

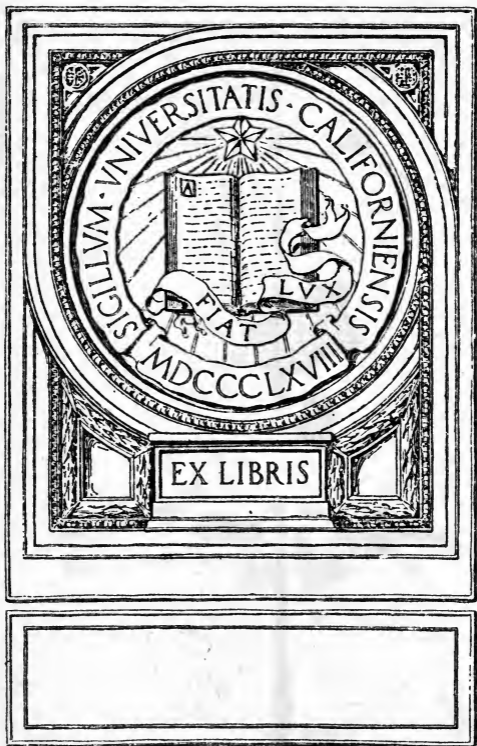
FRED.  
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The Popular Library  
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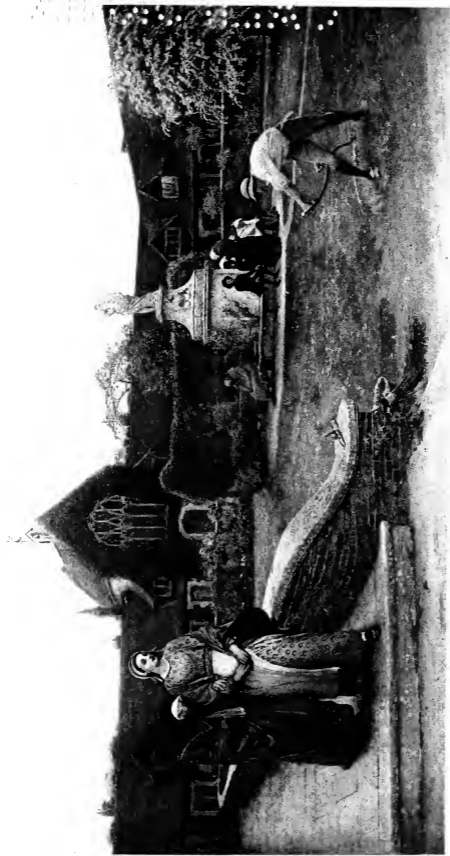
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FREDERICK  
WALKER

BY

CLEMENTINA BLACK

AUTHOR OF  
"THE PRINCESS DÉSIÉE," &C.



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## I

FROM the artistic dimness of a childhood accustomed to hear pictures much talked of but to see them seldom, three moments of vivid pictorial impression stand out. Of these the latest and infinitely the most agreeable was that which opened before me a "Cornhill Magazine" with an illustration inscribed: *The Two Catherines*. It would have been quite impossible to explain what it was that appealed to me; the uplooking face of the little governess—in which the mysterious something was concentrated—conformed to none of my canons of beauty; the story I had not read; the name of the artist it did not even occur to me to look for. I simply sat staring with my nose very near to the page, a short-sighted, inarticulate little person to whom lines and forms had for the first time revealed a glimpse of life's underlying mystery and pathos. Looking back now across years

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of picture-seeing and reams of art-criticism the composition rises fresh upon the memory with the same haunting charm, a charm like that of certain lyrics and certain melodies, personal, individual, yet with that touch of the universal in the individual which is the essence of genius. In that charm with its depths and its limits lie both the secret of the painter's personality and the measure of the world's debt to him.

The analysis of the charm, the comprehension of the man, the assessment of the debt, these are the aims towards which the following pages are directed by a writer acutely sensible of the charm and humbly conscious of a most inadequate equipment in the matter of technical knowledge.

Until five years ago there existed no full biography of the man whom Sir John Millais deliberately pronounced "the greatest artist of the century," and of whom George Mason declared, to two "cordially assenting" fellow-artists, that "Freddy Walker" was the "biggest genius of the present day." Scattered reminiscences, some warmly sympathetic, some coldly depreciative, yielded contradictory glimpses of an enigmatic figure, now slow,

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silent, reserved, indolent to sluggishness and self-absorbed; now fiery, eager, emotional, quiveringly alive to every touch, fevered with the zeal of work and fevered also with the zeal of sport. In 1896, however, his brother-in-law, Mr J. G. Marks, published a stout volume of "Life and Letters" and the mythological figure was replaced by a real man. The larger part of the volume is made up of Walker's own letters inlaid upon the most sedulously unobtrusive of backgrounds. Here at last are all the facts that the world has a right to know of one of its great men; and from these facts, so simply stated, the reader whom such problems fascinate, may seek to discover how and why English art blossomed suddenly under the hands of this keen-eyed London lad, and what was the secret that made the touch of his fingers inimitable upon the brush while it left them but the fingers of the amateur upon the flute.

Frederick Walker was born in 1840, one of a numerous, and evidently a delicate, group of brothers and sisters. His father, a working jeweller, came of a family marked by an artistic strain; while his mother was endowed

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not only with marked depth of feeling and nobility of character, but also with fine perceptions and a keen eye for beauty. She was early widowed, and for some years the family was chiefly supported by her work as an embroidress. Frederick Walker's childhood was that of a town boy attending day-schools and amusing himself at home with drawing and with the making of models and machines. He learned no modern language beyond his own, and his letters contain few references to books. On the other hand quotations occur very aptly in them, and his style of writing is rather unusually clear, straightforward and vivid. In none of his letters does he give the impression of hesitating for lack of the right word. On leaving school he was put into an architect's office where an intelligent superior, who liked the boy, and clearly perceived his true vocation, rather encouraged than checked the continual drawing of things unarchitectural. At sixteen or seventeen he embarked definitely upon the pursuit of his life, began to draw by day in the British Museum, and to attend Mr J. M. Leigh's classes in the evenings.

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By and by he was admitted to the Royal Academy schools, and in 1858 became an apprentice to Mr J. W. Whymper, the wood engraver, with whom he continued to work three days a week, for two years.

At some time during his employment with Mr Whymper, Walker joined the association of artists and amateurs which was generally called "The Langham," and of which the main purpose was study from the life. This society had regular evenings for sketching, a subject being given out at each meeting, to be drawn in a space of two hours at the next. Many of the sketches thus made by Walker are in existence and several are reproduced in the "Life." All of them have the special Walker character; all are made of the simplest every-day elements, and in every one is something of that peculiar combination that arrested my own young eyes in *The Two Catherines*—a revelation of grace and beauty in the most ordinary scenes of life and a suggestion of something deeper underlying them.

The Leigh classes, the Academy schools, and above all "The Langham" had brought Walker

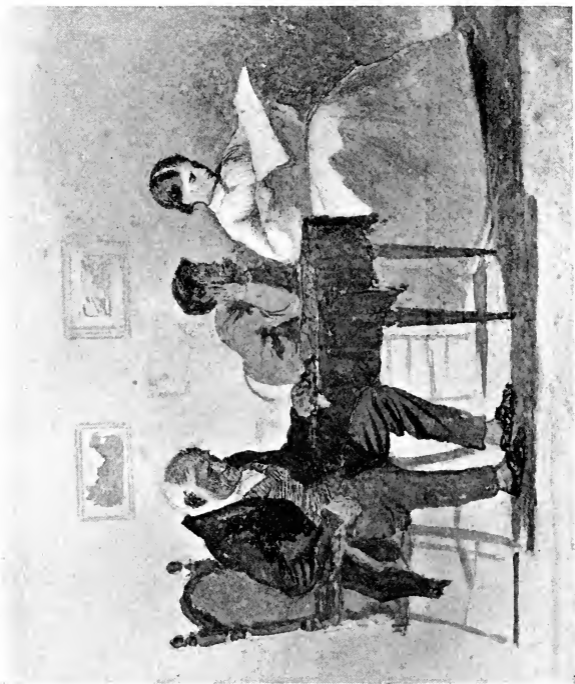
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into immediate contact with other students and artists, and his drawings were already known and appreciated among them at "The Langham." "His work," says Mr Stacy Marks,<sup>1</sup> "was eagerly looked for at the hour when all the sketches were gathered and shown together." And indeed it must have been a dull critic who did not perceive in such work as *Old Age*, *The Fireside*, and *The Peep-show* the promise of just that distinction which Walker was to attain.

By the year 1860 his student days may be considered closed. He appears to have made in their brief space an almost incredible advance in knowledge, insight, and technical skill; but the steps and method of this advance remain somewhat dark. As he never communicated in words—perhaps never could have communicated—his artistic impressions, and as he persistently destroyed his student drawings it is impossible to follow the processes whereby the clever lad "with a taste for drawing" had become, by the year 1863, the artist capable of producing *Philip in Church*. The word "fitful" is employed of

<sup>1</sup> "Pen and Pencil Sketches," vol. i. p. 69.





OLD AGE

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him as a student ; it is probable enough that his teachers would have reported him "idle" ; but doubtless, like another student also destined to touch the heights in his chosen art, who "all through boyhood and youth . . . was known and pointed out for the pattern idler," he was "always busy on his own private end." To have had wise, systematic and thorough teaching in the technicalities of one's craft is no doubt an inestimable advantage—how inestimable can perhaps be judged only by those who practise the craft of words, so wholly untaught in this country and so sadly uncomprehended—but there are temperaments to which this royal road is not open ; natures that must pursue their own aim along their own path ; and it seems clear that Frederick Walker's was one of these. He paid, as we all have to pay, the penalties of his temperament ; struggled painfully to incarnate his own inner vision ; tried this way and that way, often apparently torn by hesitations but always knowing what he sought ; while other men worked gaily on from a plain beginning to a plain ending, undisturbed either by mental conflicts or by germinating periods of in-

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activity, and perhaps at odd moments, condescendingly deplored to one another the "idleness" and unsteady ways of work of their young contemporary. Mr Hodgson<sup>1</sup> says of him—and with an evident sense of speaking well within the mark,—“nor was he in any danger from over-industry and application.” So Trollope in his “Life of Thackeray” shows an amusing conviction that it was really rather remiss of Thackeray not to sit down every morning after breakfast and turn out daily a regular stint of pages. But Walker’s “fits and starts” produced *The Harbour of Refuge* and *The Plough*, and Thackeray’s immethodical pen it was that brought forth “Esmond” and “Vanity Fair.” Regular industry is no doubt commendable and most properly to be inculcated by all seniors upon all juniors, but works of genius are not among the products that can be turned out upon a system of assiduous labour for ten hours a day with a regularly recurring interval on Sunday. The highest kind of productive power is not in blossom all the year round; it is not the industrious, unwearying Trollopes and Southseys

<sup>1</sup> J. E. Hodgson, “Magazine of Art,” Sept. 1889.

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who leave behind them imperishable volumes ; and in the sister art there is, as Sir Joshua Reynolds long ago acutely pointed out, an idleness which assuming the specious disguise of industry, keeps up a perpetual activity with the brush, “to evade and shuffle off real labour—the real labour of thinking.” That labour Walker never evaded. If ever painter mixed his colours “with brains” it was he. An idea was never left until he had achieved what he himself felt to be its fullest expression. Again and again we find him returning to a theme, rehandling a subject, casting aside relentlessly the strenuous work of days and weeks. It is said of him—not with complete truth—that he could not endure the criticisms of others, but at least he never spared himself his own. To compare, for example, his “Cornhill Magazine” wood-cuts with the water-colour drawings made from them is to receive an impressive lesson upon the endless patience, the ceaseless pursuing demanded of an artist.

At twenty or thereabouts, then, Walker was already producing the beautiful “Langham” sketches and already regarded by those who knew his work as marked out for future dis-

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tion. This time of his life must surely have been a happy one; perhaps indeed, the next five years were the happiest he ever spent. Of his many friends the dearest were under his own roof. His mother and sisters not only loved him, but also—which is rarer—loved and understood his work. To himself, apart from the deep delight of practising a beloved art, his own visibly rapid progress must have afforded keen gratification, and an ever firmer basis for those ambitions which he freely confessed. His sensitiveness, evidently always great, was not yet excessive, and he had all the healthy readiness for fun and enjoyment that naturally belongs to a quick and responsive temperament. He was ready for almost any outdoor sport, ready to dance, to act a part in a play—or to improvise one, as when, in the character of Major Walker, with whitened moustache and eyebrows, he carried on an impersonation through a whole evening unsuspected—and ready too to “play ghosts” up and down a staircase with a party of children.

Du Maurier, summing up alike Walker and his own fictitious hero in the pages of “Trilby,”

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says that "both were small and slight though beautifully made, with tiny hands and feet; always arrayed as the lilies of the field for all they spun and toiled so arduously; both had regularly featured faces of a noble cast and most winning character; both had the best and simplest manners in the world, and a way of getting themselves much and quickly and permanently liked." The unfinished portrait reproduced as a frontispiece to the "Life and Letters" shows the marked breadth between the brows which so often accompanies artistic power, the direct, observant, painter's gaze, and, in the original, the keen blueness of the eyes; while an early photograph in fancy dress—probably that of Robespierre—displays a singularly correct and beautiful line of profile. From these, from the photograph reprinted in this volume, and from the many caricature sketches of himself which have been preserved, it is possible to gain a perfectly clear image of the trim and slender figure, and the young intent face that was never to undergo the changes of age.

On strangers he produced, especially in early life, an impression of extreme shyness.

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The words "shy" and "nervous" have been used of him by all but one of those persons remembering him who have been kind enough to speak to me of their remembrances. But shyness does not of necessity imply timidity, and the adjective "timid" applied to him in Tom Taylor's excellent prefatory note to the posthumous exhibition of his works is surely misplaced. As early as 1861 Walker showed signs of an unostentatious, but pronounced and well-justified self-confidence. At no time does he seem to have had doubts of himself or apprehensions of failure. And even his much talked of shyness seems to have been but superficial, and to have melted very quickly in congenial society. Not in all companies did he deserve to be described as "the most silent man I have ever known." When he felt himself loved and understood he seems to have been ready with gay and quaint speech. One such, trivial enough, but characteristic is recalled by one of his hearers. Sitting at lunch among a group of children he greeted a dish of stewed pears with a cry of "Hurrah" and a declaration that here was something to quench the fire of his genius.



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“He would talk well,” says Mr Marks, “when roused or interested, but seldom about his art.” His one recorded saying upon this theme “composition is the art of preserving the accidental look” may serve both to make us regret that it stands alone, and to assure us that Walker’s aims and ideals, though unuttered, were perfectly clear and definite to himself.

The foundations of his character seem to have been its sincerity and spontaneity; and human beings in whom these qualities are well marked are pretty sure to be objects both of very warm affection and of very genuine distaste. To some of us they are the elect, who live at first hand and whose presence in the world makes the main part of its sunshine; to others they appear mere irritating egoists. The portraits of them therefore are pretty certain to vary largely. Thus Walker who is seen in his own letters as gay, quick, eager, deeply affectionate, arduously industrious, a good swimmer, a good rider, and, in the judgment of an Insurance Company’s doctor, a “first-class life” seemed to Mr J. E. Hodgson, a sluggish idler, of

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morbid and taciturn temper to whom work was a Herculean task; while Mr Claude Phillips thought him "*maladif* . . . from the start." We later comers, denied the test of personal impression, may well be content to accept the verdict of judges as keen as Thackeray and Du Maurier, and to believe that the charm radiating from almost every one of his works belonged not only to the artist but also to the man.



WEeping CUPID

*(By permission of Messrs Smith, Elder & Co.)*



## II

THE London into which, forty-two years ago, Walker made his entrance as a lad of twenty, was one that differed a good deal from the world of to-day. As to externals, it was much smaller, probably much less wealthy, and certainly, if we may coin a word, far less dispersive. Food, dress and furniture were all less elaborate and less ostentatious; the measure of the heiress in fiction was taken rather in thousands than in tens of thousands; and the desire of appearing to spend a large income had not yet, it would seem, become elevated to the rank of a paramount social obligation. Contemporary society—except perhaps in strictly aristocratic strata—had little or nothing of to-day's cosmopolitanism; foreign politics had settled into calmness after the agitations of 1848 and the Crimean War; America and Paris had not become neighbouring parishes to England; and in spite of the Great Exhibition

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of 1851, the large mass of quietly living, decently educated Londoners remained not merely insular but provincial. But though narrower, and perhaps more prejudiced than those current to-day, the ideals held by our parents and grand-parents in the decade from 1850-1860 were in many ways higher and more dignified. Men were measured less by the standard of wealth and more by that of personal character. A life devoted solely to the pursuit of amusement was considered unworthy; to be serious over serious matters was not to be necessarily regarded as a bore; and the word "respectable" was still a word of commendation.

