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DRAWINGS OF ALFRED STEVENS.



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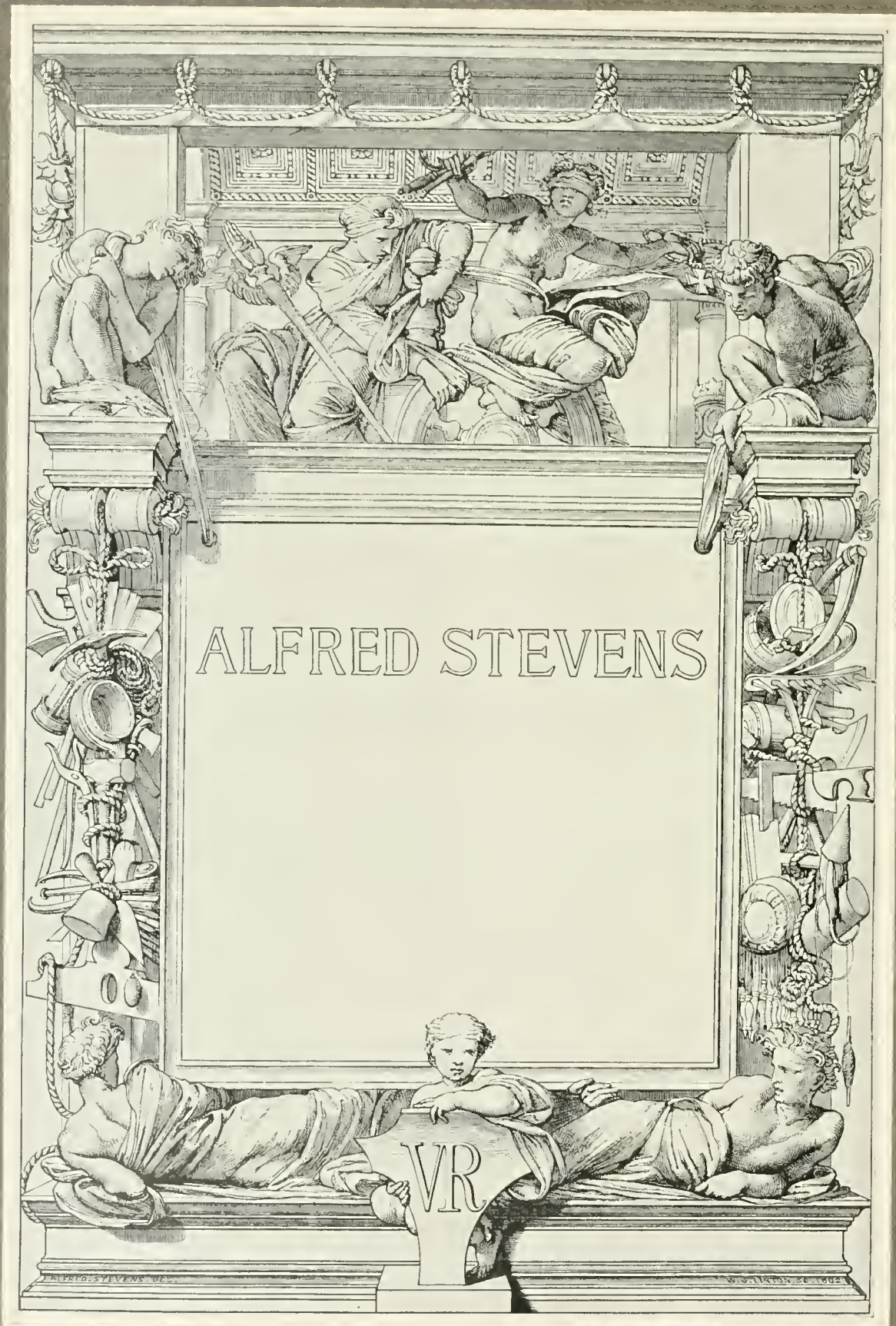
March
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DRAWINGS OF ALFRED STEVENS

DRAWINGS OF THE



GREAT MASTERS



CERTIFICATE OF THE 1862 EXHIBITION REPRODUCED *Reproduced by favour of C. Sawyer, Esq.*
FROM THE AUTOTYPE AFTER THE ORIGINAL WOOD-ENGRAVING

DRAWINGS OF ALFRED STEVENS



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ALFRED STEVENS

BY HUGH STANNUS

F.R.I.B.A., A.R.C.A., ETC.



