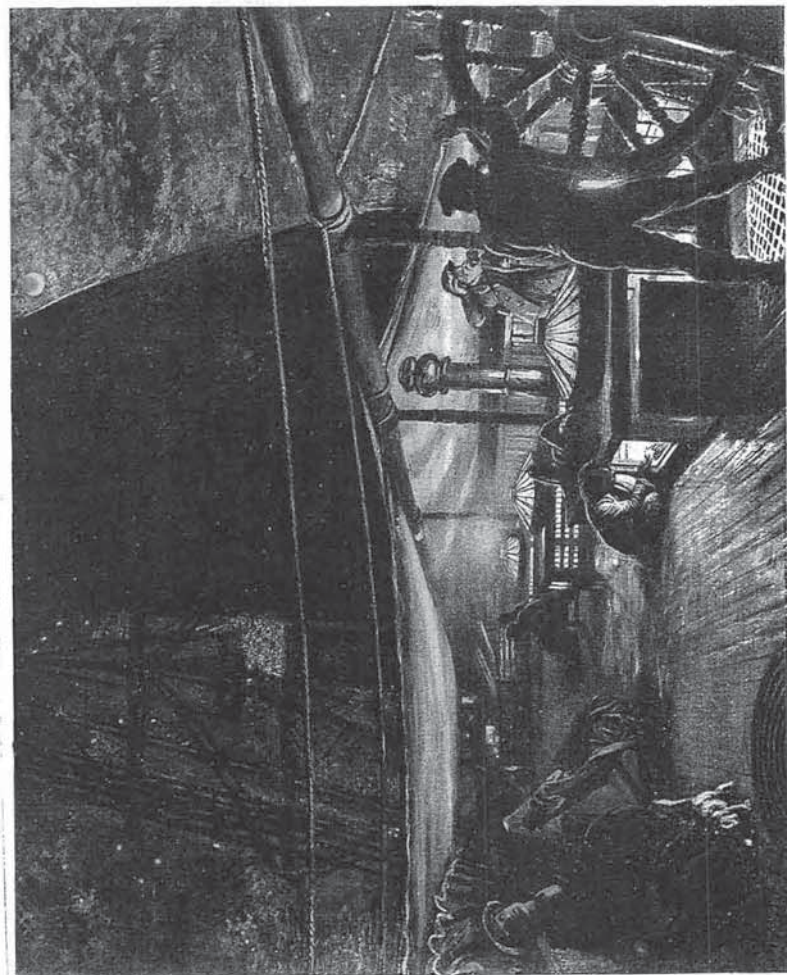
Although nettled, I laughed. "I'll lend you the volumes, and you'll find the poems will bear a wonderful deal of spoiling. The poem of *The Eve of St. Agnes* is earlier than *The Pot of Basil*, and not at such a high level, but it is brimful of beauties that will soon enchant you; the subject which I have now begun to paint you will see at the end."

He had now undertaken his picture of "Cymon and Iphigenia," and during its early stage he made a change in the treatment of his family, which required persistent strength of will to carry through.

When on one of my visits to Gower Street the street door was opened to me by the servant, there was no time to make an inquiry before the parlour door suddenly opened and revealed the mother, who was full of fire, and eagerly conjured me to listen.

"Johnnie is behaving abominably," she said. "I want you, Hunt, to hear; you would not believe it; he shuts us out of the studio altogether; he is there now all alone. For twelve days now neither his father nor I have been allowed to enter the room. I appeal to you; is that the way to treat parents? He cannot expect to prosper; can he, now? I hope you will tell him so. It is quite unnatural. Isn't it disgraceful?"

Before the dear lady had got thus far I saw the studio door at the end of the passage open, and Johnnie inquired whether it was not Hunt. Recognising me, he cut short



John Everett Millais, 1855.

The Ship.

John Everett Millais, 1855.

the argument by calling out, "Don't mind what they say. Come here."

And so, making the best assurance I could that they would find that there was some important reason for the suddenly adopted course, I joined the provoker of this discontent.

