

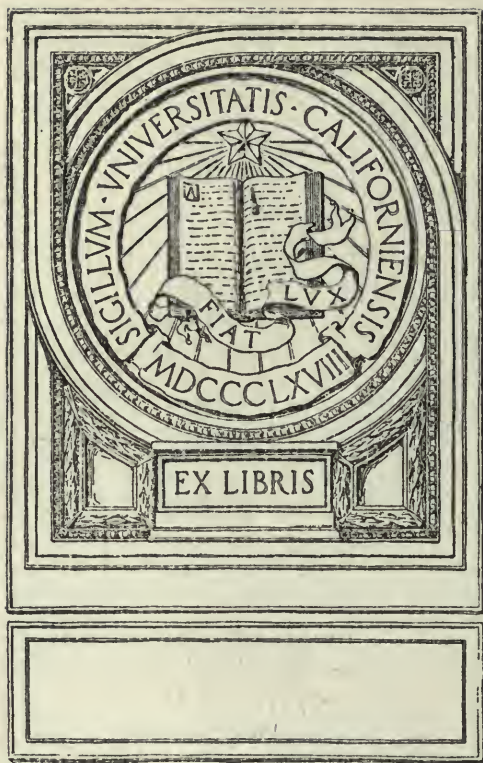
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WATER-COLOUR
BY NEVILLE LYTTON





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WATER - COLOUR

BY

NEVILLE LYTTON



LONDON
DUCKWORTH & COMPANY
HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN

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W. A. B. C. D. E. F. G. H. I. J. K. L. M. N. O. P. Q. R. S. T. U. V. W. X. Y. Z.

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My best thanks are due to Mr. Ralph Brocklebank, Mr. G. Harry Wallis, F.S.A. (director of Nottingham Art Gallery), Mr. E. Marsh, Mr. Thomas Girtin, and Mr. James Orrock, R.I., for allowing me to reproduce Works of Art in their possession.

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This brief treatise on water-colour was read as a paper to the members of the Art Workers' Guild in 1907; and though it has since been somewhat modified, it has retained the form of a lecture, and I have reproduced the illustrations which I then used as lantern slides.

WATER-COLOUR

BY the term water-colour, I mean landscape drawings done in wash. There are an immense number of works painted in water-colour which cannot be described as wash drawings. For instance, the Raphael cartoons in the Victoria and Albert Museum are water-colour. Burne-Jones painted a great number of pictures in water-colour, using the medium thick with heavy impasto. Rossetti did some beautiful subject pictures in water-colour. But this kind of water-colour is outside what I am dealing with, and should be described as tempera rather than water-colour. Landscape drawings done in wash are therefore my subject, and I will do my best to describe the special technique which they require.

The technique of water-colour is comparable to the technique of two other forms of art, namely, that of fresco and decorative handwriting. It is like fresco because it has something of the same inevitableness. The colours should be laid on at once in their proper places, and then no more touched. If the washes are messed about there is a great loss of transparence and quality, just as in fresco, if the modelling is not finished

by the time the lime sets any additional finishing in secco impairs the purity and durability of the colour.

It is like decorative handwriting, because so much depends on the proper use of the proper tools. Professor Lethaby, in his preface to Mr. Johnston's book on handwriting and illuminating, says, "Of all the arts, writing shows most clearly the formative force of the instruments used. In the analysis which Mr. Johnston gives us in this volume, nearly all seems to be explained by the two factors, utility and the masterly use of tools. No one has ever invented a form of script, and herein lies the wonderful interest of the subject, the forms used have always formed themselves by a continuous process of development." Almost these exact words might be applied to water-colour painting. No one has ever really succeeded in water-colour with the wrong materials, and no one has ever misused his materials (not even Turner) without a very marked deterioration in style.

I am going to show some reproductions of examples of the work of water-colourists of the past, to form a basis of argument and also to give an idea of the rise of English water-colour painting.

There exists a book which treats very fully of this subject, namely, Roget's "History of the Old Water Colour Society." I mention it in case this admirable work may still be unknown to some students of water-colour. It contains very amusing anecdotes about the painters as well as a great deal of very solid and valuable information about technique and colours. The following is a quotation from Roget about the technique of the earliest water-colourists :

"Beginning with chiaroscuro drawing in grey or

brown, and using the pen as well as the brush, they proceeded to the suggestion of aerial perspective by the union of two simple colours, drawing near objects with the warmer, and reserving the cooler for distant parts of their view. Brown with grey, or either with blue, sufficed for that purpose. Then came the cautious addition of a few transparent tints washed over the grey, or brown or bluish shaded drawings, to give some indication of varieties of local colour in objects. Trees were painted green, and the sky blue, and a distinction made between tiles and slate, brick houses and those built of stone. More colours were gradually introduced. But the process was still twofold. A shaded drawing was made in neutral tint with pen and brush, or brush alone ; and this drawing afterwards stained with various hues, as a child would colour a print. At length it was perceived that the broken colours resulting from the grey undercoat appearing through and modifying the brighter film above, might be got at in a more direct way. The same hues were obtainable by mixture."