THE WORLD always desires to know somewhat of the training of those Masters who have left their mark on Art-history. Of such was Alfred Stevens; and to satisfy that desire, these words are written.

HE WAS born on 28 January, 1818, at Blandford Forum, in Dorsetshire. His father was a house-painter by trade; and, as is generally the case in country towns, he practised the collateral trades or branches of decoration, sign-painting, and heraldic-work, &c.; and he was considered a clever man by his neighbours, some of whom were alive when the writer of this visited the town eighteen years ago.

STEVENS worked with his father in this trade from the age of eleven to fifteen, learning all the technical side that his father could teach him; he used his father's brushes and colours; and copied with avidity such pictures as were lent to him by Mr. Pegler, his lifelong faithful friend; but it was from the mother that he derived the sympathetic nature and the genius which made him the great man that he became.

AT THE AGE of fifteen, his industry became noticed; and the Rev. Samuel Best, rector of the adjacent village of Blandford St. Mary, generously gave £50, to which some relatives added £10; and with this sum of £60 the boy of fifteen set out for his long sojourn in Italy. HE HAD BEEN advised by Mr. Best to study the work of Salvator Rosa at Naples; but when he saw the mannerisms he felt they were "so bad" that he would not waste any effort over them; so he spent his time in making careful studies of the *Giottesco* work in the Church of the Incoronata, &c., and of such pictures by Andrea del Sarto as he could find in the galleries.

WITH two years at Naples, three years at Florence, a year at Milan, six months at Venice, eighteen months at Rome, and other wanderings, he occupied his nine years' sojourn in Italy, returning to Blandford at the age of twenty-four in 1842.

DURING this period the boy had learned painting, architecture, sculpture, and ornament. More than these, he had learned to know that all Art is one; and, more than that, he had acquired the Style

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which consists, not in imitating this man or that man, but comes of the choosing the good in all men, and adding thereto that something of his own with which he had been endowed by Nature. He thus obtained all his training abroad : he was never a student of our Royal Academy, being away in Italy at the scholastic age ; and when he did go up to London at the age of twenty-seven, he worked hard to obtain a living, with no leisure to attend classes.

ORIGINAL SKETCHES by the masters have been always cherished by art-lovers. Richardson, quoted by Ottley, calls them "the very spirit and quintessence of the art" ; he proceeds to observe that finished paintings are little more than copies of these, and frequently (in part) by other hands than the artist's ; but "these are undoubtedly altogether his own, and true and proper originals".

STEVENS left thousands of such original sketches. Many of them are the merest scribbles. He did not destroy them, however rough and diagrammatic, but threw them aside on the floor, from which they were every morning carefully collected by his attendant and stored away in the drawers and cupboards, whence they were reverently taken after his death. Some of these are included, not because of their *finish*, but because they show his Method of working. For the student, not the finished work, in which the evidence of processes disappears in the perfected result, but the incomplete work that shows a stage in the process, is the more informing. To trace the growth unto perfection at the hands of genius is ever so ; and could all the sketches be collected and arranged, then would it be possible to sort out the subjects and arrange each set according to development from inception to approximate finish. Then could be realised the gradual refining, the elimination of non-essentials, and the simplification into sublimity. But the dissipation of his sketches and the limits of this small book prevent any commensurate treatment. THESE LIFE-STUDIES show his laborious prodigality of time. He would spend hours and days in these quick ten-minute scribbles, making experiments of line, altering the pose on the same study without any erasure ; so that many of them appear to exhibit evidence of a fumbling attempt to seize the forms of the model. But they should be looked upon as he looked upon them—mere scribbles, and not drawings. To him they were means towards an end, but not the end itself (as if he desired them to be placed, like Mulready's beautiful stippling, in gilt frames to be hung up in a museum). He had made scores of these scribbles for each figure ; and when, after his death, this "litter" of the studio was brought out, it was eagerly purchased by his pupils and admirers.

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THE DEGREE of finish in these life-studies varies from the Scribble, made at the inception of the idea, in which all except the more important masses is roughly ignored—the Sketch, in which the lines are found, and the details indicated for further study—to the Drawing, in which all essential things are selected, and put down for permanent use. In comparing his rough scribbles with academic work, it may be noted how clearly he assessed the relative values of the inchoate scribble, the developing sketch, and the completed drawing—each as only a stage in the evolution; and how ruthlessly he applied the dictum, “*Le meilleur est toujours l’ennemi du bon*”; while in regard to those who, satisfied with their first attempts, have frittered their time in stippling, as if that were the aim in art, it may be said—“they have their reward”.