As he shut the door he said, "I'm sorry for my dear old mother, but the time has come when I can't have my studio made into the general sitting-room, and there's no way of making the change gradually. It must be done abruptly and firmly. Now how are you getting on? You're not giving up the 'Christ and the Two Maries,' are you?"

"Not, I hope, finally," I said; "but you see I'm obliged to paint portraits to get money. I shall spend less on 'The Eve of St. Agnes'; I can do much of it by lamplight, and I think it is more likely to sell. We are now in the middle of February, I began it on the 6th, and I could not hope to do both. I must finish 'The Resurrection Meeting' another year."

We then talked about his own work. He had committed himself to a great undertaking, but he had already drawn in the whole composition and had painted in a few of the heads very much as they were finally left. They had been painted almost or entirely at once, and to my eager eyes they seemed to have gained an immaculate freshness and precision and a nervous vitality which put them on a higher footing than his previous work. We talked about what he had done and what yet existed only in his mind. Suddenly he again reverted to the picture of mine he had last seen, inquiring what it was that prevented me from going on with it. If doubtful about the treatment of our Lord, why not look, for example, at some of the old Masters to be found in the Print Room?

I replied: "My dear fellow, my difficulties arise from whims in my own mind, which may be debatable, as to the whole treatment of the Saviour's figure, for when one phase of the question seems settled, another as formidable



presents itself. My four years in the City deprived me seriously of opportunity for art practice, but my duties spared me many broken occasions for reading and reflecting, through which notions have grown in my head which I find it not easy to resolve. Some of my cogitations may lead me to see lions in the path which are only phantoms, but until I have faced them I can't be satisfied; in the mental wrestling, however, I have investigated current theories both within art and outside it, and have found many of them altogether unacceptable. What, you ask, are my scruples? Well, they are nothing less than irreverent, heretical, and revolutionary." My two years' seniority gave me courage to reveal what was at the bottom of my heart at the time. I argued, "When art has arrived at facile proficiency of execution, a spirit of easy satisfaction takes possession of its masters, encouraging them to regard it with the paralysing content of the lotus-eaters; it has in their eyes become perfect, and they live in its realm of settled law. Under this miasma no young man has the faintest chance of developing his art into living power, unless he investigates the dogmas of his elders with critical mind, and dares to face the idea of revolt from their authority. The question comes to us whether we are not in such a position now? Of course, we have got some deucedly gifted masters, and I love many of the old boys, and know they could teach me much; but I think they suffer from the fact that the English School began the last century without the discipline of exact manipulation. Sir Joshua Reynolds thought it expedient to take the Italian School at its proudest climax as a starting-point for English art; he himself had already gone through some patient training which had made him a passionate lover of human nature; he had culled on the way an inexhaustible store of riches, and was so impatient to expend his treasures that the parts of a picture which gave him no scope for his generosity were of little interest to him.

"Under his reign came into vogue drooping branches

of brown trees over a night-like sky, or a column with a curtain unnaturally arranged, as a background to a day-lit portrait; his feeble followers imitate this arrangement in such numbers that there are few rooms in an exhibition in which we can't count twenty or thirty of the kind; it is not therefore premature to demand that the backgrounds of pictures should be equally representative of nature with their principal portions; consider how disregard of this requirement affected Sir Joshua's ambitious compositions. The more he departed from pictures of the nature of portraiture, the more conventional and uninteresting he became. Look at his 'Holy Family' in the National Gallery, with nothing in the child but a reflection of the infant in Correggio's picture of 'Venus and Mercury teaching Cupid to read,' and the absence of any natural treatment in other parts of the composition. His 'Infant Hercules with the Philosophers standing around' is equally unprofitable. The rules of art which he loved so much to lay down were no fetters to him, because he rose superior to them when his unbounded love of human nature was appealed to, and then his affection for Ludovico Caracci and the Bolognese School became light in the balance; his approval of togas went for nothing when a general stood before him in red coat with gold facings; and the playful fancies of children suggested to him vivacious fascination such as no painter ever before had noted. His lectures were admirably adapted to encourage the young to make a complete and reverential survey of what art had done in past times, for there was a danger that English painters would follow the course which Morland soon after took of treating common subjects, with only an indirect knowledge of the perfection which art had reached in the hands of the old masters. Probably Wilkie owed his more refined course to Sir Joshua's teaching. Reynolds was not then in sight of the opposite danger of conventionalism as affecting the healthy study of nature to the degree which has since been seen. The last fifty years, however, have proved that his teaching