The favourite novels of the period—excellent evidence of current feeling—were those of Thackeray, of Dickens, of Trollope, George Eliot and of Charlotte Brontë; and of these authors the first and last were still in some quarters regarded as rather dangerous and revolutionary. The earlier novels of Trollope furnish perhaps the most valuable documents from which to reconstruct the upper middle-class life of that day—a life spent amid domestic appointments that were hideous but

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comfortable, and in garments that while equally ugly can hardly have had the compensating merit of being comfortable. The crinoline, the pork-pie hat, the hair net, the elastic-sided boot and the single button glove prevailed. It was an era to which charity itself can hardly deny the epithet "dowdy," yet Walker paints and draws all these things and they become graceful parts of a beautiful whole.

In art the pre-Raphaelite movement had almost run its course. Millais, eleven years Walker's senior, had been painting since 1849 and was now at the stage of development marked by the *Vale of Rest* and the *Black Brunswicker*. Mason had another twelve years to live and was to produce in them most of his English work. The anecdotic school of Ward and Frith was flourishing gaily, and in another direction Hunt was producing his simple single figures, his groups of fruit and his compositions—at once artless and artificial—which call the word "*banal*" at once to the mind and to the lips.

It was in black and white, however, that English art showed, at the moment, most vitality, and in black and white Walker first

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displayed unmistakably the characteristics of his genius and obtained that recognition which happily came early into his too short life. It was at about the beginning of 1860 that he became engaged more or less regularly in drawing on wood for illustration. His work appeared in "Once a Week," in "Good Words," and finally in the "Cornhill Magazine." The level of these illustrations varies very greatly. Walker's markedly individual temperament would almost inevitably cause him to find particular difficulty in drawing to order, and although, in all the instances that I have looked up, his drawings stand out plainly superior to those of other illustrators in the same periodicals, yet it cannot be denied that some among them lack altogether that spark of life by which the greater number are illumined. The best are in their own line quite unsurpassable, and their charm has been so felicitously characterised by Mr Comyns Carr<sup>1</sup> that it seems impossible to avoid repeating the quotation: ". . . the expression of a childish face, the turn of a head or some fortunate choice of a gesture which seems new

<sup>1</sup> J. Comyns Carr, "Essays on Art."



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in art though familiar enough in nature—these are the slight indications that already give notice in Walker of a special power of drawing from reality some secret of beauty that escapes common observation.”

To the end of 1860 belongs Walker's introduction to Thackeray. “The Adventures of Philip” was about to appear as a serial in the “Cornhill Magazine,” and its author was desirous of finding some competent person to redraw the illustrations upon the block from his own sketches. Mr George Smith, the publisher of the magazine, having seen some of Walker's work, suggested him to Thackeray as suitable. At Thackeray's request the young man was brought early one morning to call upon him and seems immediately to have produced a favourable impression. After a little kindly talk Thackeray, desirous alike of testing his visitor's skill and sparing his nervousness, said that he was about to shave and asked Walker to draw his back. The drawing thus made is not the same as that which appears as an initial letter to one of the “Roundabout Papers” in the “Cornhill Magazine” for February 1861, and of which Mrs Ritchie writes :

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“It is wonderfully like him—I sometimes think more like than anything else I have ever seen.”

“Philip” began to appear in January 1861 and it is probable, though not certain, that the illustrations for that month and for February were Walker’s versions of Thackeray’s sketches. This was certainly the case with that for March. Before the publication of this, however, Walker had rebelled against the conditions imposed upon him. A letter from Thackeray dated February 11th, shows that the artist had declined to work up a couple of designs “which as you would not do them I was obliged to confide to an older and I grieve to own much inferior artist.” Walker wrote a reply “indicative,” as Mr Marks truly says, “of the struggle between his wish not to offend one whom he greatly respected and his feeling of what was due to himself.” His hope, he said, had been to do original work for the magazine, and what he was asked to do was distasteful to him. This letter was followed up by a visit to the publisher in which he declared point blank that he would do no more such work: “His friends told him he could do original work and that he

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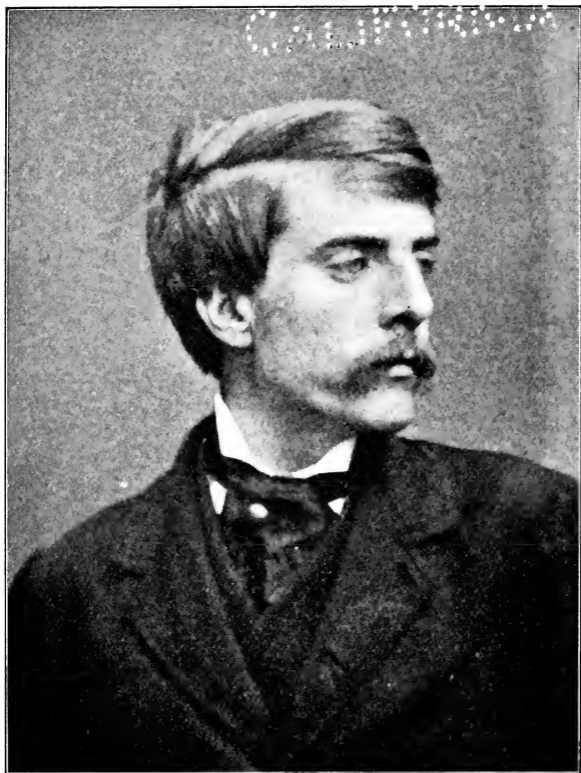
ought to do it and not copy other people's designs which any fool could do who could draw." The readiness with which Thackeray—generally, says Mr Smith, "very jealous of any alteration in his sketches"—acceded to Walker's wishes and consented to act in future no more than the part of a suggester, shows not only his quick and cordial recognition of the young artist's powers but also his equally quick and generous comprehension of his junior's character. In the case both of Thackeray and Thackeray's publisher, Walker certainly displayed that power which Du Maurier attributes to him of "getting himself much and quickly and permanently liked." A warm attachment arose between the elder and the younger men of genius; Walker was constantly invited to Thackeray's house and made known to his friends, by whom, says Mr Swain, he was "flattered"—an expression which we will hope somewhat overstates the kindness shown him.

In regard to his methods of work Mr Swain, who engraved much of it, says in the same article<sup>1</sup>: "Walker was one of the first men

<sup>1</sup> "Good Words," 1888.

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to introduce brush work into his drawings on wood. By using a half dry brush he gave texture to the line he was drawing." Mr Marks mentions that on his walks he would "frequently carry with him an unfinished wood block which he had brought for the purpose of putting in or noting something he was in need of at the time. He had a most inveterate habit of biting his nails and would stop and stand with his fingers to his mouth looking intently at anything that struck his fancy and then perhaps the wood block would be brought out and some additions made to it, though as often as not he had taken in all he wanted in that keen and earnest gaze." More than one specific instance is noted in which he worked from some particular object—a clump of jasmine which he recollected as growing in Mr Whymper's backyard, or a spray of bramble, carefully carried back from Croydon to figure in *The Lost Path*. Walker thus combined the habit of drawing from memory with that of continual reference to nature; and seems to have followed a happy middle course between that method of invariable drawing from the actual object which, while increasing the ac-



FREDERICK WALKER  
FROM AN EARLY PHOTOGRAPH

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curacy and sometimes the subtlety of an artist's work, often fails in imparting to it life and motion; and that method of happy-go-lucky drawing from an unspecialised general remembrance which, while promoting an air of action and spontaneity, degenerates in the long run into exaggeration, emptiness and mannerism. Like Antæus the artist weakens unless he renews his contact with the real earth, but the contact may be that of the eye and the mind—not necessarily that of the pencil.

In regard to the cutting of his work upon the block Walker was, as might indeed have been guessed, fastidious and particular over details, but apparently his own training under an engraver had taught him the difficulties of rendering a drawing exactly, and he was more patient than the members of his family were always willing to be. Of the many letters that passed between himself and Mr Swain concerning the illustrations drawn by the one and cut by the other, two have been published, one in the "Life" (p. 179), where it furnishes a facsimile of Walker's characteristic handwriting, perfectly legible, free from super-

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fluous loops and flourishes, irregular in size and evidently rapid; the other in Mr Swain's article already mentioned. This, the earlier of the two, concerns *The Two Catherines* and deals first with "the little governess's head." "The line I have marked in dots to be taken away, making the 'back hair' more clearly defined. There was a little dot in front of her upper lip that I have removed, and the lines on the throat *too dark*. The child behind her has some straggling hair which I have removed. I have thinned the line of the boy's cheek which sticks out too much. The hand of the lady (at the door) on the child's back has too black a line round it, and I have carried some light under the table and softened the edge of the tablecloth."

Besides his work in 1861 and 1862 in the "Cornhill Magazine," Walker made in those years no less than forty-nine drawings for "Once a Week" and a few for other periodicals, and in 1862 produced a set of eleven independent drawings for Messrs Dalziel, six of which he afterwards reproduced in water-colour. Two of these Dalziel illustrations, *The Village School* and *Autumn*, are in the print-room of the British



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Museum; and two, *Summer* and *The Fishmonger*, at South Kensington, where, the official catalogue affording no clue to the position of the various works, they are extremely difficult to find, and where, indeed, after spending three hours, I failed to discover *The Fishmonger* at all.

In these drawings where Walker, no longer bound down to the exigencies of a story, was free to choose his own subject, we find him displaying the characteristic that marks most of his work—a characteristic difficult to define in few words, and lying perhaps at the root of what has been called his classicality. Walker, it has been said, “always painted a story.” The saying is singularly inaccurate, yet a truth lies behind it. It would be more nearly exact to say that, left to himself, Walker never painted a story. What he chose to paint was not often even so much as an incident, but rather an emotion, a wave of feeling, a mood. His pictures present not something happening, but something felt: in *Bathers* the elementary bodily joys of youth, air and water; in *At the Bar* the mingled terrors of guilt, remorse and detection; and in the two designs for

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*The Unknown Land* the whole wonder and rapture of discovery. Generally—always in his best work, and often even in his least successful—the human mood stands in relief against a background suggestion of the incomprehensible, the depths, the vast, mutable, unchanging life of the world, in which our own life is but a part. It is because he is painting not an episode but a phase that his critics reproach him with want of unity and think him more successful “when he had but one thing to say than when he had two or three.”<sup>1</sup> That he formulated any such general scheme is wholly improbable. He was not a philosopher, nor a moraliser; and the painter’s concern is not with what is felt or what is meant, but what is shown. With the artist as with every one of us, some of the things seen arrest our attention, while some pass us by. In humanity the aspects that chiefly arrested Walker’s attention were those aspects of form and face that are drawn out by moods and especially by moods of tenderness and mystery. The beauty that mainly appealed to him was a beauty informed by expression of a mood.

<sup>1</sup> W. Armstrong in Nat. Dict. Biog.

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Now the expression of a mood though transient, is seldom sudden ; and it is curious to note how very seldom as he advances in life Walker paints an action that is not more or less continuous. He paints, if the French grammar may be employed to point a simile, not in the past definite but in the imperfect tense. And this being also a characteristic, almost indeed a law, of ancient sculpture, it is natural that even beholders who are unable to name any single definite point of resemblance should be aware of something in Walker's work akin to the marbles of the Parthenon. The spirit, the way of beholding things, is curiously akin ; and we can hardly doubt that his early familiarity with those works did in some measure teach Walker to see as he saw. But since he was no imitator but a genuine artist looking out on a world quite other than that of Athens, and since the impulse of the genuine artist is and always must be to paint not only as he sees but what he sees, this spirit and this way of beholding show themselves irradiating the most ordinary scenes, persons and surroundings. The man who can see beauty only in the remote, the romantic and the imaginary—in the unseen,

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in short—is in truth the man who cannot see beauty at all. Walker saw it everywhere, in a mushroom, a brick wall, a plume of grass, in the faces around him, above all in the faces of children. Even in the dress of his day—perhaps the very least picturesque that even the unpicturesque nineteenth century ever produced—he was able to discern artistic possibilities. From the figures in *Philip in Church* and from those in *Strange Faces*, a theatrical costumier might almost dress a comedy of the early sixties. No detail is shirked, yet we are not conscious of grotesqueness. Some of Millais' illustrations to Trollope strike the eye as far more old-fashioned.

It is true, however, that as Walker ceased to be engaged upon illustrations and also perhaps as he passed more and more from the influence of the pre-Raphaelite movement, he became disposed to modify and, as it were, to generalise his costumes. The *Girl at a Stile*, the *Housewife*, and the charming maiden who knits in the *Old Farm Garden*, are all clothed in dresses that bear no stamp of date.

In 1862, however, this change lay in the

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future, and Walker was still painting details as strictly of the period as Philip's egregiously tall hat and Mrs General Baynes's flounces. It was in the latter part of this year that the first of his illustrations to one of Miss Thackeray's stories was published. From this time until 1870 he continued to illustrate all her stories, and in doing so produced his very finest black and white work. There is a marked affinity of spirit and treatment between the writing of the one and the drawing of the other of these two young contemporaries. In each a singular grace and refinement of presentation devotes itself with unswerving fidelity to the ordinary facts of contemporary life; in each poetic charm is the outcome of a noble and very simple point of view that is not covered precisely by any of to-day's catchwords and does not seem to be represented by any specific current in contemporary literature or art. In what degree this spirit was that of their time or in what degree each may have owed it to the influence of a parent of unusual fineness of character can perhaps be determined only by such survivors from that period as retain enough

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of youth's hope and faith to be fair judges of this. That the harmony of aim and achievement was felt both by author and artist is shown on the one hand by Mrs Richmond Ritchie's delightful little note of reminiscences in the "Life" (pp. 95-96), and on the other by the fact that Walker continued to illustrate her work after he had practically given up doing so for other writers. His very last magazine illustration is that to her story "Sola"; and to this drawing, a reproduction of which, in water-colour, is in the possession of Sir John Aird, an adventitious interest attaches from the circumstance that the younger man would appear to be a very recognisable portrait of Walker's brother-in-law and faithful biographer. That the artist himself was satisfied with these drawings we may presume from the fact that he reproduced so large a proportion of them in water-colours. Two, from "Jack the Giant-Killer"—*Waiting for Papa* (afterwards called *The Chaplain's Daughter*) and *The Fates*—are among his very finest works in that medium. Four at least were made from "The Village on the Cliff," and one of these, *The Two Catherines*,

44 MADDOX STREET W.



To *F. Walker & Co*

INVITATION CARD—MORAY MINSTRELS,

1871

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sometimes called *The Governess*, is at the moment of writing hanging on a screen in Messrs Agnew's Bond Street rooms, where, though very small and not brilliantly successful in colour, it arrests the eye at once.

By 1864, or so, Walker, who had in the interim been painting industriously in oils as well as in water-colour and had exhibited his first Academy picture, had become impatient of giving his time to illustrations. He seems to have undertaken pretty willingly those for Thackeray's unfinished "Denis Duval," but to have become restive under those for Mrs Henry Wood's "Oswald Cray," then running as a serial in "Good Words." Early in the year he wrote:<sup>1</sup> "I begin to think it was a mistake to take those 'Good Words' things and the beastliness of wood drawing is full upon me—support me in the resolution to take NO MORE as these things get finished. I am utterly tired of it—yes utterly." Nor did he apparently content himself with merely resolving to do no more, for a little later comes this: "I asked Swain if he thought I could get off doing any more 'Good Words' drawings—in fact

<sup>1</sup> "Life," p. 47.

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give 'em to someone else. He seemed shut up and said he thought not. Strahan's<sup>1</sup> away—at Jerusalem—for three months, so I must bear that burden."

It seems to be a general opinion that the "Denis Duval" drawings are not completely successful. Their total number (including chapter headings) is six, and of these one, *Little Denis dances and sings before the navy gentlemen*, was a re-drawing from a sketch by Thackeray and does not bear Walker's signature. It is a little unfortunate therefore that it should have been chosen for reproduction in the "Portfolio." Mr Phillips thinks that in these drawings Walker was "evidently much less at ease," that he was "hampered" by the unfamiliar costume, that the work is "not quite simple," "just a little too *contourné* both in conception and style," and that "there is something forced, something approaching mannerism and sentimentality even in the prettiest of these drawings." The criticism seems to apply singularly ill to two of the drawings: *Evidence for the Defence*, and the exquisite little chapter heading of *Agnes*

<sup>1</sup> Mr Strahan was the publisher of "Good Words."



DENIS'S VALET

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Handwritten text at the top of the page, possibly a title or header, which is mostly illegible due to fading and bleed-through.

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slipping a note into a large china jar. Anything more direct and simple, less self-conscious, especially less conscious of their clothes, than the two little lads with the pistol it is difficult to imagine. But looking at the whole five, one is aware of something in most of them a little different from Walker's usual style, and the difference is not in anything so superficial as the dress. I believe it to lie in the fact that they mainly present *acts* rather than states of feeling. Under a semblance of superior unity they have lost that harmony which is the real Walker characteristic. They remain fine work, but they might be the fine work of another man. One would expect to find them preferred by persons who are not ardent Walker lovers.

The end of the year 1864 may be taken as marking practically the close of Walker's career as an illustrator. In the four years of that career he had come to the first rank in black and white, and the first rank in those days was a high one. His work, even at a very early date, had been distinguished; it rapidly became masterly, and at every stage it was original, sincere, absolutely first-hand.