THE MEDIA of expression which are at the service of the artist, have been increased in number and in complexity from age to age. The student, in looking over the memoranda left by the great artists of the Renaissance, will observe the use of charcoal and black or red chalk (firstly in line, afterwards in hatching, and then shaded by rubbing with the finger or stump). He will next observe the utilisation of the pen (a split reed) and brown ink, improved with washes of bistre, and afterwards heightened by white high-lights laid on by means of a fine hair-pencil. Then followed the fine points of metallic strips, firstly silver-point and secondly plumbago. It may be questioned whether this last, however useful to the profession of accountants, has conduced to the advancement of the highest art, as the old masters, having no plumbago-pencils, drew with the reed pen, and their work was consequently stronger in draughtsmanship. In the seventeenth century, the use of the brush in making washed drawings became more general when landscape, from having served as a mere background in the fifteenth, became of more importance; then more attention was paid to the broad effects of chiaroscuro than to composition of line. Stevens appears, in his tastes, to have remained in the sixteenth century; and he did not greatly value landscape as the chief subject in art; hence in his studies he used chiefly charcoal and red chalk; but he would take up the tool that was nearest, and the old-fashioned gold pen was a favourite in his smaller scribbles. He never used silver-point; and his scribbles for architecture and ornament are mostly in plumbago-pencil.

THE PLATES which illustrate this book were selected from the collections at the Print Room in the British Museum, the Art Library in South Kensington Museum, the Tate Gallery, and from the book by the writer entitled “Alfred Stevens and his Work”,

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that was so finely illustrated by the special processes which are the property of the Autotype Company, by whose courtesy some are here reproduced.

THE SELECTION of subjects has been limited to studies from the life. Neither paintings, works of sculpture, nor architectural and ornamental details (of which innumerable sketches are extant) are included. No full-size cartoons by him are known to exist, excepting that for the Isaiah pendentive at St. Paul's Cathedral. He did not make full-size cartoons, as he found them too great a restriction on any improvements he might desire to effect during the execution of a work ; and hence he squared off the small studies, and enlarged from them direct on the canvas, altering and improving as he went on. He might have made more use of assistants in such mechanical work, like Rafaello ; but his temperament led him rather, like Michelagnolo, to do everything himself, spending his days in solitary absorbed concentration.

THE FRONTISPIECE is a reproduction of the certificate given at the 1862 exhibition, as it was finally arranged by Stevens. The design may be compared with an earlier one shown on Plate XXXIV. ; and comment on it is reserved until that is explained later. This final design was engraved on wood by the late W. J. Linton, and is a good specimen of the work of our greatest British wood-engraver, in which, sinking his own individuality, he has very modestly followed the spirit of his subject. It was used as the short title-page in the book before referred to.

THE FOLLOWING are divided into five groups for convenience of explanation or comment.

PORTRAITURE

THIS BRANCH of art-practice would probably have been a steady source of income to him, had Stevens pursued it. The portraits by him are dignified and pleasing likenesses, showing the good side of the sitter. His habit of quick keen observation ensured the likeness, he was a good judge of physiognomy, and his sympathetic nature led him to seek out the good in every sitter.

PLATE II., from a drawing in pen and ink, of the Rev. Samuel Best, is a striking piece of work for a boy of fifteen. The quality, from the delicate drawing and dotting round the eyes to the vigorous blots on the hair and the dress, was prophetic of what he would afterwards achieve. In using black it may be remembered that

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gradation is obtained by thinness of line, and not by dilution of tint ; but here there is no hesitation : everything is put down, just as he saw it, once and for all.

PLATE III., from a drawing in plumbago-pencil, preparatory to a painted portrait, was of a boy about ten years old, who had passed away the preceding afternoon. Stevens had known and liked the poor little fellow ; and, at the request of his sorrowing friends, he made it, occupying two hours of the following morning.

PLATE IV., from a red chalk sketch, with the physiognomy well marked, is another instance of his power.