was interpreted as encouragement to unoriginality of treatment, and neglect of that delicate rendering of nature, which had led previous schools to greatness. The English School began on the top of the wave, and consequently ever since it has been sinking into the hollow. The independent genius of the first President could not be transmitted, but his binding rules were handed on. You remember how Mr. Jones spoke of the evils of precocious masterliness, but he only denounced the indulgence when in excess of the accepted standard. I would go much farther, for his words would not touch the academic tradition. I am bound, because of my past loss of time, to consider my own need, and for that I feel sure it is important to question fashion and dogma: every school that reached exalted heights in art began with humility and precision. The British School skipped the training that led to the making of Michael Angelo; but even now, late as it is, children should begin as children, and wait for years to bring them to maturity."

"I quite agree with what you say; for as to Reynolds," replied Millais, "he would think nothing of making the stem of a rose as big as the butt-end of a fishing-rod.<sup>1</sup> You'll see I intend to turn over a new leaf; I have finished these heads more than any I ever did. Last year it was the rage to talk about 'Collinson's finish' in his 'Charity Boy': I'll show 'em that that wasn't finish at all."

I added: "With form so lacking in nervousness as his, finish of detail is wasted labour. But about the question of precedent. I would say that the course of previous generations of artists which led to excellence cannot be too studiously followed, but their treatment of subjects, perfect as they were for their time, should not be repeated. If we do only what they did so perfectly, I don't see much good to the world in our work. The language they used was then a living one, now it is dead: though their work

<sup>1</sup> I never knew what particular picture he had in his mind; certainly in later years he appreciated the excellences, and regarded with no severity the failings, of the great portrait painter.

has in it humanly and artistically such marvellous perfection, for us to repeat their treatment for subjects of sacred or historic import is mere affectation. In the figure of the risen Lord, for instance, about which we began to talk, the painters put a flag in His hands to represent His victory over Death: their public had been taught that this adjunct was a part of the alphabet of their faith; they accepted it, as they received all the legends painted at the order of the Church. Many of these were poetic and affecting; but with the New Testament in our hands we have new suggestions to make. If I were to put a flag with a cross on it in Christ's hand, the art-galvanising revivalists might be pleased, but unaffected people would regard the work as having no living interest for them. I have been trying for some treatment that might make them see this Christ with something of the surprise that the Maries themselves felt on meeting Him as One who has come out of the grave, but I must for every reason put it by for the present. In the meanwhile, the story in Keats's *Eve of St. Agnes* illustrates the sacredness of honest responsible love and the weakness of proud intemperance, and I may practise my new principles to some degree on that subject."

I blundered through this argument, not without many ejaculations from my companion; but here, laughing, I turned upon him with—"You see what a dangerous rebel I am, but you are every bit as bad as myself! Here are you painting a poetic subject in which you know all authorities would insist upon conventional treatment, and you cannot pretend that this work of yours is academic. If Howard or Frost undertook the subject, you know perfectly well that while they would certainly have made some of the nymphs fair, and some dark to give contrast, there would be no kind of variety in the shape of the faces, not one would be out of the oval in any degree, none would have nose, eyes, or mouth a bit different in shape from the other; all their limbs, too, would be of the same pattern; in fact, every care would be taken that



they should rather be waxen effigies than living creatures. It would be in their several manners the same with Mulready, Eastlake, Maclise; it is the evil of a declining art, yet all the cognoscenti say, 'How classically refined, how entirely this conception belongs to the world of imagination and perfection.' Now what have you done? You've made beings of varied form as you see them in Nature. You've made living persons, not tinted effigies. Oh, that'll never do! it is too revolutionary."