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He was always in pursuit of something ahead, always trying a better way, never content merely to do the same as last time. An illustration to Miss Thackeray's "Red Riding Hood," for instance, shows him departing suddenly, when at the very summit of his skill, from the fully shaded drawings hitherto so successful, and using in considerable parts of this cut hardly more than a well defined outline. For a moment one might doubt whether this were indeed his work, but the figure of the little heroine assures us. Only Walker could have drawn that face, and that pose, so absolutely ordinary, yet so singularly distinguished and poetic. This drawing, though not one of his very best, displays another of Walker's special gifts—the gift of imparting nationality to his figures. Rémi is as French as any Frenchman of Du Maurier himself—as French as the boy and the fisherman of the 1866 water-colour are Scotch.

Thus by the end of 1864, when he was not yet twenty-five years old, Walker had already made for himself, in black and white, a reputation which would have sufficed, had he



GIRL AND VASE

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THE  
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BOSTON, MASS.



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done no more, to keep his name alive. In the ten years before his death he was yet to achieve equal fame in two other departments, as a painter in water-colours and as a painter in oils.

### III

IN 1863 the Walker family, resident for some years previously in Charles Street, Manchester Square, removed to 3 St Petersburg Place, Bayswater, the home of Walker's remaining years. The house, which is but a few steps from Bayswater Road, has been a good deal altered. In Walker's life-time there was no bay window in front, but a verandah and balcony—probably after the pattern of those still visible six or eight doors higher up. The studio built at the end of the garden in 1865 no longer exists, and though this part of St Petersburg Place is probably but little changed, the immediate neighbourhood is being transformed. Vast red blocks of flats have sprung up, poor streets have been swept away, and the peaceful southern end of "the Burgh," as Walker used to call it, lies, a little, drowsy, gently old-fashioned nook, very agreeably restful but not, it may be feared,



BOY AND GRAVE

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destined to long continuance amid these aggressive modern developments. The house seems to have escaped the attention of the society that affixes to so many London houses an announcement that some more or less illustrious inhabitant once dwelt within, for its face bears no such indication.

The home circle of which Walker was eventually, and probably very early, the central figure, did not remain a large one. Of his three sisters, one was married about 1860, and the youngest, so often his model, in the first days of 1864; of his surviving brothers, one died suddenly in 1866, and the youngest slowly, of consumption in 1868. The trio remaining consisted of his mother, himself, and his elder sister, Fanny, together with the often offending, often threatened, and always pardoned cat, Eel-eye, who began life by sitting for the black kitten in Millais' *Flood*, spent his best years killing birds in the St Petersburg Place garden, and outliving all the household, finally died under Mr Marks's roof. Eel-eye was well-known to Walker's friends and is frequently mentioned in his master's letters, generally, I regret to say, in connection with some deed of

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rapine or murder. Walker, like Whittington, Dr Johnson, and many another intelligent and distinguished person, was a cat-lover and was beloved in return. Mr G. D. Leslie, in "Our River," remarks that, like Landseer, "he appeared to understand their language," and relates how a bet was made by Mr Stacy Marks that Walker would not retain a certain cat on his knees for half an hour without holding it. "The cat in question was a large tom, and in general would suffer no one to nurse him at all. It was most curious to watch how Walker went to work. He gradually attracted the cat towards him by a variety of little caresses and words, giving it gentle touches every now and then; confidence was at last gained and he lifted it occasionally off the ground, replacing it tenderly directly; finally he raised it quietly on to his knees, and after soothing it for a few minutes withdrew his hands. The time was noted, the cat subsided into a steady doze and Walker won his bet with great applause, amid which the cat disappeared from the room with alarm."

Of Walker's domestic life it may be said with conviction that he was profoundly attached to



REINE AND DICK

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his home, his mother, brother and sisters, that he appreciated to the full their admirable qualities, rested with amplest trust upon their affection, and was incapable of grudging them anything that might be won for them by his exertions. In absence, he was pathetically homesick; one of the closest of his friends writes: "It is doubtful whether his death was not due as much to the fearful depression of spirits under which he laboured after his mother's death as to his disease"<sup>1</sup>; and when death had taken him in turn, his sister was quick to follow. Many and many a letter between the mother and son in particular show how warm was the affection subsisting between them and how deep the sense on each part of the other's tenderness and care. Yet life in St Petersburg Place did not always flow smoothly. It is clear enough that neither Walker nor his sister was endowed with a temper of patience and placidity, and that he—as indeed any observer of his artistic progress would have presupposed—was liable to those alternations of extreme

<sup>1</sup> Mr J. W. North—quoted in "Good Words," 1888, p. 817.

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elation and irritable depression which, except perhaps in persons of exceedingly robust *physique*, are apt to accompany and follow periods of strong creative activity. That "serenity," "placidity," and "imperturbability" of which his acquaintance Mr J. E. Hodgson deplored the lack, are not concomitants of the temperament that produces such work as Walker's. The very sensitiveness of nerve that made him susceptible of impressions so exquisitely fine made him also impatient over trifles, impulsive, disposed to sudden changes of plan and sudden bursts of irritability. The temper of the carthorse and the attributes of the racehorse are not to be found combined in the same organisation. But such faults as Walker's, though apt to loom large to the unaccustomed onlooker, are not, when they merely lie on the surface of a nature fundamentally tender, vivid and generous, faults that alienate love. To Mr Leslie, who clearly was himself much attached to Walker and very sensible of his personal charm, he seemed habitually inconsiderate of his mother and sister, not "appearing in the least conscious when he gave any extra trouble," and "in-

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tolerant of any blunders or mistakes that might chance to occur." But an apparent carelessness of outward forms of consideration between persons closely connected, though always ungraceful, is not always the sign that real consideration is wanting; and indeed a very punctilious regard for such forms is seldom found co-existing in England with perfect ease and intimacy. Walker's letters—to which, of course, Mr Leslie had not access—show that he did fully appreciate the many services which his family were so eager to render and he so ready, in fullest assurance of their goodwill, to ask. Moreover, there are two points to be considered in this relation: the first, that Walker was, after all, the financial support of the household, the prosperity of which depended upon his work and was promoted by anything that helped his efficiency or lightened his tasks; the second, that all these ministrations, this seeking of colours, interviewing of buyers, arranging of costumes, dispatching of parcels, etc., were not merely personal to the son, brother and bread-winner, but were performed in the larger service of art, to which his kindred were no less willing

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devotees than he, and in which he himself was, when all is said, the most indefatigable toiler. To them, as to him, no sacrifice in that cause was too great. *They*, at least, understood to the full his aims, his labours and his achievements, and found, we may be very sure, an ample reward in his success. No doubt, too, they knew how vital a necessity to him was their sympathy and comprehension. From them his canvases were not hidden; to their judgments his ears were open; to them he wrote in absence with a fulness which often makes it possible to follow every day and almost every hour of his life.

Long before ceasing to work in black and white, Walker had begun painting in water-colours. "His first important composition in that medium—*Strange Faces*—was executed," says Mr Marks, "towards the end of 1862." In the uncompromising portraiture of the hideously monotonous carpet and wall paper, in the carefully rendered detail of the clothes, may be traced the influence of the pre-Raphaelites, but the little group of the woman and child is Walker's own. Even in the reproduction one feels the delicate colouring,



STRANGE FACES

FROM A PHOTOGRAPH

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and the subtle, unexaggerated expression of the child's face; while the face of the woman—his eldest sister—is bent in that pose which he drew so often and in which the line of the brows runs upward and outward. The same view of the face is shown by the old woman in *The Harbour of Refuge*, by Philip in *Philip in Church*, by the mother in *Vagrants*, and by many another face in Walker's work. It is a view that brings out very advantageously the fine moulding of brow so well marked in his own face and probably also in the faces of two at least of his sisters. The hands in this early drawing, as in so many later ones, are particularly delicate and beautiful; in this detail, also, Walker seems to have been fortunate in his nearest and most willing models.

Of the execution and colouring of *Strange Faces* I am not able to speak. A drawing of 1860, *The Angler's Return*, already displays much of Walker's later methods, and is so devoid of the usual thinness of water-colour that it might at first sight pass for a sketch in oils. In colour it is a little cold and in tone much lower than most of his later water-colours. This subject had already been that

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of "Langham" sketch (reproduced on p. 16 of the "Life") and it is interesting to compare the varying treatment of the group. In the earlier the figures of the woman and girl, though full of subtlety, significance and feeling, will hardly bear careful examination; they are rather indicated than drawn. In the second rendering the persons have been separated a little, the figures are more solid, more correct, and more highly individualised, and the management of the light is at once more effective and more exact. But something has been lost; the tenderness, the poetical touch of the first sketch has faded a little. The woman, wonderfully life-like, is genuinely ugly and—a very rare thing in Walker's work—strikes one as belonging to an old-fashioned, almost an extinct type. Here and in a very few other works of his earlier day—a sketch called *Fright*, for instance, and a couple of caricatures reproduced in Stacy Mark's "Pen and Pencil Sketches"—may be traced a streak of realism uncompromising almost to cruelty, an insistence upon the grotesque and ungainly, suggestive of the work of Cruikshank. It is strange indeed



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to reflect that there was a moment in Walker's career when he showed tokens of almost sordid satire, and that at least one female figure from his hand might very plausibly be attributed to the ironic pencil of Mr Phil May. The ungentle touch disappears very early—disappears, as some critics think, too completely. The habit of caricature indeed remained with him his life long, but, after these early years, only one instance occurs in which the caricature can be stigmatised as a little unkind—and that under great provocation: *The young 'ooman who broke my flute—and said she didn't*.<sup>1</sup> Some trace, though but a slight one, of this hard view of the world lingers in a drawing made for Mr George Smith in 1863, and intended as an illustration for *Jane Eyre*. Both in design and in colour this drawing is of particular interest, and furnishes a sort of landmark from which the artist's later progress may be measured. Nothing is more clearly marked as he advances in life than his growing preference for warm tints of colour. Schemes of brown, red and yellow are common with him, and Ruskin's reproach that he does

<sup>1</sup> See page 65.

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not paint blue skies is not altogether without foundation. That chord of green and blue which predominates in so many English landscapes and furnishes so frequent a pitfall for the English amateur, seems never greatly to have attracted Walker. It is curious indeed to note how seldom, after his earlier years, he paints any prominent tree in full leaf. The tree in bloom and the tree bare of leaf he rendered with a happy perfection that has left a whole generation endowed with new perception of their beauties; but the tree as the ordinary man thinks of it, green as a cabbage, seldom grows in his enchanted gardens. A great discretion in the use of green, a marked absence of that thick and heavy "chrome" tint freely employed by many French painters, may be traced in his maturer work. But in 1863, when he made the drawing in question, this colour still held a place on his palette and was used for the mass of ivy that tops the old wall beneath which Rochester and Jane are sitting. The treatment of the wall is curious and interesting. The representation of old red brickwork was a field in which the mature Walker shone supreme. Indeed we may fairly guess



“THE YOUNG 'OOMAN WHO BROKE MY FLUTE,  
AND SAID SHE DIDN'T”

*We*

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that any person going about to manufacture a spurious "Walker" would put into it an old wall and a blossoming tree. But the wall of Rochester's garden is rather cold than warm; a tone of greyish lilac pervades it, the somewhat uniform green of the ivy runs above, and in front are the black and grey of Rochester's coat and Jane's dress—a grey not brownish or mouse-coloured but rather slaty in hue. In this part of the drawing indeed it is difficult to recognise anything especially characteristic of the later and better known Walker. Often, in looking at Pinwell's work, one is led to think of Walker; here, for once, in looking at Walker's, one thinks of Pinwell. But as we turn to the right-hand corner where the little Adèle stoops for her shuttlecock, likenesses to Pinwell, or indeed, as Mr Phillips suggests in the case of another early drawing, to Birket Foster, vanish. The attitude, perfectly true but carefully selected, the drawing of the figure, at once masterly and graceful, the frock, elaborately faithful to a passing mode and yet permanently harmonious, these are Walker's and Walker's only. As an illustration of the story the drawing was not

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successful and the entries quoted by Mr Marks from Walker's diary show the artist to have been fully sensible of the fact.

In the latter part of 1863 Walker began his water-colour rendering of *Philip in Church*. Of the merits of this drawing it is difficult to speak in measured terms. It is a work that sets its author indisputably in the highest rank. Had he left nothing else behind him, this must have stamped Walker as a great painter. Reproductions have been numerous and sometimes very good—that in the "Portfolio" especially—but no reproduction can give any adequate notion of the strength, the solidity, the depth and luminosity of the colouring. When I last saw it, it was placed almost in direct contact with one of Sir Laurence Alma-Tadema's brilliant studies of blue sky and white marble. Yet it was not the water-colour that paled in the juxtaposition. Nor is it colour only that is lost in reproduction; mere black and white can convey neither the exquisite gradations of tone nor the extraordinary subtlety of expression of the children's faces. Of the alteration in the position of Philip's head (mentioned on p. 42



PHILIP IN CHURCH

OWNER—LADY TATE

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of the "Life"), Sir John Millais was fond of relating the details. Inspecting the drawing while it was in progress, he pointed out to the artist that Philip was described as being six feet in height and that the head of a man of that stature would come higher up than it was represented. To his horror, Walker, taking up a pair of scissors, cut the head of Philip then and there out of the paper, and subsequently replaced it higher up in its present position. Close inspection still reveals traces of this surgical operation. It is pleasant to know that this, one of her son's very finest works, contains a memorial of Mrs Walker, of whom "a very recognisable likeness," says Mr Marks, "is to be found in the face of the elderly lady in a light bonnet seen in the background, below the base of the pillar." The young man behind her has been sometimes taken for a portrait of the artist himself, but was in fact drawn from one of his brothers. In execution, *Philip in Church* shows not merely an advance upon the Jane Eyre drawing, but a complete change of method. The earlier work is a little thin and is very highly stippled; the later, though luminous to

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an amazing degree and though never losing the transparency of water-colour, has all the solidity and depth of an oil picture.<sup>1</sup> "His results," says Mr Phillips,<sup>2</sup> "were obtained by a lavish use of opaque pigment, the high finish of every part, in which there was nothing perfunctory or 'niggling,' being due to a juxtaposition of the minutest touches." This method was regarded in some quarters as extremely heterodox. Ruskin, in his letter about the posthumous Walker exhibition, denounced it vehemently. "The laws of all good painting having been long ago determined by absolute masters . . . here is Mr Walker refusing to learn anything from any of these schools or masters but inventing a semi-miniature, quarter fresco, quarter wash manner of his own . . . which betrays his genius into perpetual experiment instead of achievement." Yet surely in art, no less than in other human affairs, "perpetual experiment" is the

<sup>1</sup> Though this drawing obtained a medal at the Paris exhibition Walker did not receive the medal personally, so that his delightful caricature remains a work of pure imagination.

<sup>2</sup> "Portfolio," p. 28.



RECEIVING A MEDAL

Handwritten text, possibly a list or notes, located at the top of the page. The text is faint and difficult to read.

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condition of all advance, and the sort of "achievement" which is repeated without fresh experiments is but stagnation. The critic who believes and declares that all has been learned already and that nothing remains but to repeat the lesson can be of no possible help to the artists of his own generation. To the public he may indeed still serve as a useful check upon that pursuit of the merely new which is ever the temptation of the under-educated and also of the over-educated. But to the worker in art, the would-be creator, such criticism as this of Ruskin's can but cause hindrance and confusion. Every instinct of the true artist cries out against its falsehood; repelled and disgusted he falls into that mood of scorn for every external judgment which for him of all men is so dangerous. The sense of being misunderstood drives him into isolation and bitterness, into little mutual admiration cliques and schools of rebellious exaggeration. By the time that Ruskin's captious words were penned, Walker lay safely beyond them in his grave at Cookham; but it was probably by similar utterances no less than by too flattering imitations—often like other flattery

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extremely painful to the flattered—that he was driven to the “touchiness,” the exaggerated reticence and the recoiling from almost all discussion of his work that marked his later years.

How refreshing to turn from Ruskin’s condemnatory theoretics to the simple practical note of a fellow-worker! “The uncertain character of the paper led Walker,” says Mr North, “into excessive use of Chinese white in his earlier water-colours. This use of white he gradually diminished until in some of his later work in water-colours there is scarcely a trace, and that existing only because of some defect in the paper.”<sup>1</sup>

Walker’s own consciousness of his “sins” in regard to this employment of white is amusingly shown in one of his many caricatures of himself, drawn about 1865.<sup>2</sup> He is represented painfully embracing a “double-tube” of flake white almost as large as himself and compelling it to exude in vast serpentine coils upon his palette. Beneath is the legend: “What *would* ‘the Society’ say if it could only see me?”

<sup>1</sup> “Life,” p. 169.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 37.

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“The Society,” that is the Society of Painters in Water-Colours, more generally known as the “Old Water-Colour Society,” said nothing unkind to *Philip* or to the two other drawings—*Refreshment* and the scene from “Jane Eyre”—which in accordance with the rules he submitted on becoming, in January 1864, a candidate for membership. He showed *Philip* when completed to William Hunt, who “seemed greatly pleased with it and gratified me very much.” Hunt died shortly afterwards, and Walker in writing sympathetically of his death, adds: “I feel great pleasure in knowing that one of the last things Mr Hunt did, was to send his vote for me.” Walker was elected an associate of the Water-Colour Society by a unanimous vote, an honour very unusual and probably never received by any other man at his age. The new associate was represented at the Society’s summer exhibition by the three drawings named above and by *Spring*, which had already been purchased by Sir William (then Mr) Agnew, in whose possession it now is and who considers it one of the finest, if not indeed the very finest, drawing that Walker ever made.

