













*In an Orchard*

# FREDERICK WALKER

AND HIS WORKS

By

CLAUDE PHILLIPS

*Author of "Sir Joshua Reynolds," &c.*



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# FREDERICK WALKER

## CHAPTER I

*Influence on English Art—Early Years—As a Wood-engraver—Connection with the “Cornhill”—Works in Black and White—Illustrations for Thackeray’s “Philip”—First Oil Painting—Visit to Paris—Influence of French Art.*

It is now some nineteen years since the career of this lamented artist was all too prematurely brought to a close. He vanished out of life at a moment when glory had already been achieved, and achieved by a road less barred by obstacle than that which artists of genius are as a rule compelled to follow, but yet at a point when he was far from having reached maturity or given the best that it was in him to give. The sentiment of poignant regret so universally felt at his death was made up on the one hand of infinite pity for the path-breaking painter who had won and grasped the crown of victory only to see it fall from his darkening eyes—on the other of bitter disappointment that the English school should, at a perilous moment, be deprived of one who might have accomplished for it so much more than in his short life he was able to do.

The disappearance of Walker was not only the disappearance of a man of mark, whose pathetic and distinctively English art had already won the hearts of the outside public not less than the sympathy of that more restricted one which judges the painter’s art primarily from its own standpoint and only secondarily from that of imaginative literature. It was the extinction of a budding school, or at any rate of a movement of promise in English art,

which, whatever might be its shortcomings, had that special quality, the value of which cannot well be overrated, that it remained in its innovations national in feeling and character. The electric spark giving life and the power of development to the germ might have come—it probably did come—from abroad, yet the art thus generated was never deliberately imitative, but on the contrary evolved itself in accordance with the natural temperament and according to the natural resources of the artist. Three years before Walker died, George Mason, a more complete artist, so far as technical achievement goes, though perhaps not a more convincing artistic personality than our painter, had passed away; a few months afterwards vanished George Pinwell, the survivor of the short-lived group, and Walker's junior by more than two years.

Walker's influence on his younger contemporaries was undoubtedly very great, and its traces still survive, especially among our water-colour painters. Still that influence, instead of growing in the years that have elapsed since his death, has by degrees waned; what might have developed into a school has remained an isolated movement, throwing out ramifications here and there, but yet not more than a movement. This is the more to be regretted, because the English art of to-day, interesting as are its most recent manifestations in every direction—undoubtedly as it is now showing itself to be alive, as it is asserting its right to a place in what may be called the modern European school, radiating from France—is taking its aids to development too much from without, too little from within. It is to the relative immaturity of Walker's art, to its lack of true vitality in its later and more ambitious phases, that is perhaps to be attributed the restricted character of its influence.

All the more do we regret that possibilities so great as those foreshadowed in the art of our painter and his fellows were not realised to the full, when we remember how a generation earlier, another and a far more important movement, that of the band of poetic realists calling themselves the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, failed to bring to ripeness such fruit as it might have been expected to bear. Here not death so much as disintegration was the cause. The intense passion, the concentrated subjectivity of Rossetti, saved in early days from excess

by its human quality, by the touch of the higher realism which informed it, in the end overpowered and obliterated the truth, upon a solid contact with which all enduring art must be based. The splendid achievements of the youthful Millais, absorbing and giving back with infinitely greater technical skill some of the brightest rays of his companions' genius, were continued, but in another form. The technique broadened, and the Pre-Raphaelite passed the barriers which separated imaginative immaturity from more mature but also more prosaic achievement. Mr. Holman Hunt was faithful, as he has ever since remained, to his early ideals, and naively sincere, with a *naïveté* and simplicity hardly paralleled in his century; but the very defects of his qualities prevented his pathetic and curious art from progressing to a higher than the initial stage, or exercising any widespread influence outside the fringe of Pre-Raphaelitism. When Walker's light first modestly showed itself above the horizon, the movement was already approaching the end of its earlier, its more vigorous and less literary stage. He cannot be said to have been closely in touch with it, save in so far as he was evidently moved by a sincerity, by a desire to stand alone, which may well have caused to vibrate certain kindred chords in his own nature. Almost from the first he sought to do as the fiery young innovators of that small earnest band had done in the beginning—to shake himself free from the accumulated conventionalities of the worst kind by which the majority of English artists were still well-nigh stifled. His supreme merit was that, while remaining open to impulse from without, when that impulse ran parallel with his own endeavour, he chose—perhaps his artistic temperament left him no choice—to see, feel, and interpret humanity and the envioning nature for himself, and not merely to tread the narrow path, worn hard and bare by his predecessors and contemporaries.

The cheap anecdotic phase of romanticism had, notwithstanding the earnest efforts of the Pre-Raphaelites in the direction of a higher and simpler truth, maintained a firm hold on English art. Walker's tendency from the beginning, whether he was wholly conscious of it or not, was to replace this romanticism by a realism tempered with that peculiar vein of imaginativeness without which it can never be acceptable in the long run to the Englishman. It was the opportuneness of his

appearance, the opportuneness of his attempt, the fact that the art of the innovator, however tentative and uncertain it might be in many respects, was a thing of home growth and national in colour, that made his success, and caused it to be more immediate and less chequered with the shadow of failure than is usual with artists of Walker's stamp.

The peculiarly sympathetic character, the absolute sincerity of all his work, even when it was most open to technical criticism, had early in his too short career won over not only the art-loving section of the public, but the greater number and the better part of his brothers in art. When following, alas! too closely, on still growing success, and the achievement of coveted distinction, came abruptly the final catastrophe, the bitterness of regret gave an additional impulse to that success, the zeal to which was set by the posthumous exhibition of the painter's collected works in 1876 some few months after his death. This was for Walker a veritable apotheosis, and it brought his reputation to a level at which it has maintained itself ever since, if we may judge not only by the market-prices of his works—for these manifestly furnish but an unsafe criterion—but by the place which has, with but few dissident voices, been accorded to him among the brightest lights of English art.