This system of blocking-out in light and shade as a beginning to a drawing has many great advantages, and is a method well worth employing notwithstanding the many developments and retrogressions that have since been evolved.

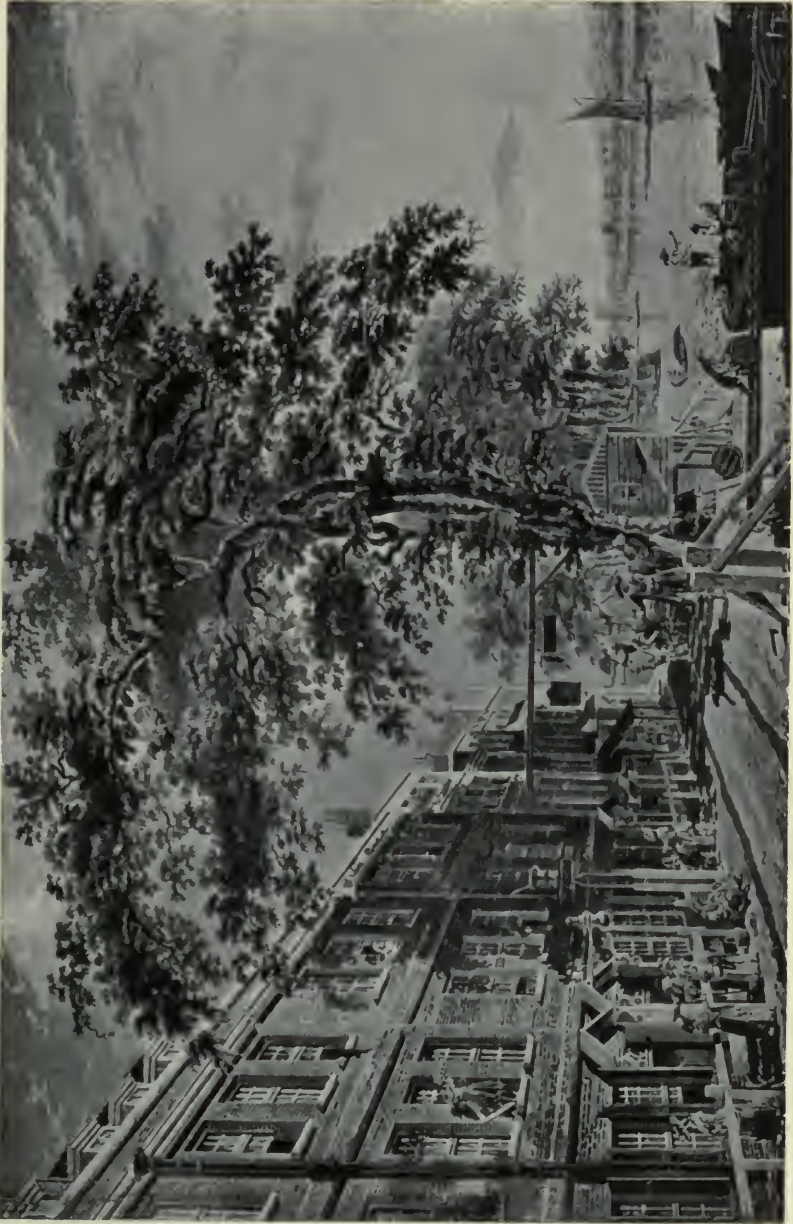
In the first place it induces the artist to separate construction and design from colour, and having paid due attention to the former, he can revel in colour without any risk of producing formlessness and lack of precision. Also in architectural subjects it gives a delicate transparency to the shadows, and is useful for producing effects of strong sunlight, as all the shadows

can be put in at the same moment of sunlight. It is interesting to see that even in a chiaroscuro drawing a difference was made in the colouring of the different planes. A warm tone for the foreground and cooler tones for the distance. A correct interpretation of aerial perspective is the most important thing in landscape.

This underpainting in neutral tints is akin to the dead-colouring employed by the Venetians and Reynolds in oil-colour.

As an instance of drawings done in this way, I have reproduced two drawings. One of Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, by James Miller, 1778 (No. 1), and the other of Strawberry Hill, by Paul Sandby, not dated (No. 2). The chief merit of these drawings consists in the beautiful clear, firm, transparent shadows on the buildings. No one who has not tried this method of painting can realise how delicious is the effect of washing the local colours over the chiaroscuro drawing done with neutral tint. This overwash of colour takes much more effect on the light parts of the drawing than in the dark parts in shadow. Thus a drawing done in this way conforms to a law of colouring referred to by Reynolds. "Let your shadows be of one colour, glaze them till they are so." (Northcote's "Life of Reynolds.")