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Of all his drawings it is perhaps the one which black and white is most hopelessly inadequate to render. The design, the charming slenderness of the fine budding twigs, the primrose-stars, all the beauties of line and shape indeed are shown in the etching, the print or the photograph, but the infinitely delicate tones of leaf and bud and the tender atmosphere of spring, moist yet crisp, that broods over the real work and brings into the nostrils of the beholder the very scent of pollen and primroses elude all reproduction.

Walker's work at this exhibition seems to have been received with a chorus of admiration, and a silver medal was awarded to him by the Society for the encouragement of the Fine Arts. From this time onward he was recognised as one of the first of English water-colour painters.

The winter exhibition of the Water-Colour Society contained two more drawings, one—of which I have never seen even a reproduction—painted from his own garden at St Petersburg Place and representing a postman delivering a letter; the other, *Denis's Valet*, a subject from "Denis Duval." The main lines of the





AUTUMN

*(By permission of Messrs Agnew)*

THE  
MUSEUM OF  
THE  
CITY OF BOSTON  
BOSTON, MASS.

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original illustration are pretty closely followed, but the later version is in every respect an improvement. The touch of the artificial, of the "not quite simple," with which Mr Phillips reproaches it has disappeared; the pathos of the boy's face is subtler and truer, and the colouring particularly delightful. This is one of the rare instances in which Walker uses blue as the leading note of his colour-scheme. Madame Duval's gown, ribbons and apron are all in varying tones of blue and white, the brighter blues tending to the hue but not to the texture of the turquoise.

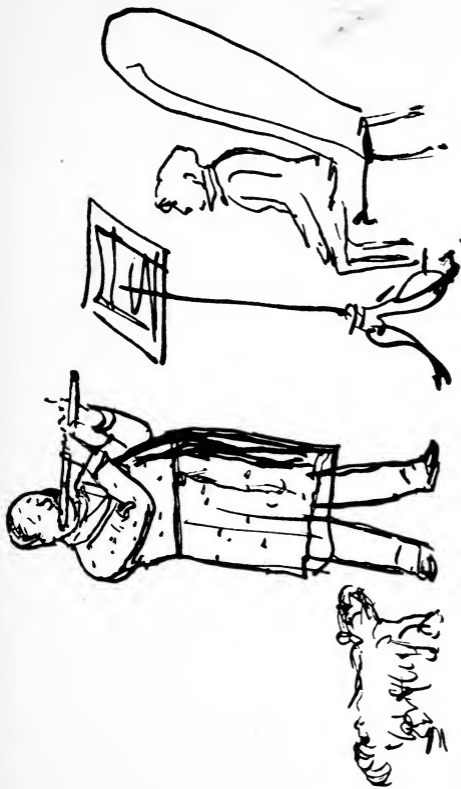
*Autumn*, the companion drawing to *Spring*, though very beautiful and mellow in colour, is not so wholly successful. The girl, I am told, is supposed to look out of the picture upon her lover, the gardener, paying attentions to a rival. Her expression, indeed, exactly fits that situation, but Walker, as usual, has abstained from putting a story into his drawing, and the spectator may find or not, as he chooses, anything beyond the mere autumn pensiveness suggested by the title.

The year 1864 may thus be taken as marking Walker's achievement of a second reputation.

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He was already known as one of the best of contemporary artists in black and white ; he now took his place as one of the best also among painters in water-colour.

Meanwhile he had already begun to lay the foundations of a third reputation, as a painter in oils.



"ANDANTE AND RONDO À LA POLKA"

(By permission of J. G. Marks, Esq.)



#### IV

WALKER'S first exhibited oil painting, *The Lost Path*, was hung—very high up—in the Royal Academy exhibition of 1863. The subject, a woman with a child in her arms, pushing her way through an expanse of snow, was one which he had illustrated in "Good Words" a year earlier. "Snow being," as Mr Marks says, "not as a rule available here in March, he made use of salt as a substitute." Of this work Tom Taylor wrote in 1876: "I still remember how deeply it impressed me. . . . I still think it one of his most impressive pictures." It did not sell during the exhibition but was purchased soon after its close, and Walker, having received the cheque at Swanage where he was staying, sends it at once to his mother: "and the reason I send it to you, dear, is that you should break into it as soon as you like."

*Wayfarers*, his next oil picture, was not

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exhibited until three years later, but in the interval Walker, besides producing some of his best illustrations and several water-colour drawings, had been engaged for a good many months upon *Bathers*, which did not appear on the walls of the Academy until 1867.

A period of sadness and anxiety had come upon the household. The youngest brother John, who had, says Mr Marks, "his share of the artistic feeling of the family" and had been apprenticed to a wood-carver, showed, when about nineteen, serious symptoms of weakness of the lungs, and was ordered to pass the winter of 1865-66 out of London. Thenceforward indeed he seems to have been seldom able to spend more than a month or so at a time at home. His mother was generally with him, and to these separations we owe a correspondence that shows us very plainly the two sides of Walker's life: his ceaseless preoccupations with work and many struggles as an artist, and his unfailing care and consideration as a son and brother. There is never a word of repining at the cost of these prolonged absences, but on the contrary many admonitions to "the poor exiles" to spare no expense.





WAYFARERS

OWNER—SIR WILLIAM AGNEW

(By permission of Messrs Thos. Agnew & Sons, proprietors of the copyright)



## FREDERICK WALKER

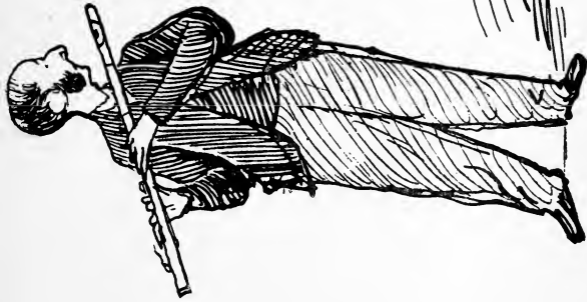
Nor was his consideration confined to the provision of money: he writes continually and cheerily to his brother; sends him a set of prints after Leech; tells him of likely books to read; thinks, when he is in Paris, how Jack would enjoy "much of it"; and when he is left for a few days in charge at Cookham, writes full details of the invalid's cough, sleep and spirits, and adds: "I have just taken him up a cup of coffee, as I have done the last few mornings, as I know it is a comforting thing." That he felt the separation from his mother severely is plain enough, and the added devotion to his flute indicated in the letters and caricatures of this period was perhaps partly an attempt at filling up his loneliness.<sup>1</sup> In Walker's case, as indeed in that of very many artists, the pictorial gift was accompanied, as the specific literary gift so seldom seems to be, by considerable musical talent. He played, it is agreed, with taste, feeling and delicacy, and with "particular attention to tone," but not

<sup>1</sup> An artist who was acquainted with Walker's music-master assures me of the extraordinary fidelity of the likenesses of him drawn by his pupil.

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perhaps with remarkable power. "He could hardly ever be persuaded," says Mr Leslie, "to perform before company" because, like Landseer, he was strongly affected by music and unwilling to let his emotion be seen. We, for whom his cherished flute remains ever inaudible, may rejoice in the pursuit to which we owe the delightful "Last Rose of Summer" on p. 59 of the "Life," and the flute-duet here reproduced, in which one can almost *hear* Walker counting to himself his bars of pause.

It was probably at some time shortly before the actual commencement of work upon *Wayfarers* that Walker made the etching of the blind man and boy which Mr Phillips reproduces in the "Portfolio" and so greatly prefers to the painting as being "more forcible, more masterly in its absolute grasp of nature." Fine it certainly is, and not the least of its fine qualities is the harmony between the bare, down landscape and the rather stern figures. But why the old soldier of the picture—a portrait of an Oxford Street hawker—should be considered "less probable" or less natural than the tramp of the etching is a little difficult to understand. The execution of *Wayfarers*



KUHLAU (FLUTE DUET)

(By permission of J. G. Mink, Esq.)

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO  
LIBRARY

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was pretty sharply criticised on its first appearance; Mr North thinks the reason was that it was more flowing, less hard and smooth—in studio parlance less “tight” than the work of Gérôme, Meissonier, Holman Hunt, or (in his earlier period) Millais. The beholder whose eyes are accustomed to modern methods will look in vain for anything “spotty and rough,” “coarse yet unsubstantial” or “slovenly” in the painting of *Wayfarers*. Its background is admittedly one of the most successful ever painted by Walker—so many of whose backgrounds are triumphs. As to the figures which are reproached with weakness and sentimentality, it may fairly be remarked of them, as of Denis in *Denis's Valet*, that they look far more real and simple in the original than in any reproduction. Any person familiar with the work only through even so excellent a reproduction as that in the “Life” may well stand amazed before the original as it hangs on Sir William Agnew's wall. The poetic charm of the boy's pale face is precisely the fleeting charm imparted by the melancholy of twilight. In another light, in other surroundings, we should see another boy. But on this road, at

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just this moment of the declining day, this was he, large-eyed, pale and pensive. As we look at the picture we feel that sense of looking into reality which is exactly what we fail to feel in looking at the reproductions.

Of the vicissitudes undergone by painting and painter in the production of *Bathers* a good many records are preserved. The first studies indeed were made at Cookham, and his family being with him Walker wrote no reports of his progress. But by and by he desired another background and a larger canvas. The background was found near Hurley, and thither the canvas was conveyed. To paint from nature, in England, in October and November, and on a seven-foot canvas, is not all joy. "My dear, it's fetching work—such tramping over fields with the horrid great canvas—it's all warped, having been wetted through once or twice. I pull up in a boat to the scene of action, and then have to take all the things across a great meadow; and a mob of long-faced horses have once or twice become so excited, rushing about in circles and kicking each other, then stopping close to look at me, and I let one come quite close and sniff the





BATHERS

OWNER—SIR CUTHBERT QUILTER

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THE  
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canvas. You see as I have to work the composition up, taking a bit here and a bit there, I have to drag the canvas to all manner of places, and nearly put a hole in it getting it over a hedge this evening.”<sup>1</sup> Nor was his work confined to “putting in.” “It’s astonishing how much I have rubbed out in order to keep it *simple*, for if I don’t, I know by bitter experience how it will be when I get in the figures. The first two days’ work went out at one lick.”<sup>2</sup> Mr North’s note, from long personal observation of Walker’s methods, fills out the hints of such letters. “Walker painted direct from nature, not from sketches. His ideal appeared to be to have suggestiveness in his work; not by leaving out, but by painting in, detail, and then partly erasing it. This was especially noticeable in his water-colour landscape work, which frequently passed through a stage of extreme elaboration of drawing, to be afterwards carefully worn away, so that a suggestiveness and softness resulted—not emptiness, but veiled detail. His knowledge of nature was sufficient to disgust him with the ordinary conventions which do duty for

<sup>1</sup> “Life,” p. 62.

<sup>2</sup> “Life,” p. 64.

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grass, leaves and boughs, and there is scarcely an inch of his work that has not been at one time a careful, loving study of fact. Every conscientious landscape painter will recognise in all Walker's landscapes the clear evidence of direct work from nature. No trouble was excessive, no distance too great, if through trouble and travel some part of the picture might be better done. He never thought 'he could do better without nature' or that 'nature put him out.' . . . He was not content with his work unless it had suggestiveness, finish and an appearance of ease; and to the latter I sorrowfully feel that he gave rather too much weight, destroying many a lovely piece of earnest, sweetest work, because it did not appear to have been done without labour. Probably this excessive sensitiveness (to what is after all of minor importance) may have been due to a reaction from the somewhat unnatural clearness of definition in the early pictures of the pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Walker could and did use his left hand equally with his right and often worked with both hands on a picture at the same moment; as a rule the left hand, which was the stronger,

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held a knife or razor, the right, the brush. I think he would have missed his knife or razor more than his brush had he lost either. . . . In his oil pictures he used benzine or turpentine very freely, except with colours or mediums. He was not fastidious as to appliances; anything would do for an easel. . . . Painting in this rough and ready way, with no protection from wind, it was often more easy to work on a large canvas with it lying flat on the ground, and much of *The Plough* and other big pictures was painted in this way. With a dark sealskin cap; a thick woollen comforter—his mother's or sister's work; a thick dark overcoat; long, yellow, wash-leather leggings; very neat, thick, Bond Street shooting boots; painting-cloths sticking out of pockets; two or three pet brushes and a great oval wooden palette in one hand and a common labourer's rush basket with colours and bottles, brushes and razors, tumbled in indiscriminately, in the other; 'little Mr Walker,' as the country people called him, was a type of energy. Sometimes I have known him manage to carry his large canvas on his head at the same time that his hands were employed as described, on

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occasions when, after having been kept indoors by the weather until quite late in the afternoon, his usual attendant help chanced to be momentarily absent.”<sup>1</sup>

*Bathers*, delayed by particular malignancy of climate on the part of a British spring, was exhibited at the Academy in 1867, when, however, it was in a much less finished state than at present. Mr Phillips complains that the flesh tones “incline too much to a leathery brownness and that the open air effect of light playing upon the surface of the nude human figure is hardly realised.” Another critic, Mr F. G. Stephens,<sup>2</sup> considers *Bathers*, “apart from its energetic and virile conception and excellent design, one of the best modern triumphs of that graceful sort of realism which aims to succeed in depicting human flesh, or as skilled critics say, ‘the carnations,’ from the life, according to nature and in sunlight. In this respect no one has succeeded better than this youth . . . who with exquisite skill and delicacy of perception, and with indomitable

<sup>1</sup> “Life,” p. 168.

<sup>2</sup> “Magazine of Art.” Vol. including Nov. '96 to April '97, p. 121-122.



WAITING FOR PAPA

(By permission of Messrs Smith, Elder & Co.)

KNOWN IN THE WATER-COLOUR VERSION, NOW BELONGING TO LADY TATE,  
AS "THE CHAPLAIN'S DAUGHTER"

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO  
DEPARTMENT OF CHEMISTRY  
5800 S. UNIVERSITY AVENUE  
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60637



## FREDERICK WALKER

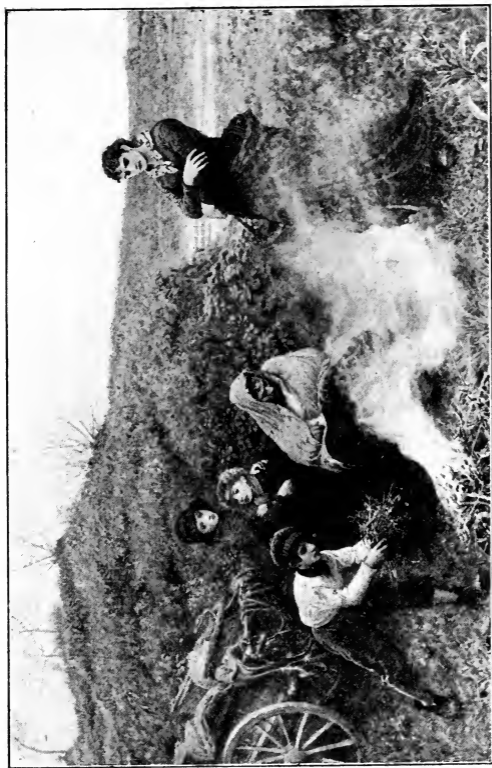
patience to boot, put his nude models in the open air when the atmosphere was surcharged with light, and without sacrificing an iota of harmony painted what he saw." The two principal figures, the "youth half kneeling" and the "erect figure of the nude bather who stands dreaming a minute as he strips off his last garment," seem to Mr Phillips to introduce "an element of studied classicality imported *quand même* into the subject" which "is felt to be an intrusion" and to have "a too deliberately sculptural character." It is curious to compare with this verdict the opinion of an intelligent observer familiar with some of the best of modern landscape painting, but almost unacquainted with Walker, before whom I placed the reproduction given in the "Life." These two were the very figures instantly selected with expressions of admiration for their truth of attitude. "That is exactly how a boy stands—I have seen that again and again!" was the exclamation. Perhaps the familiarity with the Elgin marbles which is so valuable a school for all of us may be apt sometimes to mislead our judgment. These, after all, are but especially beautiful and successful tran-

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scriptions from nature, and to some of us are so much more familiar that any other transcription approaching them in beauty seems to be a copy rather from them than from the great original common to both.

*Bathers* is the most immediately striking, though not perhaps quite the highest example of Walker's power of rendering, as few artists have ever rendered, the poetry of boyhood. Another pathetic instance is the boy looking at a grave, of which two versions—neither quite completed—are in existence.<sup>1</sup> Little Philip again as he listens half comprehending, half dreaming, to the service flowing over his head in church, and the beautiful barefooted fisher lad of Corriechoillie whose Highland accent almost sounds in his face, are full of subtle and tender mystery. Even more remarkable, however, are the boys in two early and comparatively little-known water-colours: *The Bouquet* and *The Drowned Sailor*. In the former a boy and girl are receiving a bunch of flowers from the owner of a garden. The shyness, the wondering delight of the small boy are rendered with a truth and a delicacy

<sup>1</sup> See p. 49.