NOTES FROM THE LIFE

THE USE of his scribbles and sketches, as a means and not an end, has been already mentioned ; and the coarse and contradictory effect of the unerased lines may be seen in Plates IX., XL., XLI., &c. His breadth in draughtsmanship is seen in the drawing of the limbs and feet, put in as Michelagnolo might have done, in Plate IX. His feeling of perspective is shown by countless scribbles of architectural detail in his own inimitable quick unerring manner ; and the perspective of surface in his figure sketching is seen in Plates XI., XIV., XXX., XXXI., XXXII., &c. Subtlety of curve was never too difficult for his " seeing hand ", as may be observed in Plates XII., XV., &c. ; and in Plate XIV. the supplementary scribble shows in how simple a manner the line of the right forearm is continued to lead the eye to the index-finger of the hand that is so simply blocked in. Mannerisms, from which, in some form or other, very few are exempt, are noticeable : in the breadth of the nose in Plate VII., and in the largeness of the limbs in Plates X., XIV., &c. ; but this latter is a characteristic of all who have studied at Rome.

PLATES V., VI., and VII., from red chalk sketches, show the perspective in the hatching-lines.

PLATES VIII. to XII., from red chalk sketches, show various poses connected with the carrying of water. In VIII. one woman carries the empty hydria on her head, while the other rests against a low wall. In IX. the resting woman is lifting down the hydria. This is a beautiful sketch, marred only by the contradicting lines in the experimental change in pose of the head and arms. In X. the woman stoops to fill the vessel at the fountain. The change of pose in the chest has thrown her head out of drawing ; but, allowing for this, the draughtsmanship is strong. In XI. the woman, with one

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foot on the curb, holds the hydria to the fountain while she apparently speaks with a companion. In XII. we may suppose the same woman is lifting the hydria to her head as she turns away. This set of five sketches is recommended to the student as well worthy of careful observation.

PLATES XIII., XIV., and XV., from red chalk sketches, show qualities before noted in quick study of line. In XIV. the power of drawing is noticeable.

PLATE XVI., from a plumbago sketch, may have served for an Andromeda, but this is only a guess. The draughtsmanship is most beautiful and tender, as fine as the finest silver-point work. He did not use silver-point, as has been mentioned; but from this drawing it may be seen what delicacy he would have shown had he done so.

PLATE XVII., from a red chalk scribble, shows a man with strong action in various experimental poses.

PLATES XVIII. to XXII., from red chalk scribbles, are quickly made trials for *putti* in various poses. The last one is carried farther than the others, and is squared off for enlargement. The pose is like that of a Telamon; and the lighting is from below, as if for the decoration of a cove; and there is the same effect of "double exposure" (as a photographer would term it) as has been mentioned in writing of former plates.

SKETCHES FOR PICTURES

THE FOLLOWING sixteen sketches are for pictures and decorative panels. By this it is not intended to suggest that the foregoing are not for pictures, but that the application of the studies in this group is more apparent.

PLATES XXIII. and XXIV., from red chalk sketches, suggest incidents in the "Troy" series that Stevens is known to have commenced: the filial piety of Æneas being clear in the former; while in the latter the confusion and horror which ensued on the taking of Troy appear to be suggested.

PLATE XXV., from red chalk scribbles, shows in the lower one the delivery of a message, and in the upper ones the crowning of a figure. These subjects may have been intended for his classic series, but they cannot be connected with the "Judgment of Paris", because (a) the messenger (Hermes) would not have approached the shepherd

in so undignified a manner, and (b) the prize to be awarded was an apple, and not a garland.

PLATE XXVI., from a red chalk drawing, which has been squared off for enlargement, shows a group of soldiers pressing forward to the attack. The nearest figure, who is looking backward to encourage his comrades, is a fine pose, but his left leg appears somewhat short.

PLATE XXVII., from a red chalk sketch, shows an early study for the picture in which the widowed queens and the duchess join in lamentations and curses on King Richard III. (Scene IV. of Act IV. in the tragedy).

PLATES XXVIII. and XXIX., from red chalk sketches, which have been squared off for enlargement, show two (Apollo and Venus) of a set of circular panels in the decoration of the cove of a drawing-room.

PLATES XXX., XXXI., and XXXII., from plumbago drawings, which are squared off for enlargement, show designs for the quadrantal panels in some scheme of mural decoration. The distribution of the foliage and accessories exhibits fine decorative sense. The perspective of the reverted leaf-ends indicates how far he had travelled beyond the Albertolli in his draughtsmanship of foliage; and they show how he had assimilated the spirit of Raffaello in the *grotesco* manner.