How delightful is water-colour as a medium for topographical drawings, and how vastly superior to photographs are such works as these two, and yet at the present day there is no demand at all for such drawings, even though there are several artists quite capable of doing them. There must be hundreds of wealthy landlords all over England whose estates contain beautiful cottages which will probably be pulled



No. 1

CHEYNE WALK, CHELSEA. DATED 1776
JAMES MILLER

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No. 2

STRAWBERRY HILL
PAUL SANDBY

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No. 3

COTTAGES
PAUL SANDBY
(By kind permission of the Director of the Nottingham Art Gallery)

NOTTINGHAM ART GALLERY
NOTTINGHAM

70 VIII
ALPHABET

down in the course of the next fifty years, and what more appropriate way is there of patronising the art than by employing artists in such a manner.

The next reproduction is also from a drawing by Paul Sandby in the Nottingham Museum (No. 3). The common modern accusation against a work of this kind is that it is dull. Of course in a way it is dull, and so are many excellent things. The subject is uneventful, and from the literary and dramatic point of view quite unimportant. The drawing simply serves as an illustration of how the rules of light and shade should be applied, and how the washes should lie on the paper. It is academic and unemotional, but as Vasari says, "It is exceedingly well done," and if such water-colours could be done by the *quite young* students at schools at the present day we should soon have an art capable of rendering the dramatic and emotional life of the period.

No. 4 is by John Cozens. His art is very instructive as showing that the grandest effects can be obtained with a very restricted palette. In Roget there is a quotation from Redgrave to the effect that the colours which he used were Indian red, Indian yellow ochre, burnt sienna, and black. His drawings are described by Edwards as tinted chiaroscuro. Water-colour is above all things a chiaroscuro medium, and unless this is realised it is impossible to obtain the best effect from the medium. A drawing that has no brilliant colours may yet appear highly coloured by the skilful opposition of cold and warm colours, and nothing can be more inartistic than to seek to produce very intense colours in a medium so little suited for the purpose. How

often has the remark been heard, "I like bright colours! I see bright colours." The answer to which is, "If you like bright colours paint in some powerful medium such as oil, tempera, or fresco." The attempts that are made in modern days to render the blue of the Mediterranean or purple heather effects in water-colour are enough to make Cozens turn in his grave.

There is a certain thinness of edge and contour in Cozens' works which prevents them being of the very highest design, as may be seen in the line of the foreground in this drawing, beginning with the castle on the right and going right across the picture. The trees especially make a very dry silhouette. But the general effect is nearly always grand and broad.

No. 5 is by W. Daniell, R.A. (1769-1837). It is a view of Durham, and though it is in a public museum (the Victoria and Albert) I think it is less well known than most of the other Durhams. It seems to be a law that every water-colourist who does the view of Durham Cathedral produces a masterpiece. This one is very formal in treatment (almost inspired from Canaletto), but very simple and strong in design. I would draw attention to the trees, which though very natural and graceful are yet very much "interpreted." This adoption of a canon of form is one of the most interesting points in the study of Art.

Thus "interpretation" may be taken to mean a convention of form applied to natural objects in order to render them appropriate to decorative uses. The Greeks, the Italians, the Flemish, Dutch, French, Early English, have all used such conventions. And yet why is it that this question is never dealt with in the

education of painters? Students who go to art schools are generally made to do a considerable amount of drawing from plaster casts of ancient Greek sculpture, and then they are made to draw from the life without a word of advice as to the difference between the interpreted and uninterpreted nude, and they naturally imagine that the difference between the Discobolus and an ordinary model is as the difference between a pair of boots and an umbrella, *i.e.*, that they are two absolutely dissimilar objects. It is undoubtedly necessary both in landscape and figures to make a very special study of the canons of all periods and nations and thoroughly to grasp the need that has created these conventions. Painters should approach the problem of drawing or painting nature with their mind's eye well trained to the theory of canons, and their natural desire for natural realism combined with the bias of their own personality would produce those deviations from the canons of the past which are necessary to the vitality of the Art. (An interesting article on this subject appeared in the *Burlington Magazine* by Mr. Sturge Moore.) If painters, on the other hand, try to inspire themselves solely from nature without having studied the history of canon they are taking hold of the wrong end of the stick, and the result will be what we now see in modern picture galleries, namely, chaotic incompetence. Youth must of necessity be the age of convention in art. Emancipation from conventions and rules can only come after immersion in them. To arrive at natural realism combined with dignity of philosophic purpose and nobility of design means the possession of superb technique, which can only be acquired by a process of

absorption, or else by being apprenticed to a great master. But alas! the system of apprenticeship is no longer in use, and as a natural result there are no great masters.