VAGRANTS (TATE GALLERY)

(By permission of Messrs Thos. Agnew & Sons, proprietors of the copyright)

Handwritten text at the top of the page, possibly a header or title, which is mostly illegible due to blurring and fading.

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all Walker's own, and contrast almost humourously with the critical, condescending, affable air of the slightly older girl. In the other drawing there is a contrast even finer between the face of the boy looking with "ruth," with something of terror and something of awe-stricken curiosity upon the drowned man, and the face of the old fisherman who is concerned too, but accepts death and the perils of the sea as everyday matters—a face that says, with the grandfather of Peterkin: "But things like that, we know, must be"—

Of *Vagrants*, which was exhibited a year later than *Bathers*, Mr Comyns Carr—one of the most sympathetic and comprehending of Walker's critics—writes that "in directness and simplicity of invention" it "ranks as perhaps the most masculine of all his conceptions." In charm of colour, however, and in technical mastery, it falls below *Bathers* and *Wayfarers*, and for that very reason loses far less in reproduction. In the situation which it now occupies on the walls of the Tate Gallery, it entirely justifies what Mr North wrote in November 1893.<sup>1</sup> After speaking of

<sup>1</sup> "Magazine of Art."

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the strength and beauty of colour in *The Harbour of Refuge* he goes on to say: "I think the most complete of Walker's oil-paintings, "Vagrants," will appear poor and superficial in this respect." Certain it is *Vagrants* pales before *The Harbour of Refuge*—but then so does almost every other picture in the room. Mason's inimitable *Cast Shoe* is perhaps the only other work near it which fully holds its own.

During these years of work and sorrow that divided *Philip in Church* from *Vagrants*—years that had seen the death of both his brothers—Walker's labours had been relieved by various holidays. He had paid three brief visits to Paris, had been twice for some weeks at a time in Scotland, and was now about to make a journey to Italy. Of his French visits very little of special interest is recorded. His fellow traveller and fellow artist, Calderon, tells us that he showed no sign of being particularly impressed by any of the pictures in the Louvre, and that at the Luxembourg only Jules Breton seemed to engage his marked attention. At Versailles, however, he studied David's *Coronation of the Empress Josephine* "from corner to corner," and



ON BOARD THE S.S. KEDAR

(By permission of J. G. Marks, Esq.)

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“slipped away” to return to it again. “He never spoke of the picture afterwards and I am in doubt to this day as to whether it was admiration of the grace of the female figures which bewitched him, or whether he had a sudden revelation of the possibilities of the short-waisted ‘Empire’ dress. He certainly showed great affection for that costume afterwards.” The “Empire” dresses that appear in Walker’s work, however, are of so very different a stamp from those worn by Josephine and her ladies, and Walker himself was so far less likely to study the matter than the manner of another man, that we may perhaps rather conjecture in David’s work some peculiarity of treatment, colouring, or lighting that fitted in with his own preoccupations of the moment.

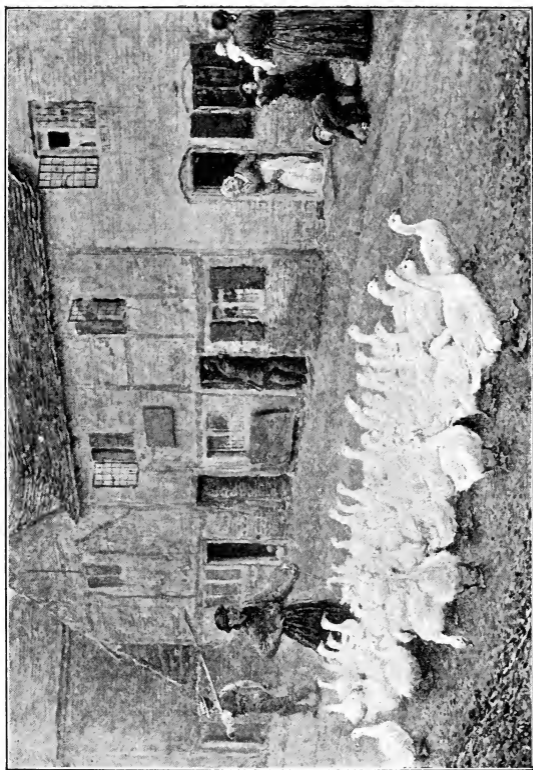
His Scotch visits produced various water-colour drawings, among them the *Fisherman and Boy*, in which the boy is so marvellously successful, but in which the head of the man fails to stand out quite completely from the beautiful background.

The journey to Venice was the occasion of the poetic sketch of Gibraltar (“Life,” p. 132), of

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the sketch of a dinner on board the *Kedar* (see p. 109), and of *The Gondola*, a water-colour drawing in the possession of the Right Hon. Joseph Chamberlain (reproduced on p. 141 of the "Life"). Of this drawing some critics have complained severely, but the reproduction gives the impression of a work singularly lovely and singularly Italian. Even in the sepia monochrome, the back view of the girl with the spotted handkerchief round her neck seems to glow with colour. But May and June are hardly the months for Venice, and to be long away from home suited Walker ill. He was probably happier painting at Goring with his mother beside him than amid all the pictorial and scenic glories of Venice.

During this period of active work in oil-colour he had produced, besides the water-colour drawings already mentioned in this chapter: *Evidence for the Defence*, from "Denis Duval"—a version more satisfying in its simplicity and sincerity than even the original woodcut; *The Moss Bank*, painted at Torquay; *The Poultry-yard*; the unfinished portrait from which is taken the frontispiece to the "Life"; *The Street, Cookham*, whose old



THE STREET, COOKHAM  
(By permission of S. G. Holland, Esq.)

Handwritten text at the top of the page, possibly bleed-through from the reverse side. The text is illegible due to fading and blurring.

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walls and white geese are familiar in scores of reproductions; *The Introduction* (p. 28 of "Life"); a charming sketch of a lady sewing by a window; *The Spring of Life* (see p. 123); *The First Swallow* (p. 129 of "Life"); *Boys and Lamb* (p. 129); *Stream in Inverness-shire* (p. 115 of "Life"); *The Violet Field*; *The Bedroom Window*; *Well-sinkers* (p. 153); *The Fates* (p. 119) and *The Chaplain's Daughter* (see p. 101), both versions of illustrations to Miss Thackeray's "Jack the Giant-Killer"—all these in addition to some dozen of his very best illustrations. Some of these water-colours demand more than a mere enumeration of their titles. Of *Well-sinkers* it is difficult to analyse the extreme and singularly characteristic charm. Perhaps even more than the greater pictures, this drawing furnishes a test of the spectator's relation to the artist. It is possible greatly to admire *The Harbour of Refuge*, *Bathers*, and such drawings as *The Fishmonger's Shop*, *Philip in Church* and *The Chaplain's Daughter* without feeling that sympathetic thrill of something at once kindred and universal that will awaken for one beholder at one man's work and for another beholder at another's. Those who

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love *Well-sinkers* at first sight and go on loving it more and more are true disciples—"sealed of the tribe."

*The Chaplain's Daughter*, with its solidity, its delicacy, its high finish yet perfect subordination of parts, and its characteristic note, sparingly touched, of a particularly beautiful blue, dark as indigo but translucent, is technically perhaps one of the painter's very highest achievements; but in subtlety of expression and possibly in its extraordinarily skilful balance of pale tones of colour *The Fates* is finer still.

Reproductions are given here both of the woodcut and of the water-colour, and comparison will show a multiplicity of small changes. Chief among them is the enlargement of the space beneath, above and on each side of the figures—to the great advantage of the background. The persons in the woodcut do not indeed strike the eye as crowded, but when we turn to the drawing how agreeable is the sense of space, how much more clearly we feel the women placed in a room instead of on a crowded stage. How much in particular does the standing figure at





THE FATES (WOODCUT)  
(By permission of Messrs Smith, Elder & Co.)





THE FATES (WATER-COLOUR)  
(By permission of Mrs Murray Smith)

THE  
CITY OF  
NEW YORK  
OFFICE OF THE  
COMPTROLLER  
IN CHARGE  
OF THE  
FINANCIAL  
OPERATIONS  
OF THE  
CITY

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the window gain in firmness and dignity by being seen entire and a little way into the picture instead of at the extreme verge. The stout lady on the sofa has been furnished with a light coloured bow under her chin; her dress has assumed a pattern of wide, delicately-toned stripes, and there has been a very slight, but very valuable change in the position of the work-basket on her lap. The end of the basket is no longer covered by her shawl, her arm and hand are behind instead of above, and the slope of the basket itself, besides facilitating the required escape of its contents, marks the position of the supporting knee and makes the woman more of a figure and less of a bundle. The stern central lady has, in the interests of colour, changed her dark bonnet-strings for light ones, and the hook of her parasol—probably in order to come nearer in shape to a spindle—has given place to the club-shaped handle that may be remembered as fashionable about 1870. It is in the fourth figure, however, that of Anne Trevithic, that the changes are most in number, tiniest in detail, and most significant in the aggregate. The first point to strike the eye is that the

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trimming on her gown, which was a black band with white edges, is now a black band with white spots, and that a line of it now encircles her neck. The value of the neck-band is easily seen, but not so the reason for the change of pattern. The slightly altered fall of the skirt is simpler and more definite; it marks a movement at once quicker and less violent; so does the hand on the sofa, no longer so flat. The whole figure bends a shade less, the head is a shade less protruded. But it is in the face that the slight subtle changes are at once least and greatest, and here, alas! the reproduction inevitably falls short. One can see indeed that Anne's expression is less violent; but one cannot see its subtlety—the surprise and vexation, veiled by a desire to preserve a smooth surface and conceal the real nature of her trouble. The touch of mystery, of wonder, of the largeness of human fate is in this tiny face. There is no need to know Miss Thackeray's story—the deepest and strongest perhaps that she has ever written. Something deeper still, the something that lies beneath and behind all stories is in Walker's drawing.

*The Spring of Life*, known also as *In an*



THE SPRING OF LIFE (ALSO KNOWN AS "IN AN ORCHARD")

(By permission of J. P. Heseltine, Esq.)

1955

1955

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*Orchard*, possesses a charm and tenderness of feeling recognisable in any reproduction ; but none comes near to giving the impression of the real drawing. Not only is the colouring—full of all the infinitely tender tones of spring—delightful beyond imagination, but the faces of the children, especially of the elder, have tones of colour and delicacies of expression quite beyond the range of black and white. The hair, inevitably black and heavy in a print, is richly brown, the softly receding planes of cheek and jaw make the face, not, as in the reproduction, round, but rounded—which is quite another thing—and the whole countenance breathes life. You can almost hear the boy's voice and the lamb's bleat. The dress of the mother which I—it is impossible to tell why—had conceived as blue, is of a tone between the raspberry and the mulberry, harmonising as no shade of blue could ever have done with roof, and wall and grass. As for the blossoming cherry-tree, no one who has seen—and who that is English has not seen—the *Harbour of Refuge* or the *First Swallow* will need to be told what Walker has made of that.

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It is quite characteristic that of this exquisite drawing as, later, of the *Old Farm Garden*, he writes as of a trifle. Perhaps he was disposed, as all of us naturally are, to measure the importance of his work by the pains it cost him; whereas, in creative art, that which "comes of itself," that which the artist feels to be created less by himself than by those "brownies" of whom Stevenson tells us, is apt to have a grace and perfection beyond the reach of the most strenuous endeavour. Yet since it is only the strenuous endeavourer to whom the "brownies" consent to dictate, the public is perhaps not so far astray in its grateful admiration for the artist. If Walker painted *The Spring of Life* easily, it was not solely because nature had given him an admirable equipment of eye, hand and temperament; but also because for years his eye had received and compared, his hand practised, and his mind sedulously considered the materials that life presented to him.

The thirst of observation, the insatiable impulse of exercise and practice, are endowments perhaps at least as rare and no less essential to the artist than the spark of genius.



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Among the would-be artists who crowd our art schools, perhaps nearly a third possess some touch of the essential fire, and perhaps an equal proportion the persistent industry, but small, indeed, is the fraction possessing a combination of both. Without that twofold possession, no artist attains the highest rank; and Walker's case—whatever Mr Hodgson may have thought of his industry—is but one more instance of this truth.

## V

IN the second half of 1868 Walker's working life entered upon a new phase. He paid a visit—largely in the hope of fishing—to his old friend Mr North in Somersetshire. "I am here," he writes to Millais in August, "as I thought on a 'flying visit,' but the place is so completely lovely and there's so much paintable material that I expect to remain until quite the end of the month." This month was but the first of many. The Somersetshire scenery delighted him, the climate, in spite of dampness, seemed to agree with him, and in Mr North's calm, considerate friendship, and full artistic sympathy he found a moral atmosphere no less congenial. The letters give a pleasant picture of the simple, busy life led by the two friends, lodged in a beautiful old, more or less decayed, and now, alas! modernised house, going off to work, each in his own way, at the creation



BOYS AND LAMB  
FROM A PHOTOGRAPH



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of beauty, returning to the excellent meals of kind Mrs Thorne, "the farmeress," and concluding their evenings with "flute, smoke and talk." Here, on this first Somersetshire visit, he began *Mushroom Gatherers*, a subject never finished to his mind, but of which the study in oils is a fine twilight picture full of a strange depth and richness of colour to which reproduction can do no justice; and painted the little study of *Mushrooms and Fungi*, which in its own line has never been surpassed, and perhaps never equalled.

Still-life paintings and flower paintings are often fascinating arrangements of colour and sometimes marvels of imitative dexterity, but it is the rarest thing in the world to find one of them capable of imparting precisely the pleasure that would be given by the real objects arranged with equal skill. Every lover of natural objects—flowers, fruits, even surfaces, metals and textures—knows that to each belongs a mysterious indefinable charm of its own, something for which, in the case of things inanimate, the words "temperament" and "atmosphere" seem too large, but which yet those words come nearest to expressing.

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It would seem that an exact imitation of superficial aspects should, in the case of lifeless objects, inevitably convey these same qualities, but ninety-nine times out of a hundred—nay, nine hundred and ninety-nine times out of a thousand—the mysterious something is left out. In Walker it is present. If a mushroom could have a soul, Walker might be said to have painted its soul.

In October, after short visits to Scotland, and to Freshwater, where he met Tennyson, who was “most kind,” “very jolly,” and “came to see Miss Thackeray and me and saw my water-colour,” he returned to Somersetshire and began to lay plans for *The Plough* and *The Old Gate*. His letters, save for complaints of unfavourable weather, are cheerful and hopeful: “No news. All right and jolly. Work going on well. Send us a something to read.” Presently, in November, he is going to have “a shed or hut, built of boards,” to shelter him while he paints “the background of my great go.”

*The Old Gate* outgrew its first canvas and was transferred to a larger. The smaller original canvas—some parts of which Mr

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North considers superior to the second—is now in the Museum and Art Gallery of Birmingham. The succeeding spring was spent largely in struggles with an inimical climate—struggles from which even a robuster man might wisely have retreated. In the teeth of wind, snow and personal discomfort, however, Walker persevered and *The Old Gate* was made ready for this year's exhibition of the Academy. It is so many years since I saw this picture that I cannot venture to speak of its colouring; and since its design and composition are subjected to precisely the same complaints that are directed against *The Harbour of Refuge*, it may be well to leave their discussion for those pages which deal with the admittedly greater picture.

During the summer of 1869, which was spent in London and on the Thames, Walker painted the unfinished *Peaceful Thames*, upon which Mr Leslie's "Our River" furnishes an interesting note: "The method with which this picture was begun was very curious and was one he was fond of at that period; the whole effect was laid in with the strongest yellow pigments, aureoline, cadmium, lemon-

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yellow and burnt sienna.<sup>1</sup> So rich was the effect or 'fat,' as he called it, that a touch of black and white on it looked quite blue by contrast." After a visit to Scotland, where he made, in the garden of the historic seat of Stobhall, the drawing of a *Lady in a Garden, Perthshire*, he returned in the autumn to Somersetshire in order to resume work on *The Plough*. Thence he wrote, in the middle of November, to his sister Mary, telling her that his "little wood-house" is now provided with a stove and chimney and that he proposes to make tea in it. "Well, this is opposite a grand old stone quarry, that is wonderful in the evening light, with trees and a fringe of green on the top, but all crags and like a cliff; and descending from it fields with good undulating line, and the place suggests something quite wild and far away from everyone. . . .

"I intend having . . . nearer still, a large spread of bloomy, newly ploughed earth, purple, you know, and sparkling and still in rather a wavy sort of line, and right in front THE PLOUGH in full action, guided by

<sup>1</sup> "Life," p. 42. Mr Marks conjectures "raw sienna."



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a strong man. The near horse *white* in tone rather with yellowish mane and tail, telling against the dense earth just ploughed up; and guiding the horses, with long reins, a boy, active and graceful if I can do him; and *indigo* rooks circling above—at least with rather blue lights on them—one just poised before he drops on a furrow. Some teasels and large weeds right in the foreground, such as keep their form through the ploughing months; the dress of the figures not suggesting any particular time—not the present, that is—if I can only do it.”<sup>1</sup> Upon *The Plough* and some water-colour versions of previous illustrations—which he denominates “pot-boilers”—he worked with very brief intermissions until time compelled him to bring the picture, enlarged from its original dimensions by the assistance of the village dressmaker, to town, where for a day or two before the “sending in” he worked from a white cart-horse standing in the garden of St Petersburg Place. His “wood-house” did not apparently always serve to shelter him; Mr North, in his interesting reminiscences of their

<sup>1</sup> “Life,” p. 193.