"I know," he said, half apologetically; "but the more attentively I look at Nature the more I detect in it unexpected delights: it's so infinitely better than anything I could compose, that I can't help following it whatever the consequences may be."

"Well, neither of us is sophisticated enough to appreciate the system in vogue, not to feel that it ends in an insufferable mannerism and sameness of feature that soon pall upon the senses beyond toleration. From the time of the Egyptians, all great artists have founded their beauty upon selection, and not upon the falsifying of Nature," said I. "Those English artists who, since the commencement of their opportunities, have won honour for our nation, have firmly dared to break loose at some one point from the trammels of traditional authority. What gave the charm to Wilson's works was his departure from the examples of the classical painters whose general manner he affected. Wilkie, in his 'Blindman's Buff,' found no type of its sweet humour and grace in the Dutch masters; and Turner's excellence had no antecedent type of its enchantment in Claude or any other builder-up of pictorial scenery. Flaxman and Stothard are always most able in those works in which their own direct reading of Nature overpowers their obedience to previous example, and so it is with the best painters of our day. For young artists to remain ignorant of the course of their predecessors would be boorish folly, or knowing it, to despise the examples set by great men would be presumption, courting defeat; you and I by

practical study know as much of the great works of antiquity and of the principles represented in these as any students need. Let us go on a bold track; some one must do this soon, why should not we do it together? We will go carefully and not without the teaching of our fathers: it is simply fuller Nature we want. Revivalism, whether it be of classicalism or of mediævalism, is a seeking after dry bones. Read, my dear fellow, the address of Oceanus in Keats's *Hyperion*, and you will see how the course of life on creation's lines is inevitably progressive, and only under debasing influence retrogressive. Nothing but fatal deterioration can come from servilely emulating the past, no matter how admirable the original; that sculptors should desire their works to be called pure Greek, or that painters should desire their pictures to be either Peruginesque, Titianesque, or Rembrandtesque, is to my mind a perversion of ambition. Every age brings new knowledge into the world: the artists of past days imagined and composed their works for the intelligence of their contemporaries, and we should work with equal desire to address the intelligence of our own day. We have, as an example of trammels, the law that all figures in a picture should have their places on a line describing a letter S—the authorities for convention finding this ground plan in Raphael's groups. I recognise it in many, but not in all: the best that can be said for the edict is, that it varies the two sides of a composition, one being hollow and in most cases rich in shadow, while on the opposite side of the picture the objects form a protruding mass open to the light. Experiments with this canon are quite desirable for young artists—you have used it in your 'Cymon and Iphigenia,' and I in my new picture—but I am convinced that the universal use of it is paralysing to the need of making each design accord with the spirit of the subject. Again, should the several parts of the composition be always apexed in pyramids? Why should the highest light be always on the principal figure? Why make one corner of the picture always in shade?



For what reason is the sky in a daylight picture made as black as night? and this even when seen through the window of a chamber where the strong light comes from no other source than the same sky shining through the opposite window. And then about colour, why should the gradation go from the principal white, through yellow to pink and red, and so on to stronger colours? With all this subserviency to early examples, when the turn of violet comes, why does the courage of the modern imitator fail? If you notice, a clean purple is scarcely ever given in these days, and green is nearly as much ignored. But while our leaders profess submission to ancient authority, they don't dare to emulate the courageous independence of ancient art where it is remarkable. Look, to wit, at the audacity with which the columns are placed in Raphael's 'Beautiful Gate,' cutting the composition into three equal parts, giving thus a precious individuality to the picture."

Millais continued his rattling commentary as I went on, often endorsing the convictions I hazarded, and so encouraging me to be bolder. The pictures I have here cited to justify the views expressed were not the sole examples brought forward to illustrate the contention, for many works ancient and modern were summoned to bear their testimony to our argument.<sup>1</sup>

In the midst of our earnest talk a quiet knock came at the door. "Who's there?" asked my companion.

"I have brought you the tea myself," said the mother. I was hurrying forward, when Millais stopped me with his hand, and a silent shake of the head.