PLATE XXXIII., from a sketch left in a mixture of charcoal, plumbago, and ink, shows a composition of the three sister-arts: Architecture, with the mantle of sovereignty, embracing Sculpture and Painting, all sitting on the same throne of Art one and indivisible, and accompanied below by recumbent figures of Vulcan (typifying Manufacture) and Mercury (typifying Commerce). The purity of the line is noteworthy; and there is ground for regret that he did not clear up the composition in the middle portion of the circle. This design was afterwards simplified (by the omission of the two lower figures) and much improved (by the emphasis of the sister-arts) in competition for the reverse of the medal to be awarded to students in the art schools of the United Kingdom, as shown in Plate XXXI. of the book by the writer; but it was not carried into execution, because the design by M. Antoine Vechte, a Burgundian artist, who had distinguished himself in the "Great Exhibition" of 1851, was ready and complete; and was considered by those in authority at that time to be more practical and preferable.

PLATE XXXIV., from a drawing in ink shaded in plumbago, shows the first design submitted for the 1862 exhibition certificate. In

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comparing this with that shown in the frontispiece, it will be observed that in the final design alterations were made from the two *putti* below, and from the allegory (Judgment restraining Fortune) above. When this, showing the *putto* supporting the shield bearing the initial V in solitary sorrow, while the other turns away sadly shrouding his shield bearing the A (a touching allusion to the passing in the preceding year of him who had been a fostering patron of all that was good and beneficial to his adopted country), was submitted for approval to a Gracious Lady, it was felt to be too pointed a reminder of her own individual irreparable loss; and it was accordingly modified, as shown in the frontispiece. When Stevens altered the *putti* in accordance with her feelings, he took the opportunity of strengthening the composition in the upper part representing the discerning Judgment that binds the blind Fortune which would scatter undeserved honours—an appropriate allegory in connection with the rewards at an exhibition.

PLATE XXXV., from a drawing in sepia and Chinese white, shows his design for the "Vision of the Angel", prepared as the decoration of a church for which he had received the commission. It is sad, but characteristic of the man, to observe how, in dissatisfaction with a portion of the composition, he smudged it and threw it aside. The four evangelistic symbols in the smaller lunettes are drawn in a fine simple sculpturesque manner.

PLATES XXXVI., XXXVII., and XXXVIII., from red chalk sketches, are apparently early studies for the servants in the "Vision".

DECORATION OF ST. PAUL'S

PLATES XXXIX. to XLIV. are connected with his great scheme for the complete decoration of St. Paul's Cathedral in London. He was never asked for a design for the whole building; but, in his mind, each portion depended on every other portion; and his commission for the Isaiah in one of the four western pendentive-panels started him to prepare a complete scheme. The Plate LIV. in the writer's before-mentioned book is taken from that portion of the model which shows the cupola; and will serve to elucidate the next four plates.

PLATES XXXIX. and XL., from red chalk sketches, are quick alternative trials for the "Expulsion" shown in the cupola. The choice of treatment appears to lie between the shrinking in shame of

the former and the looking back in regret of the latter sketch. In the subsequent development he chose the latter.

PLATE XLI., from a red chalk scribble, shows a rough early trial for one of the groups of *ignudi* in the ribs of his design for the cupola (which will be seen on reference to the Plate LIV. before mentioned). The design was unfinished when he passed away, like alas ! so many other of his works ; and thus is not his final word on the subject, as he had in his mind the intention to take it again in hand when he had completed the Wellington monument (*and the horse*). In this trial scribble, which was not carried further, the figures both looked towards their left, one upwards as listening, and the other downwards as proclaiming ; but he tried another pose of the head of one of the figures, in a manner that was possibly not an improvement.

PLATE XLII., from a red chalk sketch, shows a drapery study for one of the Prophets in the pendentive-panels. More sketches of this pose exist ; but it was not carried further. It is simple and dignified, and shows one of his ten-minute trials.

PLATE XLIII., from a red chalk sketch, shows the Angel of the Cross, a quick trial-sketch in a sculpturesque treatment.