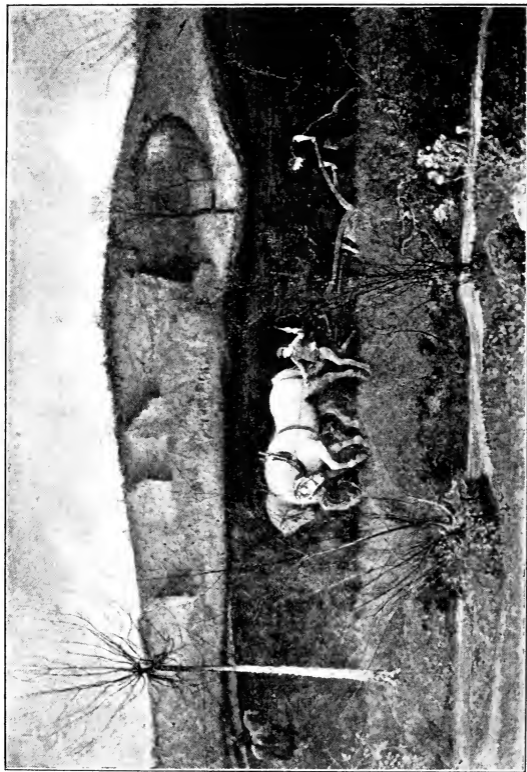
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life together, says: "Walker did not invent out-of-door painting, but no man more honestly worked in open air, more determinedly, more appreciatively. I have known him working under circumstances of physical discomfort which would have made painting impossible to most men. On *The Plough*, for instance, he worked, some windy days, with the canvas lying on the uneven earth, with great stones and lumps of wood on its corners to keep it steady. Once it was carried into the stream which is its foreground by an extra strong blast, and floated down some way—luckily face up. This he took very calmly, saying, 'I have noticed that unfinished pictures never come to harm from accidents.'"<sup>1</sup>

*The Plough* was received apparently with unanimous praise, and the extracts given by Mr Marks from the contemporary notices are indeed amply deserved. To Mr Comyns Carr the picture appears a perfectly successful achievement.<sup>2</sup> "As we examine the design, it seems that to each figure has been assigned the attitude most enduringly associated with

<sup>1</sup> "Magazine of Art," November 1893.

<sup>2</sup> "Essays on Art."



## THE PLOUGH

OWNER—THE MARQUIS DE MISA

(By permission of Messrs Thos. Agnew & Sons, proprietors of the copyright)

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the duty to be performed; the subject has been watched so long and closely that the different and changing movements of horses and men have at last yielded the one fixed outline that is expressive of them all. . . . In the perfection with which all the figures are attached to the soil, in that idyllic grasp of a scene which locks together in a single image the landscape and the people who inhabit the landscape, the work may be reckoned equal, if not superior, to the work of the French painter"—that is, of Millet. And now hear another critic. Mr Claude Phillips, after complaining of a certain want of aerial perspective, goes on: "Worst of all is the much-vaunted plough itself, the most misdirected piece of rustic classicality to be found in any of the artist's work. The horses may be inspired by those of the Parthenon, but they are nerveless and without movement; the pretty boy who whips them up and the ploughman himself may, and do, form charming lines with the team and the plough, but their movement is not nature, not even generalised nature with the unessential omitted. . . . George Mason . . . would have produced a work more homo-

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geneous, more complete, and better digested from the artistic standpoint; he would have seen his subject and continued to see it, as a whole predominant over its component parts, and not to be sacrificed to them. There would have been in the relation between the figures and the landscape just that inevitableness, that perfect balance which Walker could never quite command.”<sup>1</sup>

The design of the picture lies before the reader, but gives no idea at all of the colour. The quarry cliff is of a deep red in the setting sun; above it a heavy cloud fills the centre, resting, with a boldness from which a younger or less daring artist might have shrunk, on the highest point of the slope; the triangles of sky to right and left are of a deep not very transparent blue. In the first glance Mr Phillips's complaint seems justified; the cloud looks too solid, the cliff too near. But it is ill to question the faithfulness of a transcriber so scrupulous and so well endowed as Walker. Careful observation of sunset effects may show us that precisely this appearance of nearness, precisely this lack of definition of planes, does

<sup>1</sup> “Portfolio,” June 1894.

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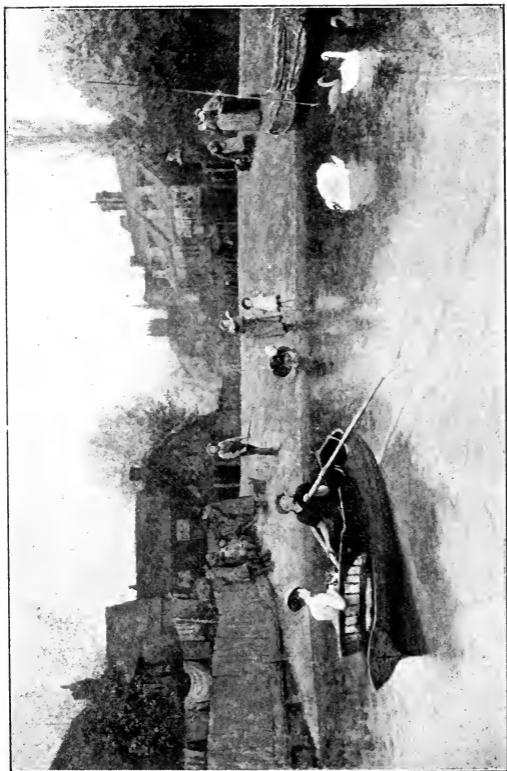
arise when the light of a sinking sun strikes nearly level upon some hill or cliff against a cloudy sky. Whether this fact should have debarred Walker from choosing such a sky we may of course debate if we will; but having once chosen it, he would have been false to nature if he had put in, out of his own head, that perspective which nature had for the moment abolished. In regard to the figures and the horses this reproduction, like every other that I have ever seen, more or less fails to give their strenuousness. In the picture one feels the strain of the ploughman's every muscle, the tensity of the boy's stretched arm and leg, the labouring pull of the horses' shoulders. The "Pall Mall Gazette's" critic was right enough in using the words "epic grandeur"—and yet—something there is in the picture not entirely satisfying. After long reflection and very careful detailed consideration I am inclined to believe that *The Plough* suffers from being on too small a scale. I do not mean that the setting is too large for the figures, but that the eye—why, I cannot say—craves to have the figures nearer life-size. That there are subjects which demand treatment on a large scale and subjects which

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look the better for being more or less in miniature, every painter and every observer of pictures knows. *The Plough* I cannot but think belongs to the former group and would have gained in power, in dignity and in beauty had the canvas been twice as large as it is. Some dim, unanalysed feeling of the kind probably lies at the root of the dissatisfaction with which some ardent admirers of Walker behold this particular work. "I love everything he ever painted—everything except *The Plough*," said a lady to me the other day. In this connection it is perhaps significant that Walker's next picture, *At the Bar*, represented a life-sized figure.

"Walker's labours on *The Plough* had left him," says his biographer, "in a low state of health, and certainly the way in which he worked in the open air in all weathers was calculated to try a much stronger man." We hear—ominous words—of "a succession of colds." He made a second visit to Venice, where he seems to have tried, in vain, to "place" the group of figures with which his thoughts were busy and which eventually developed into the *Harbour of Refuge*. By the end of July he was back in England and





THE FERRY

(By permission of S. J. Holland, Esq.)

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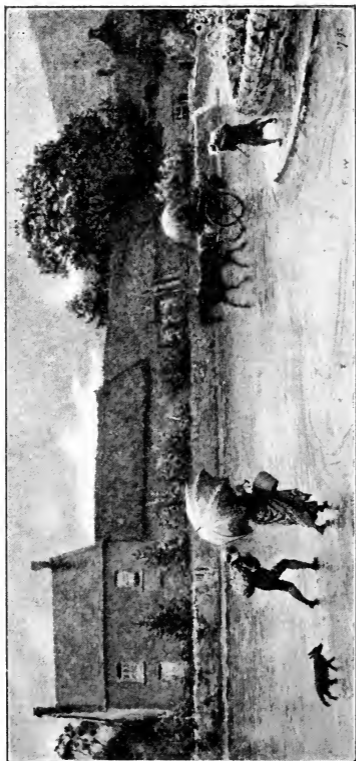
staying with his mother and sister on his beloved Thames at Bisham "just above Great Marlow." Here he painted *The Ferry*, perhaps the most universally beloved of all his water-colours. Any reader unfamiliar with the original must bid his imagination bathe the reproduction in the warmest tones of mellow reds and browns. At Bisham, too, Mr Marks believes, though at a later time, was made the water-colour of *The Rainy Day*, called incorrectly on its frame at South Kensington, *The Rainy Day, Cookham*. Of this, except that the roadway looks a little too light coloured, the reproduction gives a very fair idea. The original at Kensington does not show to full advantage, partly perhaps owing to the effect of a gold mount which seems to dull its delicate perfection of colour, and partly no doubt owing to that juxtaposition of many pictures which is so trying to all.

To the same period as *The Ferry* Mr Marks is disposed to attribute *The Amateur*, that delicately humorous drawing of which, under an appearance of artlessness, both design and colouring are so daring. A straight cabbage bed, a straight path, a straight

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flower bed and a straight paling run parallel across the main expanse of the paper; on the right rise an upright red-brick gatepost and, nearer the front, upright scarlet-runners. A ball on the post and a segment of wheel seen through the open gateway relieve the straight lines. Amid the cabbages stands a coachman, solidly planted, considering with pleased attention the chosen cabbage which he is about to cut. The colouring—most unusual for Walker—is almost entirely in tones of green, and of their skilful gradation no words can give an adequate impression.

The year 1871, which was that in which Walker was elected an Associate of the Royal Academy, was marked by the exhibition of *At the Bar*. I never had the good fortune to see this picture, but judging from a photograph of it in its damaged state, cannot but believe that it must have been, in some respects, Walker's very finest work. The picture consisted of little more than a woman standing in the dock, apparently at the close of the day, her face full of suspense and apprehension; an usher's head and shoulders just showed beneath; a pillar was behind her,



THE RAINY DAY  
FROM THE ORIGINAL IN THE SOUTH KENSINGTON MUSEUM



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and a hanging lamp unlighted over her head. This painting was made at home and the artist's family entered assiduously into his labours. His mother "roamed about London" seeking a lamp of the right sort; his sister Fanny went to Beaconsfield to inspect a dock which it was hoped might suit; his sister Mary stood for the face and figure. "Their interest in the picture was, in fact, remarkable. It was almost as if the poor hunted creature portrayed on the canvas stood before them in very truth. At night, the forlorn woman in the deserted studio was spoken of by them in tones subdued by sympathy."<sup>1</sup> The picture was very low in tone and looked still more so amid the brilliant colouring of the Academy walls. Yet many beholders saw its fine qualities. Mr Comyns Carr writes of it: "In his treatment of the face Walker here gave evidence of a power of passionate expression that is not revealed in any other of his works. . . . Those who remember the picture as it was first exhibited and who can recall the desperate and hunted aspect of the woman's face and her expressive attitude in the dock, will certainly admit that

"Life," p. 221.

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a painter who could command such intensity of human feeling and who could also present the careless beauty of such a subject as *The Bathers* must have been possessed of gifts that had not yet seen their full development." The picture's appearance in the exhibition was a bitter disappointment to the artist. "I have really been so *put down* by it," he writes to Mr North, "that I scarcely like to ask you to see it. I feel that it must, in effect, be *done again*." "His sister Mary," says Mr Marks, "on going into the studio one day found Walker on his knees with the picture on the floor, rubbing down parts of the woman's face and neck with pumice stone preparatory to repainting them." Possibly, however, he felt that he was not yet ready to do all that he wished with this difficult subject and left the idea to mature—as by this time he must well have known that ideas did mature—in his mind. At the time of his death he had not repainted the face, the main part of which was still in the ghastly whiteness of its erased condition. Eventually the head was repainted at the request of Walker's trustees and under the advice of a small body of artists by Mr Macbeth, whose



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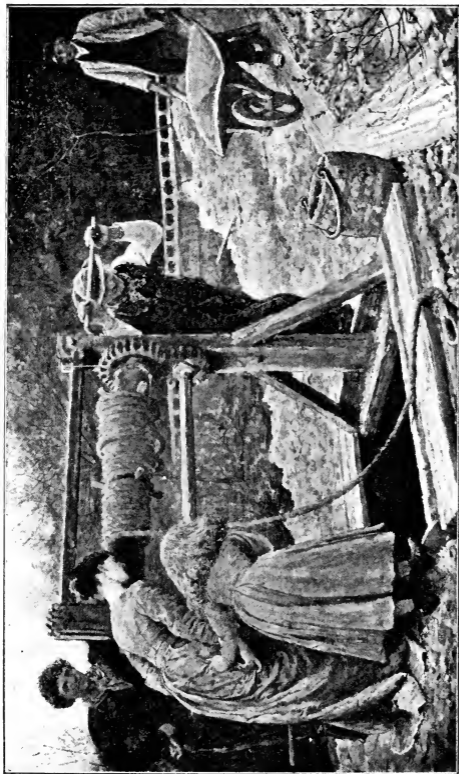
task was assisted by reference to a small study of the subject exhibited at the Dudley Gallery in 1872 and again at the posthumous exhibition in 1876. The restoration cannot be considered successful; probably too great care and anxiety to follow the original destroyed the restorer's ease and hindered the full exercise of his powers. To me the photograph with all its defects—defects which are considered to render its reproduction here impossible—has, even at present, a depth of tragic suggestion not attained by the restoration, and by no means equally present either in the water-colour study which I have been allowed to see or in the reproduction given in the "Life."

Lovers of Walker cannot but feel that the incompleteness of *At the Bar* adds a fresh pang to their regret at his short span of life. So much of the admiration given to their favourite artist is, as they indignantly feel, bestowed upon mere "pleasantness" and takes little account of the strength and truthfulness that set him far above the plane of other painters equally pleasant and sometimes almost equally accomplished. To see in Walker nothing but the domestic idealist, is as if one should see in

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Tennyson only the author of the "May Queen." An "agreeable" picture *At the Bar* can no more have been than "Othello" is an "agreeable" play; and the average City man would be no more likely—of spontaneous choice—to hang the one upon his dining-room wall than to go forth after his excellent dinner in order to witness the other. But the "pleasure" which is the aim of art, holds other elements besides the "pleasant" and the "agreeable," and there is a beauty of tragedy no less than a beauty of the pastoral. A "not entirely successful experiment" Mr Comyns Carr justly calls this picture, but the experiment was in the direction of Walker's highest successes; for here again there is no event, no story—only emotion, a mood, a phase of feeling. *The Lost Path* which, by critics who have seen both pictures, is apt to be ranked in the same category, was less detached from mere circumstance, more dependent upon the material accidents of snow and darkness, and by that very quality nearer to those dangerous paths of allegory and symbolism which have led so many an artist away into the wilds.

Failure as he held it to be, *At the Bar*, even



WELL-SINKERS

(By permission of Sir William Agnew)

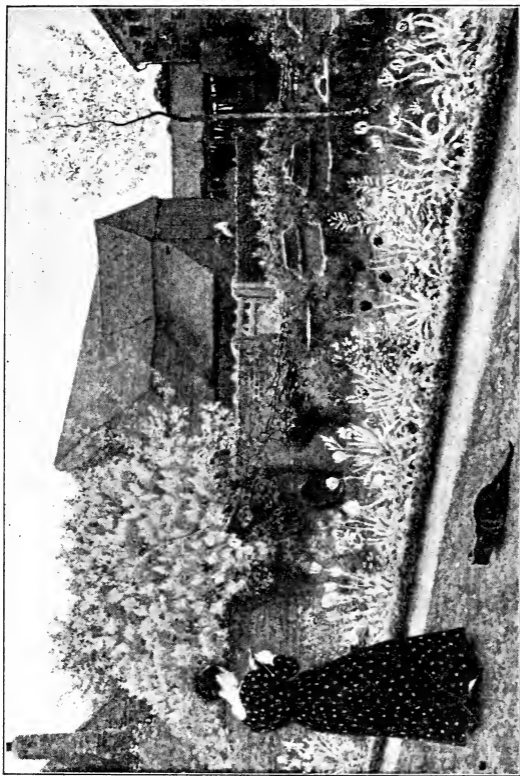
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more surely than *The Plough*, announces certain qualities of greatness in Walker's talent. If his execution, as an oil-painter, was not altogether on the level of his imaginative power, we must remember both that he had not yet completed his thirty-first year and that one of the conditions of growth is that "a man's reach should exceed his grasp." Sometimes before the idyllic perfection, the absolutely sure execution of such water-colours as *The Old Farm Garden* and the *Fishmonger's Shop*, we are tempted to doubt whether Walker did not—as some critics are ready to declare—here touch the highest point possible to him; whether the mastery here displayed be not the utmost limit of his reach. The wreck of *At the Bar* remains to reassure us and to convince our unavailing regret that the unfulfilled future held an artist even greater than he who was buried in 1875 at Cookham.