No. 6 is a drawing of St. Mary's, Dover. An early Turner of the most beautiful kind. It would, indeed, be difficult to find a fault in such a drawing. Everything in it is perfect: the carefully selected chiaroscuro—the exquisitely graceful linear design—the great breadth of the masses and the subtle handwriting quality of the accents—and the avoidance of superfluous finish.

No. 7. As an example of Turner's middle period I have chosen Somer Hill, which is not a water-colour at all—but an oil-picture. It is not only one of the best works of Turner at his best period, it is also typical of what is best in the whole of English landscape art. It is intensely English in feeling and in atmosphere. It is very romantic, yet its romance is controlled and kept within bounds by a classical restraint. It will serve as an excellent illustration to what I am going to say about chiaroscuro.

Chiaroscuro is a word which has almost entirely dropped out of modern studio jargon. "Values" is perhaps the nearest equivalent to chiaroscuro—but when a modern artist says that the values are wrong in a drawing, he means that the particular depth of the tones in different planes is wrong from a realistic point of view, *i.e.*, not according to what might be observed from nature. Chiaroscuro means something quite different from this. The following is a quotation from Reynolds: "When I was at Venice; the method I took



No. 6

ST. MARY'S, DOVER

J. M. W. TURNER

(In the possession of James Orrock, Esq., R.I.)

to avail myself of their principles was this: When I observed an extraordinary effect of light and shade in any picture, I took a leaf of my pocket-book, and darkened every part of it in the same gradation of light and shade as the picture, leaving the white paper untouched to represent light, and this without any attention to the subject or the drawing of the figures. . . . After a few experiments I found the paper blotted nearly alike. Their general practice appeared to be to allow not above a quarter of the picture for the light, including in this portion both the principal and secondary lights; another quarter to be as dark as possible; and the remaining half to be kept in mezzotint, or half shadow."

It will be seen from this that chiaroscuro as Reynolds understood it had nothing to do with nature, but was an arbitrary scheme for the disposition of the masses of light and dark. Ever since artists began to design in three dimensions instead of two, *i.e.*, when they began to pay special attention to aerial perspective and distance, a more or less arbitrary scheme of light and shade was found necessary for decorative purposes. Imagine an artist going out to sketch a landscape, where there was a sheet of water and some trees. He would find that the water was much the same value as the sky, and the trees would make a thin dark line, the total proportion of light to dark being about ten to one. Therefore if he wished his sketch to be a decoration he would have to say to himself which should be the lightest light and which the darkest dark, he would have to devise the most rational scheme of light and shade suited to the view before him, making

such a change in what he saw that his drawing might become decorative without ceasing to be natural. The modern contention is that laws concerning light and shade are rubbish; that what the eye of the artist sees is what the artist ought to reproduce, no matter how much tradition is against him. The answer to this is that art is concerned with the inner eye (*cf.* Leonardo da Vinci) rather than with the physical eye. An artist's business is to paint rather what he feels than what he sees. Art that is only imitative is not art. If a landscape is painted simply and solely according to the vision of the physical eye (it would be nearer the mark in modern times to say the eye of the lens) the result is an illustrated interview of a particular spot—something purely anecdotal. If, on the other hand, the laws of light and shade are skilfully applied the result becomes a work of art. Not only something that is a decoration apart from what it represents, not merely a particular view of a particular spot at a particular moment, but a picture which contains the god of landscape. As an instance, consider Turner's Somer Hill. If it only represented a house on the top of a hill with a pond in the foreground it would contain nothing of an emotional character, but the reason that it is so moving is that it embodies all that is dignified and sweet in an English summer evening.

While contemplating this picture, which is at once so beautiful and so natural, so personal and yet so traditional, it would be a good moment to go into the much-discussed question of truth to nature. I maintain that there are two different kinds of truth to nature, and before deciding whether truth is a