PLATE XLIV., from a red chalk sketch, shows an early study for one of the four recumbent statues of the evangelists that Stevens intended to be placed on low pedestals in the four quarter-galleries. The accompanying symbolic eagle of St. John is indicated at the left-hand side of the sketch ; and the drapery is noted in the supplementary sketch below. The drawing, delicate but adequate, represents St. John as meditating in rapt contemplation on heavenly things. This was carried further ; and exists as a portion of the model preserved at the Cathedral.

WELLINGTON MONUMENT

PLATES XLV. to XLVIII. are connected with the monument to the first Duke of Wellington in St. Paul's Cathedral, a work into which Stevens wrought his own soul ; and which, like the Cathedral to Sir Christopher, renders unnecessary any other monument to the sculptor.

PLATES XLV. and XLVI., from red chalk sketches, show studies made by Stevens, preliminary to the competition-model of 1856, for the noble figure of "Valour".

PLATES XLVII. and XLVIII., also from red chalk sketches, show

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studies made during his final work on the actual monument, the latter being a study of the figure of "Cowardice".

ALL OF THESE, and most of what has gone before, show Stevens' power of draughtsmanship, his prodigality of time, and his estimation of the life-studies as mere "shorthand notes," not to be handed about, and (least of all) not as final examples of his art. They have educational value to the student; but for himself they were *intended* as sketches, *made* as sketches, and *used* as sketches—*i.e.*, as "stepping-stones to higher things", as Tennyson, following Longfellow, writes—what those higher things were and are, all artists can judge; and this gives the reason and serves as the extenuation for this small book.

THANKS are due to the Custodians of our National Collections, who sympathetically gave all facilities for the reproductions of such of their Treasures as are here included.



PEN AND INK PORTRAIT OF THE REV. SAMUEL BEST
DRAWN AT THE AGE OF FIFTEEN

TATE GALLERY



PENCIL PORTRAIT OF DEAD BOY

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RED CHALK STUDY OF A HEAD

SOUTH KENSINGTON MUSEUM



DRAPED FIGURE (STUDY IN RED CHALK,

BRITISH MUSEUM



RED CHALK STUDY OF A FIGURE IN THE
ATTITUDE OF SUPPLICATION

TATE GALLERY



RED CHALK STUDY

SOUTH KENSINGTON MUSEUM



RED CHALK STUDIES FROM THE LIFE FOR A
SUBJECT CONNECTED WITH THE CARRYING OF WATER

SOUTH KENSINGTON MUSEUM



RED CHALK STUDY FROM THE LIFE FOR A
SUBJECT CONNECTED WITH THE CARRYING OF WATER

SOUTH KENSINGTON MUSEUM



RED CHALK STUDY OF A FIGURE DRAWING WATER

SOUTH KENSINGTON MUSEUM



RED CHALK STUDY OF A FIGURE DRAWING WATER

BRITISH MUSEUM



RED CHALK STUDY FOR A FIGURE
CARRYING WATER VESSEL



RED CHALK STUDY OF FIGURES

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RED CHALK STUDY OF NUDE FEMALE FIGURE



A. Zoya. vs

RED CHALK STUDY OF NUDE FEMALE FIGURE

SOUTH KENSINGTON MUSEUM



PENCIL STUDY FOR A FIGURE WITH
HANDS BOUND AT THE BACK

TATE GALLERY



RED CHALK STUDY OF A MAN IN STRONG ACTION

SOUTH KENSINGTON MUSEUM



RED CHALK SKETCHES OF *PUTTI*

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RED CHALK SKETCHES OF *PUTTI*

SOUTH KENSINGTON MUSEUM



RED CHALK SKETCHES OF *PUTTI*

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RED CHALK SKETCHES OF *PUTTI*

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RED CHALK SKETCHES OF *PUTTI*