## VI

FROM the middle of 1871 to the end of 1872 was a time of mastery and fruition. Henceforward no exhibited work could possibly be considered as a failure, and if, in comparison with Walker's own very best productions *The Village* and *The Right of Way* may seem a little tame, yet as the work of any new hand they would justly have been held to betoken the advent of a serious rival. To the summer of 1871 belong two—probably three—of his serenest and sunniest water-colours. Of the beautiful *Old Farm Garden* Walker himself writes as “just a slight thing with a lilac bush” which he has “just sketched in.” In its finished condition it is one of his triumphs, and beyond its undeniable charm and beauty, interesting as an example of successful dealing with a fairly bright shade of the difficult violet-lilac-lavender group from which painters in general hold judiciously aloof. From the re-



THE OLD FARM GARDEN  
(By permission of R. C. Lehmann, Esq.)

10 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91 92 93 94 95 96 97 98 99 100



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production I had myself unconsciously and as a matter of course conceived the blossom as white, and the real drawing broke on me with that freshness and surprise which the genuinely original artist—and he only—reserves for even the most accustomed of his admirers. The wall and roofs have, as usual, delightful tones of mellow red, the bee-hives are touched with Walker's favourite greenish blue, and the flower-border is painted as only Walker paints. As is so often the case, the dress is spotted—Walker, like Mrs Tulliver, "always liked a spot"—and the cat on the path is rendered with the fidelity and comprehension that might be expected from the sympathetic master of Eel-eye.

To the same period and to the same happy mood belongs *A Girl at a Stile*, which might very well have been made a third to *Spring* and *Autumn* and borne the title *Summer*. A girl wearing a dress neither quite brown nor quite brick-red, leans in the shade of a blue-green umbrella upon a stile and reads a letter; beyond her is blue sky, and each side bushes of blossoming wild-roses. A bunch of pink and red roses lies on the step of the stile and

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we may think, if we please, that the letter in her hand lay there with them. The very spirit of English summer is in this drawing: the clear pale sky, the delicate pattern of the briar leaves against it, the full luxuriance of grasses and wild flowers about the girl's feet are all that may be seen from a hundred field paths any fine day of June, but they are not quite what Walker was wont to paint. An earlier or a later season and a later time of day were generally more attractive to him. But never did he deal more tenderly or more faithfully with the features of any landscape.

*The Housewife*, which I regret that I have not been able to see, can hardly fail to be equally delightful. A woman sits, busily shelling peas, in a backyard where there are flowers in pots, climbing plants and a water-butt which we may divine to be of the greenish-blue displayed by the bee-hives in the old farm garden and the umbrella over the stile.

In the early part of 1872, and probably earlier, Walker was working busily upon *The Harbour of Refuge*, and presently was looking out for a statue of a founder to adorn his quadrangle. This *desideratum* he thought he

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had discovered in Charles the Second's statue, then still lingering—though described as long ago as 1750 as “wanting to be taken down”—in Soho Square. The Restoration costume, however, was superseded by the classic toga now to be seen in the picture, and the dilapidated monarch, instead of entering on a new lease of life within the frame of Walker's masterpiece, retired unrecorded to a country retreat.

The composition of *The Harbour of Refuge* (see frontispiece) must be familiar to almost all English eyes, and the picture itself, thanks to the munificence of Sir William Agnew, now hangs (on walls which the nation owes to another generous donor) in the Tate Gallery, where every Londoner and every visitor to London can see it for himself. Its glow of colour no words can convey. Its radiance is powerful enough, as a companion pointed out to me on an afternoon between Christmas and the New Year, when just before four o'clock we glanced once more into the room, to illuminate the whole gallery in which it hangs, even in the closing twilight of a December afternoon.

Mr Phillips—who finds none of Walker's oil-

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paintings really successful—complains that the work “lacks unity not less of general impression than of composition.” In like manner he complains that the component parts of *The Old Gate* “do not make up a picture in the higher sense of the word,” that the painter “has not got his subject together, that it straggles, that it does not express itself as a whole.” Judging solely by the reproductions, it is certainly true that *The Old Gate* does not produce a single and vivid impression. Reproduction, however, so often does injustice to Walker, that a view of the original might greatly modify our judgment. The late Tom Taylor, quoted by Mr Marks,<sup>1</sup> speaks of its “power of arresting attention, and the art it shows, not of telling a story, which is common enough, but of setting those who study it to make a story for themselves, which is far rarer.” The distinction is a sound one, but the second quality may be no more a virtue in a picture than the first, and in *The Old Gate* it is not a virtue. It is the fault of the picture that it does too directly suggest an episode, that its subject-matter is rather too much individualised and detailed to

<sup>1</sup> “Life,” p. 176.

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be entirely in accord with the artist's genius—or perhaps with the demands of pictorial art. Here for once Walker comes near to the danger which, as an illustrator, he knew so well how to avoid, of being anecdotic. A want, not of unity, but of universality, is the picture's weakness. Walker was at his best when he dealt with feelings common to the general mass of men—the influences of evening, of sunshine, of terror, of labour, of youth and of age. The sentiment of *The Old Gate* is specialised, not general; it lacks the profundity, the mysterious suggestiveness that belong, for example, to *The Plough* and *Wayfarers*, and that must have belonged to *At the Bar*.

But is this the case with *The Harbour of Refuge*? Does any beholder who is other than a professional critic really feel a lack of unity or find the canvas made up of “episodes?” I doubt it. The picture, as far as I have been able to observe its effect on others and on myself, does not indeed create in the brain a coherent intellectual conception—that is not the function of art—but it strikes a clear, resonant and harmonious note of responsive feeling. We look at it with that sense of

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memory, of recognition, of a door opened before us, which we receive only from fine works of art or from deep and sudden personal emotions. That *The Old Gate* can awaken that sensation in all its fulness, seems improbable; that *The Harbour of Refuge* can and does, hundreds of beholders can testify.

Against both pictures is raised the old cry that certain of the figures are too classical. Mr Phillips thinks the young workman in the earlier picture "aggressively Pheidian in its calculated classic grace," and the mower of the later "more classical still than the fustian-clad divinity of *The Old Gate*, and more self-conscious in its measured grace." Ruskin, unmeasured as usual, speaks of "the ridiculous mower, galvanised Elgin in his attitude." One might perhaps pause to ask *which* figure of the Elgin marbles either the mower or the young labourer directly recalls; and the critics who are so ready with the cry might find some difficulty in replying. But let us grant that both figures do resemble the Greek statues; let us even suppose that some contemporary of Phidias had left a statue in this very pose of the mower—what then? If Walker's

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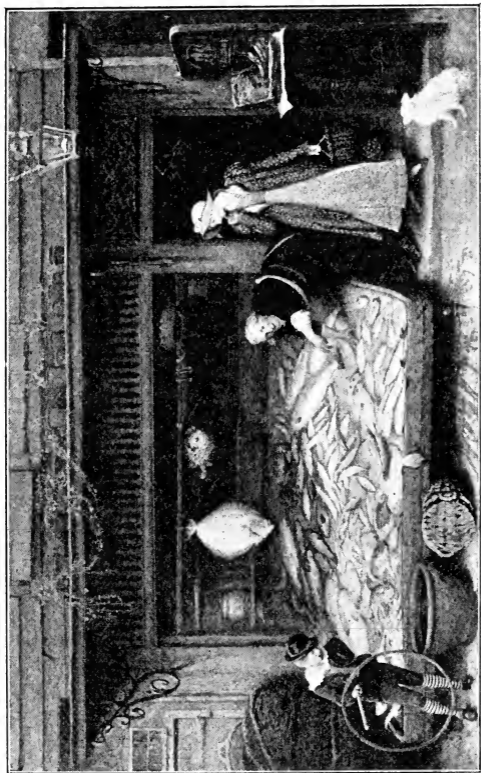
figures are true to that of which they and the Elgin marbles alike are but reflections, to life, that is, and to the natural unstudied movements of human action — why complain of what the later presentment has in common with the earlier. But if the complaint is that Walker's figures are like the ancient marbles and are therefore not like living humanity, then the complaint is undoubtedly a proper one, and the only remaining question is whether it be also true. In this connection it becomes interesting to hear how the figures strike persons well acquainted with rustic life but not well acquainted with the marbles in the British Museum. It was my fortune to introduce the picture, the other day, to precisely such a person, a young girl devoted to country life, keenly observant, with some taste for drawing and only a slight and casual knowledge of the Elgin marbles. She fastened instantly on the mower's figure, exclaiming with delight at its truth and precision. I, following in the steps of critics from whom I totally dissented, suggested that it was somewhat affected and unnatural. She turned upon me, indignant,

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demanding whether I had ever looked at a man mowing, and I felt that her question was the proper reply to Walker's critics.

*The Escape* (see p. 191), a water-colour from an illustration made in 1861, dates from this year, and so does the beautiful frontispiece to William Black's "Daughter of Heth" (see p. 185)—Walker's last illustration and surely one of the most completely satisfactory ever made. Another water-colour work of this summer was *The Village*, which is reproached with being "a little too topographical" but is delightfully simple and faithful. In October, Walker wrote to Mr North: "I am working hard at a fishmonger's shop with a great slab of fish and a fair buyer." This undertaking was of course the famous water-colour in which, on a space of  $14\frac{1}{2}$  by  $22\frac{3}{4}$  inches, are painted the whole shop-front and doorway, three figures, besides the dog (a dog, I am told, already introduced to fame in Forster's "Life of Dickens"), and a slab displaying "the metallic green of mackerel, the silver of salmon, the shot sheen of herring, the rose of red mullet, and all the intermingling russet and golden browns and purples of garnets and





A FISHMONGER'S SHOP

(By permission of S. G. Hollend, Esq.)



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plaice and perch and other fresh and salt-water fish, flashing and playing into one another with a splendour due to nature, but a subtle harmony of arrangement due to the painter."

A son of the original purchaser who, as a boy, accompanied his father to the studio and recalls Walker not as shy, but as singularly quick, alert and full of life, tells me that after naming the price—a high one, though doubtless lower than the present value—Walker added as if in explanation: "I have put into it all I know." No doubt he had. As a sheer triumph of skill, knowledge and arrangement, the drawing is the admiration of every artist. It holds all that Walker at his highest point of maturity knew—but not all that he felt. It is a drawing to marvel at, to contemplate admiringly at intervals, but not, I venture to think, like *The Old Farm Garden* or *Philip in Church* (to take examples at random), a drawing to live with and love daily better.

In 1873, Walker was chiefly busy in seeking a suitable setting for his proposed picture of *The Unknown Land*, the completion of which was forestalled by his death. Various places

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in Devonshire were tried without very much success. In Somersetshire, later on, he was again busy with a picture of mushroom gatherers, as well as with *The Peaceful Thames*, but does not seem to have progressed easily or to his own satisfaction with either. He had apparently been ill earlier in the year and his mother's health was now causing anxiety. By the end of May he writes from Scotland, "*Am perfectly well.*" . . . "I am feeling so much better that it's difficult to imagine myself the same worn-out, nervous creature. It seems to me that air and exercise alone will keep me well and happy." Again, a day or two later: "*Am awfully well* and beginning to want to get to serious work again." His failure to complete the works on which he had just previously been engaged was evidently not due to any running short of ideas, for he writes to Mr North that he is "brim-full of subjects." Nor can it be supposed that the powers of execution displayed in *The Harbour of Refuge* and *The Fishmonger's Shop* were baffled by such themes as *The Peaceful Thames* and *Mushroom Gatherers*. But the human machine cannot be worked at its highest stretch without con-

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siderable recuperative intervals; and the very fact that he had lately produced these masterpieces may have been one reason why he was unable at once to produce another. Now with energies renewed he began to lay plans for a picture—never, alas, to be begun!—of men busy in iron works, and returned to the background of *The Unknown Land*. In the autumn comes an ominous letter of excuse: “There has developed on me a frightful cold in the head and throat such as I have scarcely ever had before.” It is probable that from this time Walker was never again really in good health. In December he and Mr North went to Algiers, where for a short time he seemed better. A shadow hangs over his letters, however, and behind his many resolutely cheerful allusions to his mother’s state of health may be seen a constant terror, and in February he rather suddenly returned home. It is clear that the latter part of his stay was a period of ill-health and wretchedness. Two of his recorded sayings, a denunciation of the aloe and prickly pear plants as made respectively of zinc and putty, and a half-humorous, half-pathetic lamentation that he should never see

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a hansom cab again, show a gleam of his characteristic aptness of description and his characteristic quaint touch of self-caricature.

One little water-colour he made in Algiers in which the African goat appears—judging by a reproduction—to be dealt with in the same happily sympathetic spirit as the English dog, cat and lamb in other work. The rest of 1874 was a terrible period of illness—he and his mother ill both together at home; his sister away with him, still ill, at Folkstone. Then, when all were together at a farm near Godalming, Miss Walker's health suddenly broke down; and Mrs Walker, herself little better than an invalid, was reduced once more by the exertion of nursing to serious and indeed dangerous illness. Not till the middle of September was removal to town possible. Work, which had of course been out of the question, became imperative. Under medical orders, but evidently with a divided heart, Walker left his mother and sister settled at home and went to join Mr North in Devonshire, taking with him a drawing begun at Godalming and eventually called *The Rainbow*. A girl kneels on a chair before a window and near her

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stands a young woman, apparently a servant. The figure of the kneeling girl with its long line of light hair is charmingly graceful and true; and the room has all the delicate, unobtrusive finish of detail in which Walker delighted.

The respite was brief. On the 16th of November fell the stroke for which brother and sister must have been prepared—the death of their mother. In December Walker, once more in Somersetshire with Mr North, was again attacked by illness, and from the local doctor Mr North learned that his friend's lungs were affected. By February he was back again in town, where he completed a replica of *The Old Gate*—his last exhibited water-colour. His sister returned with him to Somersetshire where he painted his last picture, *The Right of Way*, which was still hanging in the Academy exhibition when he died.

This picture has been in Melbourne for some years past and I do not like to trust to memory for a description of its colouring.<sup>1</sup> It

<sup>1</sup> A friend is kind enough to send me from Melbourne the following note by an artist who went on purpose to look at the picture:—

“The colouring is delicate but not weak. There is

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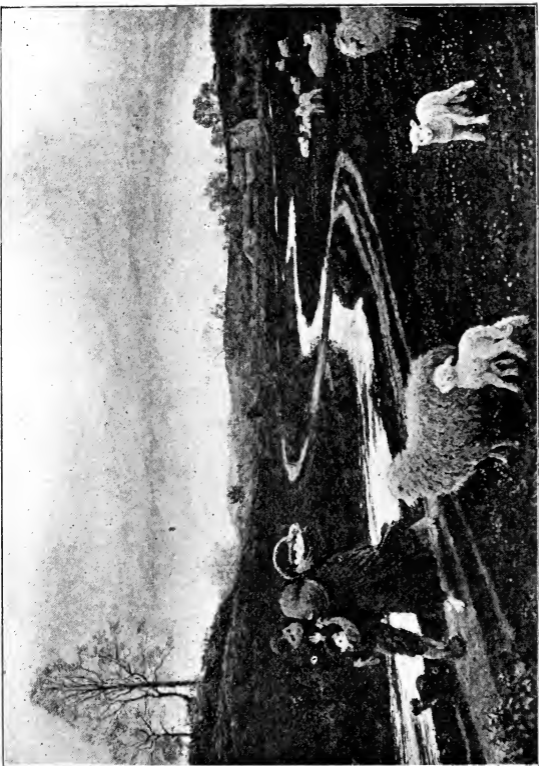
is, however, safe to say that the darkness of the reproduction is untrue to the picture, which is bright and rather light in tone.

The last work upon which Walker was engaged is declared to have been a water-colour version of the figures on the terrace in *The Harbour of Refuge*. It is not described as being unfinished, but there is a rather crude whiteness about the stone coping of the balustrade which one may venture to be sure Walker would not have permitted to remain.

In May he joined Mr H. E. Watts in Scotland, and struck his friend as looking very ill; but seemed to mend and was in good spirits. Only a day or two before the final attack he sat talking "full of life and enthusiasm," about his scheme for *The Unknown Land*, and enquiring eagerly about an island in the Bay of Auckland

a strong sense of atmosphere, a feeling of moisture in the air. A yellow glow pervades the picture. The trees have a faint brownish tinge through them; and the grey sky of departing winter has the faint yellow glow of coming spring, as if the sun had no strength yet but was coming through the moist atmosphere. The green of the young spring grass also is seen as through a strong yellow haze."





THE RIGHT OF WAY  
MELBOURNE NATIONAL GALLERY



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which Mr Watts had visited and which seemed to offer a possible setting.