"I really can't let you in, mamma," he returned; "please put the tray down at the door, and I'll take it in myself."

<sup>1</sup> Wilkie's "Blind Fiddler" is chosen as an excellent example of the principles enforced by academic rules; it will enable the attentive reader to trace the serpentine line as the ground plan of the arrangement of figures and salient accessories, and also the pyramidal forms of groups in the composition. As to the first and secondary lights and their relation to the tertiary lights and deepest darks, and also the cutting off of a corner by shadow, it is also edifying.

I spoke then. "We are debating matters, Mrs. Millais, that would really be very dull to all but artists up to their necks in paint, and our talk is the deepest treason against our betters."

She knocked again. "I call on you, Hunt, as a witness of this bad behaviour to his mother."

Millais' only apology was, "You'll see in time how



WILKIE'S "BLIND FIDDLER."

right I am"; and when she left he waited a minute ere he went for our tea.

We resumed our talk, reverting to the difference between vigorous and moribund art. I continued, "The beauty aimed at now is exactly the opposite to that of great art: in old days the ambition was to combat sickly ideas of beauty; the modern ambition is utterly without health or force of character, either physical or mental. It is conceived to satisfy the prejudices of the modiste; ladies by some are portrayed with waists that would



condemn the race to extermination in two generations, and men are made such waxwork dandies that savagedom would soon sweep a nation with such an aristocracy into the melting-pot. Art's office is not to encourage such maudlin culture, for true refinement in design, as in word poetry, is to raise aspirations to the healthy and heroic; it certainly should not lead its admirers to court the moribund, by decking up the sentimentally languid in fine feathers. Lately I had great delight in skimming over a certain book, *Modern Painters*, by a writer calling himself an Oxford Graduate; it was lent to me only for a few hours, but, by Jove! passages in it made my heart thrill. He feels the power and responsibility of art more than any author I have ever read. He describes pictures of the Venetian School in such a manner that you see them with your inner sight, and you feel that the men who did them had been appointed by God, like old prophets, to bear a sacred message, and that they delivered themselves like Elijah of old. They seemed mighty enough to overthrow any vanity of the day. He glories most in Tintoretto, and some of the series described, treating of the life of the Virgin, and others illustrating the history of the Saviour, make one see in the painter a sublime Hogarth. The Annunciation takes place in a ruined house, with walls tumbled down; the place in that condition stands as a symbol of the Jewish Church—so the author reads—and it suggests an appropriateness in Joseph's occupation of a carpenter, that at first one did not recognise; he is the new builder! The Crucifixion is given with redoubled dramatic penetration, and the author dwells upon the accumulated notes of meaning in the design, till you shudder at the darkness around you. I wish I could quote the passage about Christ. I'll tell you more of the book some day. I speak of it now because the men he describes were of such high purpose and vigour that they present a striking contrast to the uninspired men of to-day. This shows need for us young artists to consider what course we should follow. That art is dying at times is

beyond question. The 'Oxford Graduate' reverses the judgment of Sir Joshua, for he places the Venetian in the highest rank, and disdains the Bolognese School, which until these days has never been questioned for its superiority, both under the Caraccis and Le Brun, whom the President also lauds. Students in those days would have been wise had they realised their doleful condition, and taken an independent course. I venture to conclude that we are now in a similar plight, and the book I speak of helps one to see the difference between dead and living art at a critical juncture. False taste has great power, and has often gained distinction and honour. Life is not long enough to drivel through a bad fashion and begin again. The determination to save one's self and art must be made in youth. I feel that is the only hope, at least for myself. One's thoughts must stir before the hands can do. With my picture from *The Eve of St. Agnes* I am limited to architecture and night effect, but I purpose after this to paint an out-of-door picture, with a foreground and background, abjuring altogether brown foliage, smoky clouds, and dark corners, painting the whole out of doors, direct on the canvas itself, with every detail I can see, and with the sunlight brightness of the day itself. Should the system in any point prove to be wrong, well! I shall be ready to confess my mistake and modify my course."