virtue or a vice, it is necessary to separate these two different truths. One sort of truth, therefore, shall be described as scientific, actual, or journalistic; the other sort as philosophic, religious, or ultimate. As an instance of scientific truth, any typical landscape by Monet would serve my purpose; as an instance of actual truth, the frock-coats in the portraits of Monsieur Léon Bonnat; as an instance of journalistic truth, the paintings of Meissonier. Now in these three instances the aim as regards truth is practically the same, *i.e.*, an aim after actual truth, without philosophic truth. I might take many instances where the actual and philosophical truth coincide, but that would only confuse the issue. The instance which I am going to take to illustrate the other truth is the *Prima Vera* of Botticelli. This picture is known to every one (at any rate in reproduction) and it contains the philosophic, religious, and ultimate truth, without the actual truth. Suppose that the seasons as we now know them were to change, owing to some atmospheric upheaval, and a new generation came along which could never see or feel the spring and we wanted to explain to it all that spring had meant to us—the former generation—there would be no better way of doing this than by showing the *Prima Vera* of Botticelli. In that picture everything is *actually* untrue. The plants are arranged in a formal, unnatural way, the trees are placed in a quite artificial semicircle; the draperies fall into a series of decorative lines and have no tangibility or substance. The shapes of the forms are hardly human; yet nevertheless that picture contains the spring. All that we feel of new life, enthusiasm and romance, when winter has not been

long enough gone for us to be quite rid of the sense of fear, and yet the sparkle and exuberance of the flowers and the singing of the birds are gradually producing the spring intoxication, has been embodied and explained in the *Prima Vera*.

As I have said before, the philosophic and the actual truth may coincide, but whether in landscape portrait or subject pictures, the philosophic or religious truth *must* be present, whereas the actual or scientific truth may or may not be present, but is not essential to the work of art. Hence the *Prima Vera* of Botticelli is in all essentials more modern, more advanced, more realistic in the proper sense, more important to modern painters than any spring landscape by Monet with effects of sunlight on green trees.* The movement for actual realism in art coincided almost exactly with scientific criticism of religious beliefs. Monet wanted to show that nature was not actually as Poussin and Claude painted it. Huxley, Darwin, and Lyell wanted to show that the first chapter of Genesis was not actually a true account of the creation of the world. Monet and Huxley † were essential to the development of thought. Before Monet, people did think that Claude's landscapes were like actual nature. Before Huxley, people believed the first chapter of Genesis to be true in all its details. However, now is the time to realise

* I don't wish it to be thought that no picture painted since the *Prima Vera* of Botticelli contains this vital truth. I have chosen this chiefly because it is universally known, and also because a vital truth never becomes obsolete.

† In mentioning Monet and Huxley together I do not wish to give the impression that they are on the same level as men of science. Monet was only scientific in aim.

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that, though it is necessary to perceive what actual truth is; yet actual truth is worth nothing either in religion or art. It may be true that Christ was not the son of a virgin, yet the Christian religion was the apotheosis of purity, humility, reverence. And with a disappearance of belief in the Christian religion there is a corresponding disappearance of these qualities. This is a disaster to the human race, unless some other force should bring about the apotheosis of stronger and nobler qualities. In like manner Claude and Poussin's trees may not be the trees of nature, yet they adopted a canon which expressed the inner meaning of landscape, and whether we adopt the same canons or not, we must have the same pursuit after philosophic truth.