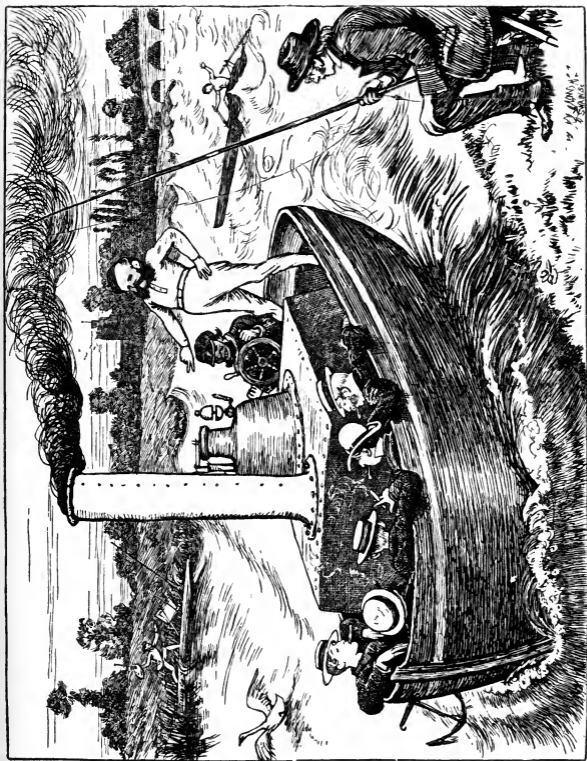
On the following Sunday afternoon as they strolled by the loch, at St Fillan's, Walker was seized with hæmorrhage; a local doctor was called in, a physician summoned and Miss Walker telegraphed for. For a fortnight he lingered, nursed by his devoted sister, and died on June 4th, having barely reached the age of 35.

He was buried on the 8th of June beside his mother and brother, at Cookham, amid the tears of a band of friends and fellow artists. His sister followed him in the next year, living long enough, however, to see with pride that exhibition of her brother's collected works which gave so high an idea both of the greatness and the range of his powers.

## VII

BESIDES his serious work in black and white, water-colour and oil, with which the foregoing chapters have dealt in some detail, Walker left behind various other proofs of his talent. Of his innumerable caricatures probably only that of Captain Jinks appeared in print in his own lifetime.<sup>1</sup> This drawing was made in 1869 when Walker was staying at Maidenhead, and owes its origin to the indignation with which he viewed the steam launches that puffed up and down the river, destroying all hope of fish and disturbing the comfort of every lesser craft. Mr Leslie, with whom he was staying at the time, writes in "Our River":—

<sup>1</sup> Another drawing of Walker's was indeed published in "Punch" (New Bathing Company Limited—specimens of Costumes to be worn by the Shareholders, Almanack 1868), but can hardly be ranked as a caricature.



CAPTAIN JINKS OF THE SELFISH AND HIS FRIENDS ENJOYING  
THEMSELVES ON THE RIVER

*(By permission of Messrs Bradbury and Agnew)*

1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. 12. 13. 14. 15. 16. 17. 18. 19. 20. 21. 22. 23. 24. 25. 26. 27. 28. 29. 30. 31. 32. 33. 34. 35. 36. 37. 38. 39. 40. 41. 42. 43. 44. 45. 46. 47. 48. 49. 50. 51. 52. 53. 54. 55. 56. 57. 58. 59. 60. 61. 62. 63. 64. 65. 66. 67. 68. 69. 70. 71. 72. 73. 74. 75. 76. 77. 78. 79. 80. 81. 82. 83. 84. 85. 86. 87. 88. 89. 90. 91. 92. 93. 94. 95. 96. 97. 98. 99. 100.

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“He was most fastidious about this work, rehearsing it many times before he was satisfied; sometimes it would look to him as though he had taken too much pains with it, and he carefully endeavoured to give it an air of ease and carelessness. Then all the ugliest and most disagreeable points about the affair had to be emphasised: the boiler extra large and clumsy, the smoke, the swell, the black-faced engineer and the guests on board, with their backs to the view, entirely wrapt up in their cigars and brandies and sodas. In rendering the distant landscape, the work becomes entirely tender and finished—it is a beautiful little bit of Bray, with the church and poplars drawn direct from nature; a bridge is introduced to prevent the scene being too easily recognised. On the opposite bank is a portrait of myself with easel and picture upset by the steamer’s swell; this mishap had actually occurred to me one day at Monkey island. Walker watched daily the embarkation of the boat he had selected for his satire, and I recollect him lying on the tiller of my punt, taking keen mental notes of the appearance of the captain of the craft; it reminded me

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forcibly of a cat watching a bird hopping about in unconscious ignorance."

This background of care sedulously concealed behind an appearance of ease, seems to have been typical of Walker's work on even the slightest of productions, and was perhaps a matter not so much of deliberate intention as of inborn character. We find him redrawing a caricature three times,<sup>1</sup> writing detailed notes as to the tiniest points in the cutting of his invitation cards for Mr Arthur Lewis's musical parties, and hunting as far a-field as Salisbury for a prisoner's dock to suit *At the Bar*. All four of the cards made for Mr Lewis are reprinted in the "Life." One (see p. 37)—a medley in the taste of the eighteenth century, wherein a tree, a lyre, a couple of masks, a winding scroll, and a whole tangle of grapes and vine leaves stand out effectively from a background—shows Walker's skill in design, a skill not always possessed by the painter of pictures. No professed designer could have filled the space more satisfyingly. The others, full of talent as they are (the Apollo engaged in lighting his pipe,

<sup>1</sup> "Life," p. 42.



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on the card for 1865, is a particularly beautiful figure), do not reveal any quality which might not have been divined from the artist's pictures and caricatures.

Looking through the series of caricatures, one finds their special characteristic, apart from the precision and knowledge of their drawing, to be a singularly delicate perception of character, and especially of momentary shades of feeling. A novelist might well look with envy at the way in which, for example, the sketch on p. 111 of the "Life" <sup>1</sup> gives at one glance every essential of a scene which the most practised pen might fail adequately to render in half a page. Here, as so often, his own weaknesses are touched no less humorously than those of his neighbour; he shows us his sense of discomfort or embarrassment, his shy attitude on the very edge of his chair; his struggles with his work; his chilliness as he sits, his feet, in a vain hope of warmth, curled together on the bar of his easel, his cap drawn down, his shoulders drawn up, falling leaves swirling around and flying apples aiming themselves maliciously at his

<sup>1</sup> "Walker and Mr Agnew looking at *Vagrants*."

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head—all this in the sketch not  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches square, labelled “E.N.E. Wind.”<sup>1</sup> Another drawing that depicts himself wearing the dress and laden with the *impedimenta* of the tourist-fisherman running in headlong pursuit of the Glasgow train; and yet another drawing, often reproduced, exhibits *The Temptation of Saint Anthony Walker*. Here Walker, the neatest and trimmest of hermits, his hair brushed in unwonted smoothness from a central tonsure, kneels beneath a delicate floating halo before his easel, while behind him rises an immense visionary highlander pointing to a gigantic salmon, labelled: “26 lbs., caught by Mr Watts.” Other salmon of every size and in every conceivable position float circling round the tempted one. In this delicately skilful sketch, made in 1873, we see plainly the hand that produced *The Fishmonger's Shop*; as in the poster for “The Woman in White,” we see the hand that drew *The Lost Path* and *At the Bar*.

Of late years many artists of distinction have tried their hands at posters, but in 1871 such attempts seem to have been unknown in

<sup>1</sup> “Life,” p. 51.



FRONTISPIECE TO "A DAUGHTER OF HETH"

FROM A PHOTOGRAPH



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England. A discussion that took place in his presence as to posters for a forthcoming production on the stage of "The Woman in White" drew Walker's attention to the subject, and he designed a poster representing that hapless person at life-size. That he perceived the possibilities of this new departure is shown by a letter in which he calls it "a first attempt at what I consider *might develop into a most important branch of art.*" The first sketch is reproduced in the "Portfolio"<sup>1</sup> and the completed poster in the "Life."<sup>2</sup> Of the former Mr Phillips justly says that it is rather "too academic and impersonal," "too little suggestive of the element of weirdness and mystery in the story itself." But as usual, work developed under Walker's hand, and even in a reduced print the poster is vivid and dramatic. In its full dimensions and in its proper posture on a wall it must have been impressive in a very marked degree. A woman in a white dress and shawl is passing out through an open door into a black night spangled with white stars. Her right hand is on the open door, her left is at her lips as

<sup>1</sup> P. 36.

<sup>2</sup> P. 233.

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she pauses looking back, startled, with terror in her face. A lock of hair blowing loose on her forehead gives the feeling at once of her quick arrested motion and of the open air without. The immense improvement upon the first sketch that comes of the opening inward instead of outward of the door is very noteworthy. The outstretched hand, a little unmeaning before, gains dramatic significance, the perspective of the door gives a depth to the composition, and the outstanding head of the key, absolutely white upon absolute blackness, is of surprising value both to the eye and the imagination.

Another piece of work outside Walker's usual province was the beautiful outline of a mermaid with long, floating hair and arms outstretched to a dimpled mer-baby, which he sketched on the wall of a room in Sir William Agnew's house, and which appears on p. 216 of the "Life."

Looking at Walker's work as a whole, one can hardly fail to be struck by the volume, the variety and the very high standard of his output. That his few working years should ever have been supposed idle is surely a most

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curious delusion. But his *visible* work was doubtless intermittent. Much of the labour of creative genius must always lie out of sight; as Dumas said: "Il y a un fier dessous." To a man who did not understand the germination of seeds the appearance of harvests would no doubt seem strangely intermittent. It is unfortunate, however, that the word "irregular" should so often have been applied to his methods of work, since its application seems in some quarters to have been extended to his ways of life. I have certainly read some years ago, though I regret that I am unable to fix the passage, an insinuation, if not indeed a direct statement, that his life was shortened by such "irregularity." It seems well, therefore, to say definitely that any opinion of the kind is quite without foundation. The only imprudent course by which Walker can possibly have shortened his life was by working too zealously, especially out of doors in unfavourable weather. The touching expressions of full confidence in him and of complete approval that occur in private letters between those to whom his whole life was intimately familiar, are entirely incom-

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patible with any conception of him as the dissipated genius whose weaknesses bring him to a premature grave.

As to his general character, nothing is more marked than the warm and enduring affection with which he inspired the large proportion of those persons who came into close contact with him; and the more closely one studies his letters, his acts and his spoken words, the more assured does one become that Mr North's estimate is just: "In my thought, after all these years, he remains a very clear and noble figure, without a trace of meanness. Hasty, impatient, with a grand contempt for paltry worldliness; and absolutely, in the truest sense, unselfish."

But to us, who can never come face to face with the man, it is, after all, the artist who is really important. For us the questions are how and why Walker merited that pre-eminence which the artists of his own day accorded him,<sup>1</sup> and what, to us, are the special revelations, the special delights afforded by his art.

His natural, specifically pictorial endowment

<sup>1</sup> See note to p. 10 of "Our River."





THE ESCAPE

(By permission of W. Dalglish Bellasis, Esq.)



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was not probably quite so fine as that of Millais; it is likely that he neither saw so swiftly nor manipulated so surely and easily; his first impression was probably neither so vivid nor so sure. But Millais, with all his robustness of view and handling, seldom or never went beyond that first view, and his work too often partook of the quality which in literature we should call journalistic. With Walker the first impression remained, grew, matured and developed until it had reached its utmost range of expression. And the range of expression ultimately discernible by his delicately sensitive temperament being far beyond what most of us, clumsy and untrained as we are, can perceive for ourselves, his pictures do really and literally enlarge our world. To have lived intimately with Walker's work is to dwell thenceforward in a universe whose common sights of daily life are touched with a new light and informed with a new beauty—a universe in which humanity seems to call for a deeper tenderness, a more tolerant smile, a gentler recognition.

That his genius had attained its full development is an opinion which no person can

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possibly hold who has attentively followed the steps of its progress. It is no more credible that the work of Frederick Walker was finished at five-and-thirty than that the work of Keats was finished or the work of Marlowe, nay, we may even trace, in the records of his last years and in the notes of future work left to us, the course which his immediate development would probably have followed. He had been passing through a period of great dissatisfaction; his mind was full of conceptions which his hand could not—in oils—execute with the full perfection demanded by his fastidious judgment. In other words, he was at a period, not of stagnation, but of rapid artistic growth. The subjects which he contemplated showed not change but expansion; they were still marked by a character of generality, they still dealt with phases of human feeling, but were touched by a warmer ardour of living activity; the labour on a great scale of ironworkers, the expectant wonder of mariners approaching an unvisited shore—these were the themes on which his mind was dwelling. Of *The Unknown Land* several sketches remain. In that reproduced on p. 259 of the “Life” there are

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certain elements of greatness that had never before been so surely marked. Never had his glow of light been so purely luminous; never in his many studies of human feeling had he sounded so trumpet-like a note; nowhere had his colour been more perfectly satisfying. To look at this drawing is to feel how immeasurable was the loss that English art suffered in Walker's death, and to guess dimly at the height of achievement that he might have touched in another twenty years of work.

Walker's technical execution, like his outlook on life, was distinctly individual. His methods, alike in black and white, in water-colour and in oils, were his own, and his aim in all three mediums seems to have been the attainment of broad effects without a sacrifice of finish. In black and white and in water-colour he arrived admittedly at mastery; and in oils touched it certainly in the *Harbour of Refuge* and *The Plough*. The fact that his methods as an oil painter, reproached at first, now appear quite normal, while those of Ward and Frith strike us as almost Chinese, shows that he was moving with the main current. His method has probably influenced his suc-

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cessors less than his point of view; he has taught less as a craftsman than as an artist; not the hand but the spirit has learned from him.

He had in a marked degree that clear perception of the actual world around him without which the creative artist either in words or in pictures seldom succeeds in striking any widely and deeply human note. It is Miss Austen, not Mrs Radcliffe, who shows us our own human nature, together with the "sprigged muslins" and the "sirs" and "madams" of our great-grandmothers. So, just because Walker shows us the early middle Victorian period with so unblinking a veracity, he remains not only the truest interpreter of that period with all its high thoughts and all its unconsciously hideous externals, but also a true interpreter of our own and every coming age. To him, as to all true artists, the person was more than the raiment; to the majority in his, as in all healthy social ages, a man was more than his possessions. In our day we have learned to be much more fastidious about externals—thereby much comforting our eyes and much multiplying our cares—but we have in great measure lost grasp of the vital inner

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essentials of character and personality. Our standard of furniture is much higher, but our personal manners have singularly decayed; we dress better, but we speak worse, and it seems sadly probable that the ghosts of Thackeray and Walker, if they could pass together through the London that they knew so well, would agree in finding us more outwardly prosperous but less friendly, more travelled but less well-read, more vulgar and, in fundamental things, less educated than those fathers and mothers of ours who wore top hats like Philip's and bonnets like the Little Sister's.

This is perhaps the reason why, as one of Walker's truest friends and warmest admirers said to me: "Just now, you know, 'Walkers are down.'" It is also, no doubt, the explanation of that sort of bond of fellowship which a common love for his work seems to create, and to which, in the course of writing these pages, I have owed so many pleasant hours and so much kindness. That "Walkers" should remain "down" is surely highly improbable. Apart from the reasonable hope that the wave of vulgarity and externality will presently sink as it has risen, we may

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remember that it is after all largely superficial. In a population so vast as ours there must always be a considerable public attuned to a note so singularly national as Walker's, and that democratisation which brings home art and books to an ever-widening circle can but bring him in fresh admirers.



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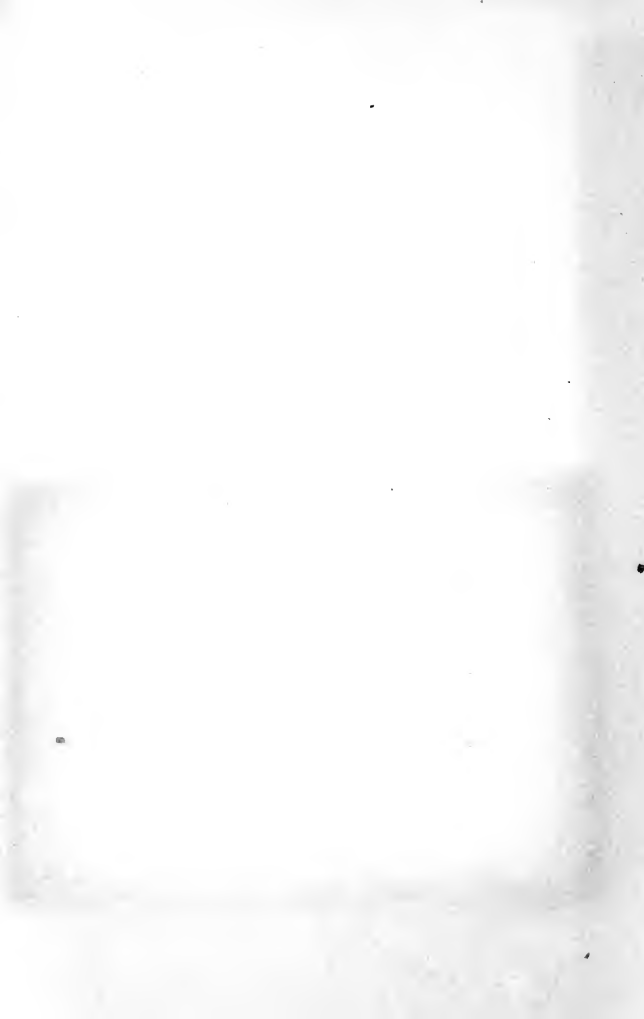
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