In the midst of my talk Millais continually expressed eagerness to get away altogether from the conventions denounced, and adduced examples of what he agreed were absurdities, declaring that often he had wondered whether something very interesting could not be done in defiance of them. "You shall see in my next picture if I won't paint something much better than 'Cymon and Iphigenia'; it is too late now to treat this more naturally; indeed I have misgivings whether there is time to finish it as it is begun."

We had had our talk out for the night. He was putting things away, and collecting his brushes and



otherwise making signs of departure. I held out my hand to say "Good-bye."

"Oh no!" he said, "you must come in and see the old people," which brought to my mind the prospect of a terrible quarter of an hour.

The parlour comes to my sight now. Over the fireplace was the oval portrait of Johnnie, painted when he was fourteen by Phillip (it had been done in return for sittings given for the head of Bruce in a picture representing that hero at College); below this portrait on either side were the small likenesses of the father and mother by their son; above the entrance door was Millais' admirable chalk-drawing of the Apollo's head. The mother sat in an arm-chair near the window and the father on the other side of the fire.

Johnnie burst into the sitting-room; I came up bashfully behind. "Now we've come to have a nice time with you, mamma and papa."

"We don't wish," said the mother, "to tax your precious time at all; we have our own occupations to divert us and engage our attention," and the crochet needles were more intently plied.

"Hoity-toity, what's all this? Put down your worsted work at once. I'm going to play backgammon with you directly"; and he straightway fetched the board from its corner and laid it on the table before her.

"You know, Hunt, how shamefully he has been behaving, and I appeal to you to say whether it is not barefacedness to come in and treat us as though nothing had occurred," appealed the mother.

The *us* was chosen because at the time Johnnie had gone to his father with the guitar, placing it in his hand, and remarking, as he put his arms round the paternal shoulders: "Now, as we are too busy in the day to see one another, it's more jolly that we should do so after work, so just you be a dear old papa, and now prove to Hunt what a splendid musician you are. Hunt used to practise the violin once, but his family didn't like it, and

he could not be annoying them in music and painting too, so he gave up his fiddling, but he's very fond of music. You play that exquisite air out of *Rigoletto*." And then turning to me he added, "There's no one in England has such an exact touch as he has"; while to him he railingly said, "You want pressing like a shy young lady."

His father was, however, already tuning the strings, when the son went over to the still irreconcilable mother, took her needles away, kissed her, and wheeled her in the chair round to the table where the opened chess-board was arranged awaiting her. The father had already commenced the air, which at my solicitation he repeated, and afterwards played "*The Harmonious Blacksmith*." The radiant faces of both parents gradually witnessed to their content, and while the son beat time to the music, he paid no less attention to the game with the mother.

After an hour of this renewed good understanding I left, without fear that the course my friend was taking would diminish the mutual affection of the father, mother, and son.

Since I had become a student in the Life School, which was held only in the evening, I had felt justified in giving more of my daylight to original work at home, but at the appointed hour I hurried away to the little "pepper-box" at the top of the building in Trafalgar Square.

It was here that the gods were seen in actual flesh. One evening in the past summer, running up the spiral staircase three steps at a time to secure my place before the model posed, I was brought to sudden sobriety of pace by overtaking Etty, that veteran master of colour in his generation, who was labouring to reach the top. It was with a feeling of shame that I found I had disturbed his toilsome climbing. I was too late to retreat, for he turned and saw me. I made my gentlest salutation to the bearer of the burden of life, the more reverently, seeing that his infirmity did not quench his ardent habitual effort. He could scarcely speak, but stood aside and made



signs for me to pass. I apologised, with assurance that I would follow. Beckoning me close to him he said, as he put his hand upon my shoulder: "Go. I insist! Your time is more precious than mine." I felt sure that he wished me to take him at his word, accordingly I obeyed his directions.