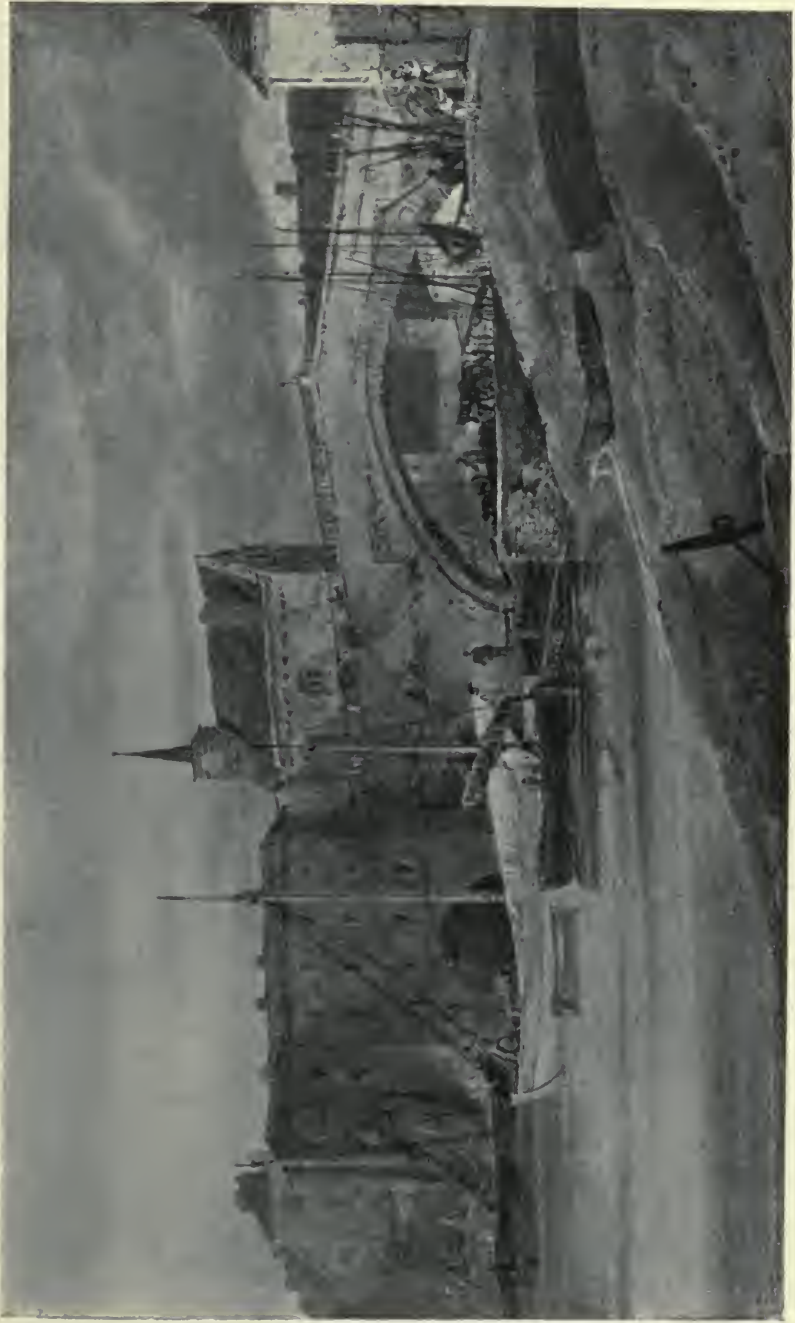
No. 8 is a late Turner. It is difficult to know what to say of such a drawing except that it shows complete decay. Unfortunately it is just this kind of drawing that the public have chosen to admire most. There seems to be a fate against any English artist, no matter how great he may be to start with, continuing to be an artist all his life. The British public always *demand* something that is not truly artistic. Late Turners are often described as "colour poems," "profoundly imaginative," "miracles of seraphic vision." When such terms find their way into art criticism one may be sure that the poor artist has given way at last—that he has stepped outside the legitimate form of his art, and that he is supplying the Adelphi-isms that have been so long clamoured for. Turner's late water-colours and pictures are the exact artistic equivalent of his verses. Yet the literary world is sensible enough not to pretend to see in them the foundation of a new school of poetry.

For the last ten years the "advanced" exhibitions have been flooded with the artistic offspring of senile Turner. There is no doubt that Turner was one of the great gods of landscape, and therefore everything that he did was interesting, even after his decline, but what a misfortune that his artistic descendants of to-day should not be the children of his prime.

Nos. 9, 10, 11 are by Girtin. Girtin died at the age of 29, therefore he never came to his full strength, far less declined. But what amazing achievement. What a splendidly robust artist! What a perfect blending of style and matter, of tradition and vitality. What a fine reverence for the limits of water-colour, and what a Titanic skill in profiting by its possibilities. He seems to have added something of Canaletto and Guardi on to his English tradition. Turner said of him, "If Tom Girtin had lived I should have starved"; but Girtin would never have equalled the success of Turner, though he was a more perfect artist.

The three greatest stylists of English water-colour are undoubtedly Turner, Girtin, and Cotman. Girtin is lucky in having left little behind him but what is first rate; whereas there has been a rage for all Turner's worst works. Cotman also lived to decline, but at his best he was perfect. (Turner's opinion of him may be gauged by the fact of his signing with his name one of Cotman's drawings.)

There are two reproductions here (Nos. 12, 13) from Cotman's drawings. The peculiarity about Cotman is that his drawings are more coloured than any other first-rate drawings. Water-colour is essentially and above all things a light and shade medium, yet the addition



No. 9

THE OLD OUSE BRIDGE, YORK
(In the possession of Thomas Girtin, Esq.)

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GRETA BRIDGE
JOHN SELL COTMAN

of slight colour and the judicious opposition of warm and cold colours add enormously to the beauty of a light and shade drawing. After Cotman, water-colours were turned out in great quantities to supply the large demand there was for pictures that looked like oil-pictures and yet were not so expensive. The transparency of the washes was lost in ridiculous over-finish. Strong colours were used and they abandoned the old wash-line mounts (than which nothing is more decorative) for gold mounts, in order that they might imitate as nearly as possible oil-pictures. In Cotman, colour is pushed to its very furthest limit without producing a deterioration in quality. His Greta Bridge (British Museum) is the best example of a perfect, yet highly coloured drawing.

No. 14 is by David Cox and No. 15 by William Hunt. I have not had these drawings reproduced here either because I admire them or simply for the pleasure of making fun of them; they are here because they represent the sources of two currents that have been flowing right down to the present period. They represent, both in very different ways, the tendency to a somewhat bigoted adherence to realism. This tendency to realism had two distinct phases. I will first take the phase that is represented by the David Cox drawing. The true originator of the phase was Constable.* He reacted strongly against the descendants of the Reynolds' school, who waged a sort of effete classicism.