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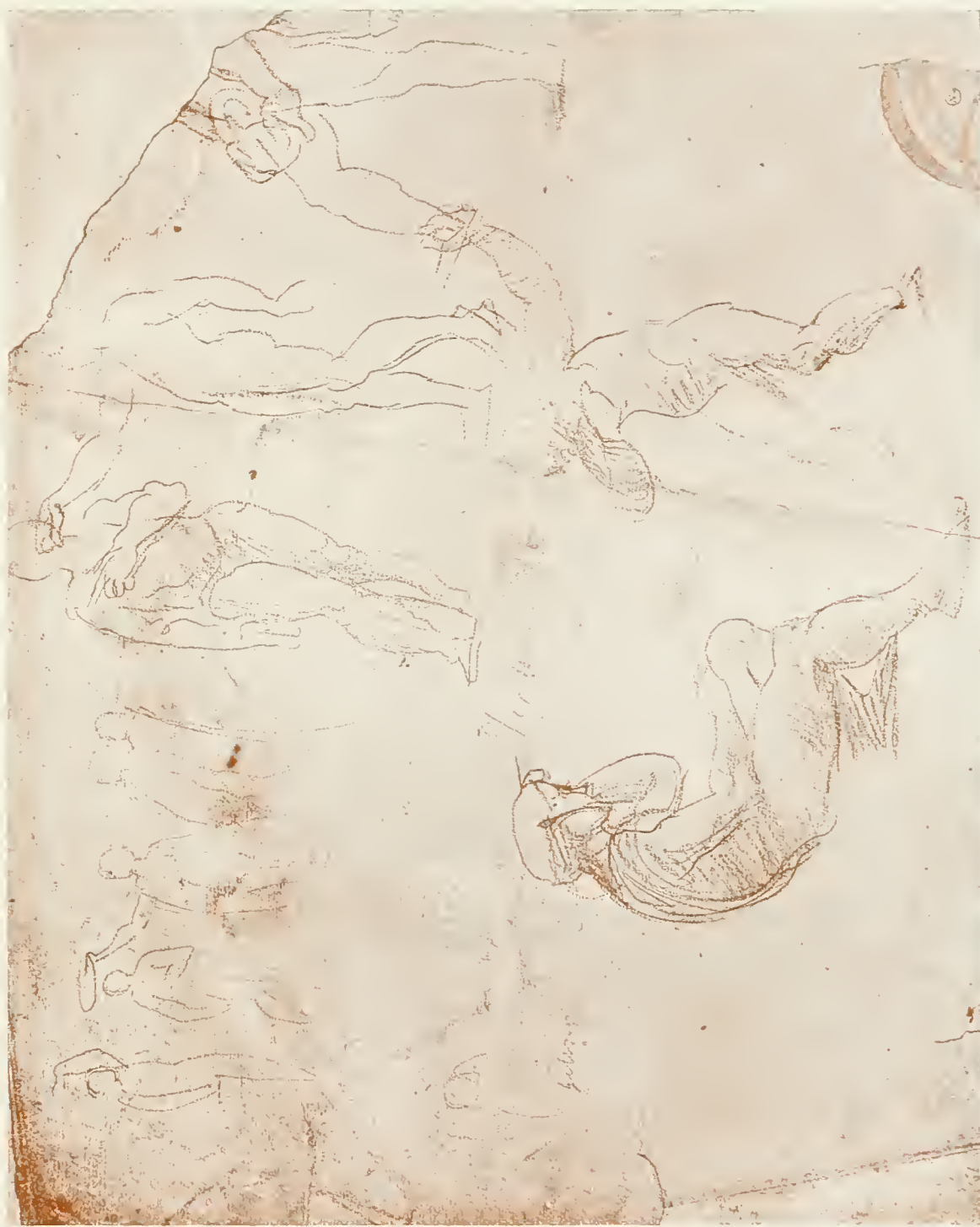
RED CHALK SKETCH "AENEAS AND ANCHISES"

SOUTH KENSINGTON MUSEUM



RED CHALK SKETCH FOR "THE TAKING OF TROY"