He painted on a sized but unprimed mill-board; he made the outline hastily with charcoal, dusted this out



ETTY IN THE LIFE SCHOOL.

slightly, then took out his prepared palette and fastened it with a screw to the left-hand upper end of his board. His colours were set in order from white through reds, browns, blues, and greens to black. He began using them by rubbing in the darks with umber and rich browns, and then painted on the general lights in masses with accentuated prominences of pure white, tempering this gradually from patches of blanched reds and lakes kept in squares of different strengths on his prepared

palette. At this stage, he made the half tints by leaving the ground more or less to show through the scumblings. After each touch his weighty head overbalanced itself to right and left, while he drew himself back for a more distant glance. At every fresh sally he recommenced by enlarging the swoop of his brush on the palette. The next evening he began to clear away the excess of dried and undried paint with cuttle-fish, and circled away again with colours differing only by the inclusion of yellows and the more delicate lakes. In his after layers he never seemed to give an entire equivalent for the enchantments of his first indications of effect.

His choice of paints was not beneficial as an example to the young, for while at first he seemed to have brought certain vivid pigments for the background only, they all came gradually into the vortex of his sweeping hand, and before he had painted half an hour, emerald green and Prussian blue appeared to be made to do service in flesh. He was intoxicated with the delight of painting, and when, after a careful reloading of his brush, he drove the tool upwards in frequent bouts before his half-closed eyes, I don't think that, had he been asked suddenly, he could have told his name.

We did not always have as instructors the members whose deserved renown made them coveted teachers, but in midsummer on one occasion—regarded as a fortunate one by all the students—Mr. Mulready was the visitor. I listened to his criticisms, when my turn came, with much attention, and he continued his instructive remarks so patiently each evening that it seemed he treated me with more than average favour. Perhaps it was relying upon this apparent partiality one evening, when the class had broken up and he was leaving the school, which led me to follow him through the door and down the steps. Hearing me, he halted and turned round. I apologised for my intrusion by explaining that I sought information which would enable me to acquit myself of a duty delayed for some years. I then referred to



Mr. Varley as having been good enough when I was a boy to see me and to give me advice upon drawing, when he furnished me with lithographs to be copied as exercises at home; ultimately he lent me a crayon drawing, which he called a Rembrandt. While I spoke I could not but observe the visitor's features darkly clouding over, but I persevered, being confident that, on learning all, he could find no cause of offence. Suddenly he compelled a pause, and burst out with, "And how *dare* you, sir, assume that this affects me in any way?"

"May I explain, sir," I went on, "that Mr. Varley once said he was proud in being able to speak of you as in some manner a connection of his; remembering this, I thought you might direct me how to find his son, whom I have never succeeded in tracing, since on going to the house shortly after Mr. Varley's death I found it abandoned, and from that day I have not had an opportunity of returning the drawing." Here the annoyance to which I was unconsciously subjecting Mr. Mulready was beyond toleration.

"I am astounded at your temerity, sir, in addressing me on such a matter!" he exclaimed. "He had no right to make the statement you speak of, and you, sir, have no excuse for taxing my attention with it."

I stammered out, "I fear, sir, that I have made some great mistake, but pray believe me that I had no idea I should vex you."

"You have, sir, made a great mistake, a very great mistake indeed, one that I cannot at all understand." And so he turned and went down the steps, still storming as he went, while I stood dumbfounded. The next night, when he came his round, I stood up, bowing respectfully as I offered him my place at the drawing, but he only glared at me with his face set like a mask, saying, as he went round me, "Oh, it's you, is it?" I had most innocently made him my declared enemy. Yet models who posed to him told me that he always inquired

as to what I was doing at home, adding, "Ah! you'll see, he will do something one day."

Some years later I heard what accounted for his ill-humour. He had married at seventeen a sister of John Varley of the same age; it proved to be a most unhappy union, and before the prime of life they had separated for ever, each thinking the other to blame, so that intimates refrained from mentioning the relationship. He probably assumed that I ought to have known of this.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> With regard to conversations with Millais, I cannot of course pretend to have recorded every exact word set down. But the illustrations and criticisms used, and the names of the works of art cited, are as fresh in my memory as if they had been spoken only yesterday, and therefore a revival of the conversational form of the interview seems to me the best way in which to convey an idea of what passed.