* As an improviser Constable was second to none. His rapid sketches in oils are marvellous. Unfortunately his important studio works lose nearly all the vitality that he was so successful in realising while sketching from nature.

Benjamin Robert Hayden is typical of the kind of Art that I am referring to. Constable kicked against the inevitable brown tree, the melodramatic light and shade, and the excessive use of bitumen of which his predecessors were so fond. Constable's painting had an enormous success in France, and there his imitators took an even stronger dislike to canons and conventions than he did himself. They mostly worked out of doors and without decorative aim, and they were the founders of the impressionist nature school of to-day.

The other phase of the nature school is represented by the Hunt drawing, and the person really responsible for this kind of drawing and its derivations is Ruskin. Ruskin hated the presumption of the Constable school in thinking they could imitate nature in half an hour or an hour. He said, "The world has taken centuries to create itself—how can you presume to imitate it in half an hour?" However, he did not think it presumption to imitate it in twenty hours or fifty hours, and as a fifty hours' job, this drawing of Hunt is a very good example.

Turner, who was Ruskin's great hero, began his career as a pupil of Sir Joshua Reynolds, and he was well impregnated with the canons, conventions, and rules which were in vogue at that time. Later in life he deviated from these canons in a direction which he thought and which Ruskin thought was naturalistic.

Ruskin's idea of the proper education for a beginner was to go to nature, and faithfully, humbly copy all that he saw. In order to appreciate the disaster that such a method brings, let some one who does not know how to draw and yet has a critical faculty try it. Alas,



No. 14

PRIMROSES AND BIRDS' NESTS
WILLIAM HUNT

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA



THE CHALLENGE: A STORM ON A MOOR

DAVID COX

many have tried it without having the critical faculty. I don't know whether it would be quite fair to impute to Ruskin the garden group of water-colours or the Oriental group,* but at any rate these fiendish achievements are the outcome of the idea of faithfully copying nature.

I have kept to the last this magnificent drawing by Claude (No. 16), as I should like the flavour of this work of art to remain with my listeners. Claude Lorraine is not in high favour at the present moment. He was very unfairly treated by Ruskin, and he is anathema to the impressionists. Yet if this drawing be compared to the best pictures that Claude Monet ever painted, only those who are devoid of all sense of proportion could fail to realise the immense superiority of the one over the other, alike in aim, conception, and execution. As a water-colourist he is in a class by himself. No one else has ever been quite so

* *Garden water-colours.* I refer to those water-colours which aim at representing bright highly coloured herbaceous borders relieved against a yew hedge, the brilliance of the flowers being ineffectively and clumsily imitated in a medium which is not nearly substantial enough for the purpose. Friends and relatives of mine have often said to me, "I love colour—I love flowers. Why am I not to try and paint them as I see them?" The answer to this is, "If you love flowers, try to understand their decorative use in Art as well as in Nature, as did Fra Angelico. Try to comprehend the immensity of his technique which enabled him to produce colours which rivalled the very colours of the flowers themselves."

Oriental water-colours. I refer here to those water-colours that have for their subject Egyptian girls with pitchers on their heads silhouetted against a sunset sky reflected in water with the pyramids in the background. I must apologise for mentioning these last in a work that deals with art, but they are still so terribly popular and prevalent.

free or accomplished, so reckless, or so passionate. His touch is exquisite: Difficulties don't seem to exist for him. He uses a brush and wash as easily as most people speak. In his oil-pictures he never reached quite the same level. His huge landscapes in oils are too far removed from improvisation. In them there are beautiful bits and wonderful atmosphere, but they do not contain enough of the original impulse. However, as this lecture deals with water-colour, it is fitting that I should hail him as the greatest of them all.

This is all I have to say here about water-colours of the past. There still remains the present and the future. What are we to do as modern painters? Are we to assume that we shall do right because we are modern, and because we live in an age when progress is believed in as a matter of course, or are we to acquire a perfect knowledge of the methods of the past and absorb all that has gone before us?