SOUTH KENSINGTON MUSEUM





RED CHALK STUDY FOR A BATTLE SCENE

BRITISH MUSEUM



STUDY IN RED CHALK FOR A PICTURE FROM THE
TRAGEDY OF KING RICHARD III

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SKETCH IN RED CHALK FOR A CIRCULAR
PANEL REPRESENTING APOLLO

SOUTH KENSINGTON MUSEUM



SKETCH IN RED CHALK FOR A CIRCULAR
PANEL REPRESENTING VENUS

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DRAWING IN LEAD PENCIL FOR A QUADRANTAL PANEL

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DRAWING IN LEAD PENCIL FOR A QUADRANTAL PANEL

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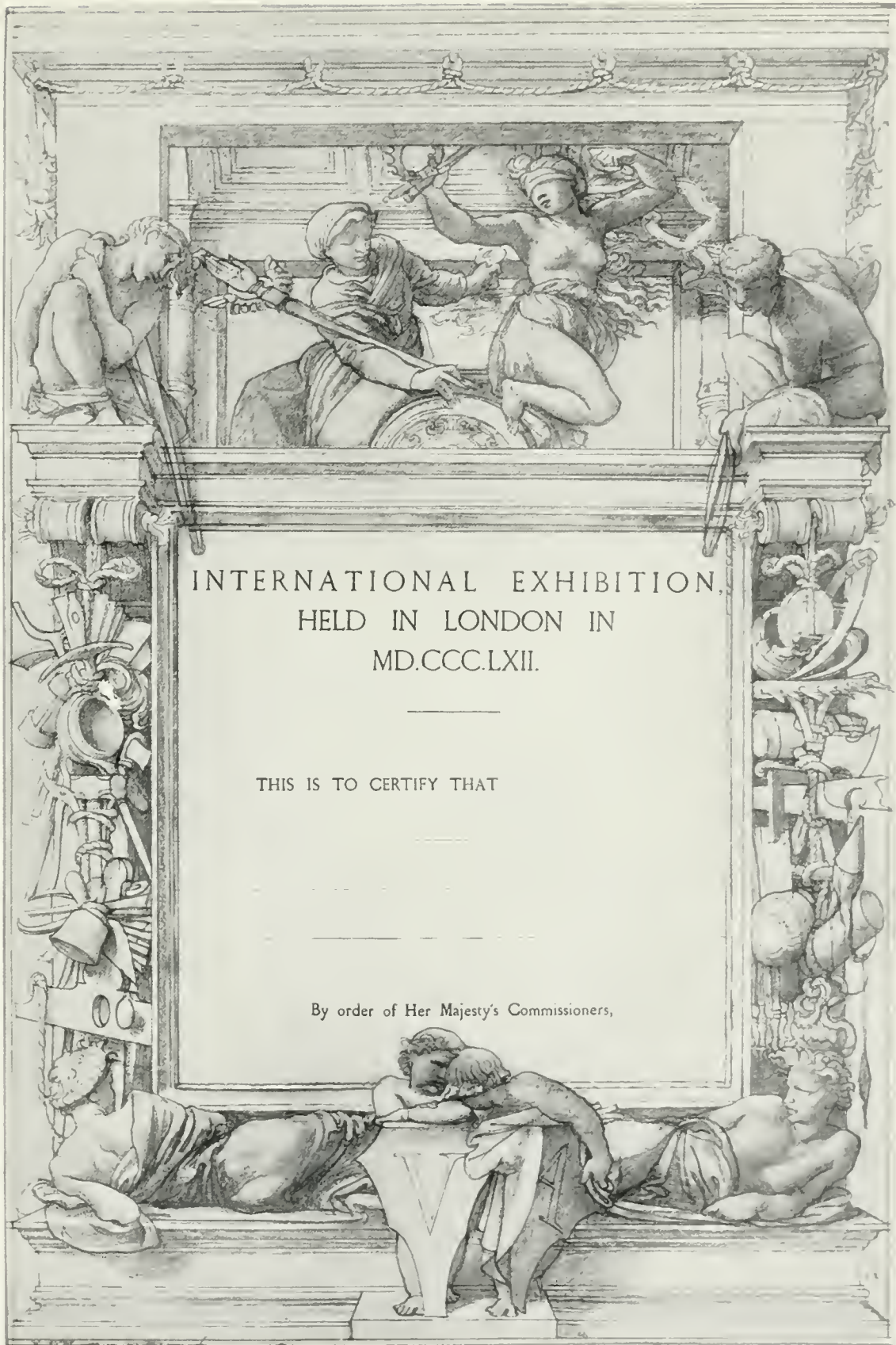
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DRAWING IN LEAD PENCIL FOR A QUADRANTAL PANEL



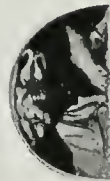
TRIAL-STUDY FOR A MEDAL REPRESENTING THE THREE
SISTER-ARTS, ACCOMPANIED BY VULCAN AND MERCURY

BRITISH MUSEUM



FIRST VERSION, IN INK AND LEAD PENCIL, FOR THE 1862 EXHIBITION CERTIFICATE

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ALFRED STEVENS

DRAWING IN SEPIA AND CHINESE WHITE FOR CHURCH DECORATION
THE "VISION OF THE ANGEL"



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