The Mecca of modern painters is Paris. They fly to it as the moth flies to the candle. They court deliberate death. Paris has destroyed the whole of European art. The Parisians themselves, who are quite without the quality of modesty, have a rooted belief that the present era of art in Paris is something so stupendously magnificent that beside it the Periclean Age does not exist at all. The best French art has always been classic. The modern Parisians are anything but classic. They detest tradition, they crave for what is new and sensational. They argue in the following manner: "You cannot go back. You must be modern. What is dead is dead," &c. In answer to this I should like to quote a saying of William Morris: "Something never came



STUDY OF TREES
CLAUDE

No. 16

out of nothing." It is true that "What is dead is dead," but what is living is always the issue of something that is either dead or dying. The usual sense of the word "modern" is ten years before the present and ten years after. I think "modern" should mean 500 years before and 500 years after. A new artistic fact takes just about 1000 years to manifest itself. The "spirit of modernity" is a common phrase just now in art criticism. This being interpreted means that when a modern picture contains all the faults that the great masters of the past so carefully avoided it is said to have the modern spirit. The value of the history of Art is that it has set up a standard, and if modern pictures do not come up to this standard (it does not matter how much the spirit of modernity may be present) they do not exist. Taking Constable as one of the prophets of the modern spirit, his disciples of to-day are so many subter-Constables, instead of super-Constables. Their preoccupation with the modern spirit has the result of making them do badly to-day what has previously been done well. Hence the words modern and bad are often interchanged. It must, however, be realised that works of art are never good because they are old, or bad because they are modern, or *vice versa*. Things are good because they are good, or bad because they are bad. The reason that there is such a vast quantity of bad art produced now is because there are so many more producers than ever before. Ever since the institution of compulsory education the intellectual trades have been flooded with the badly and semi-educated, and painting has suffered along with all other arts. The harm done to the Arts (indeed, to the whole of life) by compulsory

education is incalculable. Will humanity ever recover from it? That is the question.

The past history of Art provides endless instances of goings back and renaissances. The Egyptians again and again reverted to their most flourishing epochs, and always with the greatest success. Their most decadent periods came when their desire for realism surpassed their feeling for design.* The history of Chinese Art is similar to that of the Egyptians, as they continually reverted to their zenith period, as did also the Japanese, drawing fresh life and vigour from the original source.

In more modern times the Italian renaissance was a renaissance of the Greek classical period. And what was the result? Was it a feeble imitation of Greek Art? Not at all. It was something absolutely new and vital. Later still in the last century, when a number of English painters came to the conclusion that Art had gone astray since the days of Raphael, were their pictures mere *pastiches* of the primitives—emphatically no. At times they were almost excruciatingly Victorian. Thus it appears that these renaissances are an inevitable law of Art history. How far imitations of particular painters of the past are legitimate is a matter that each painter must decide for himself, and time will give him reason or otherwise. Poussin did his best to imitate Titian, and yet his Art is both national and individual. The sources of Watts' inspiration were

* A friend of mine holds the opinion that decadence in painting dates from the time when the picture became more highly considered than the frame; that both are evidences of expressive design and both equally important.

the Elgin marbles and the Venetians, and yet he was intensely English. It is safe to say, however, that knowledge derived from methods and traditions of the past must be swallowed and digested before it can form part of a new life. Montaigne says that the bees ransack the flowers, and yet what they produce is neither "sweet-william nor thyme," but honey; and so a modern painter, when he ransacks nature, must not produce the actual flowers of nature, but he must produce Art, which is the honey of nature.

In England at the present day, there are signs of a renaissance in architecture, furnishing, and most of the so-called minor arts and crafts. Also the trade for modern pictures is bad, which is a state of things most likely to bring about a revival of good painting.* At the beginning of the nineteenth century it was thought that if only the State and society encouraged painters sufficiently, Art would thrive in a manner hitherto unknown. That has not been at all the result. The number of artists has multiplied; the Art has gone back. In France there is such a tremendous output of painted works that it is difficult to conceive a drain sufficiently large to carry away such a vast encumbrance to human life.

It will be seen from what I have said that I am full of bias and prejudice, but that is surely what a painter should be. My opinions are the result of instinct, and afterwards I try and find good reasons to support them. I do not wish to be understood to mean that Art is entirely and solely a matter of laws and principles—but

* As artists are unlikely to sell their pictures when they are finished, they might just as well paint good ones as bad.



I wish to emphasise the fact that imagination, genius, inspiration, poetry, are things which may or may not lurk within the individual, but they are in no way hampered by a good education in the laws of painting. At present we have *no* education. If a man is a genius he will be none the worse off for having the means of expression at his finger-ends. If a man is simply a hack, he may just as well be a competent hack.

The history of Art movements is a sequence of revolutions. The last revolution was a reaction against the academic, and towards the anarchic. My reaction is not only towards law and order, but towards such a pitch of law and order as can only be attained by keeping clear of all reigning academic bodies as well as from the anarchists. The anarchists were necessary to the development of Art, as they demonstrated that law and order without the vital spark were nothing worth. Also they have demonstrated that though a whole generation may loudly affirm that bad pictures are good, the fundamental common sense of human nature will assert itself in the end. The age of paradox has come to an end.

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