In the last years of his life, and in those which followed immediately upon his death much sympathetic and appreciative criticism was devoted to the analysis of his life-work, to the exposition of his tendencies in art, to the tracing of points of contact and points of difference between his productions and those of contemporary foreign masters who might fairly be deemed to have influenced him. It would have been too ungrateful a task at such a moment to show the shortcomings and weaknesses of a method which was avowedly not yet mature when he was snatched away, or to point out in what it might appear, to one judging dispassionately, to be an art rather of promise than of performance. It is now, perhaps, after a lapse of nearly two decades easier to make such an attempt, although it is difficult at this stage to do what no one appears to have done at the time—that is to indicate with any attempt at realistic truth the human as well as the artistic personality of our painter. It thus becomes necessary, in any

attempted appreciation to rely almost wholly on what remains of the artist, and but little on the scanty data which have been made public with reference to the man.<sup>1</sup>

Frederick Walker was born in Marylebone, on the 26th of May, 1840, his father being a designer of artistic jewellery, with a taste also for painting, which descended, it would appear, from our artist's grandfather, who was responsible for some creditable family portraits. His mother recognized early his more than common talent for drawing, and while he was yet going through a course of general education at the North London Collegiate School, Camden Town, took some of his drawings to Mr. Arthur J. Lewis, of Moray Lodge, Campden Hill, in the employment of whose firms he then was. This gentleman, himself a practised artist, at once perceived the promise of the youthful draughtsman, and recommended that he should be allowed to follow his bent and make of art the business of his life. He had already begun to draw in the halls of the British Museum when, at the age of sixteen he was, by way of trial placed for eighteen months with an architect and surveyor. Very naturally the mechanical training which he there had to undergo, and the routine tasks to which perforce he had to apply himself were little to his taste. So soon as he was released from his experimental apprenticeship, he returned with added enthusiasm to his more congenial artistic training, working in the daytime at the Museum among the Elgin Marbles, and at night attending Leigh's life classes in Newman Street. These Elgin Marbles, of which later on he had casts placed in his studio, so that they were always in his sight, left, as will be seen, an indelible impression on his art, and more especially on its later phases. In March, 1858, he was admitted as a student at the Royal Academy, but he never progressed from the antique to the life school there.

Mr. J. L. Roget, in his concise and interesting notice of the painter, contained in the work to which reference has already been made, states that his studies from the life were made not from the model, but from what he saw around him in the outer world, of which, in its everyday manifestations, he was, as might easily be inferred from his early performances, keenly and sympathetically observant. A large number of fancy designs,

<sup>1</sup> J. L. Roget's *History of the Old Water Colour Society*, Vol. II., pp. 385-390.

made without any living model—memory coming to the aid of imagination—were done at a sketching club which met at Langham Chambers. These are described as “mostly done in grey with a brush, over unobtrusive but exquisite lines in pencil.” While still a student at the Royal Academy, Walker entered upon a three years engagement with T. W. Whymper, the wood-engraver, to attend his studio three days a week, and draw on the block under his instruction. It was this branch of his artistic training which was earliest to bear fruit, and to enable him to make a practical start in his career; and here his own unaided studies and observation of his fellow-man were to stand him in good stead. The study of classical sculpture which was at the root of his training was not to bear obvious fruit until later on.

Mr. J. Comyns Carr, who has made an especial study of the art of Walker, in one of his numerous essays<sup>1</sup> on what has evidently been with him a favourite subject, describes this period of the young aspirant's life as one of unceasing and irksome labour. He was required for obvious reasons to do his work rapidly and in accordance with a method prescribed by the taste of his master's customers—that is, in the conventional book-illustration style which obtained before that of Millais and Walker himself got the upper hand, before the rise of *Once a Week* and the *Cornhill Magazine*. No doubt such labour was distasteful to young Walker, as it must be distasteful to any artist of creative impulses. On the other hand, it must have contributed to give him certainty and precision of hand, though it did not correct that deep-rooted tendency of the artist to hesitate, to evolve, to elaborate, which had its great drawbacks as well as its advantages. Originality of vision, distinctiveness of style are not qualities which the young and imperfectly developed artist can possess at the outset, whatever may be his possibilities; and it is more than probable that this rough-and-ready training after all did the artist more good than harm. We are reminded of Watteau in his early 'prentice days, when bound to a kind of purveyor of cheap art destined to be exported in every direction, he was compelled to turn out by the dozen *images de piété*—Holy Infants, Madonnas, angels, saints, monks, and demons. This early apprenticeship of our painter to the wood-engraver determined, however, the branch of art in which he was first to essay his flight, and no doubt, as

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



Mr. Comyns Carr points out, exercised a permanent influence upon his work even as a painter—an influence from which, like even the mighty Albert Dürer, the painter-engraver, but even more the engraver-painter, he was never wholly able to shake himself free.

The periodical *Once a Week* had been founded in 1859, and attached to its staff were, among other artists of reputation, J. E. Millais, T. Sandys, John Leech, Charles Keene, and John Tenniel. In November 1859, Walker divining here, as it is permissible to surmise, a unique opportunity for remunerative work and self-development side by side with men who had already won for themselves a name, ventured in some trepidation to call upon the editor of the new periodical to exhibit specimens of his work and seek employment as a draughtsman on wood. Tom Taylor,<sup>1</sup> who describes him at this point as “a nervous, timid, sensitive young fellow, frail and small of body, feverish of temperament, but ever prompt and bright of wit,” goes on to say, “They (the drawings) were examined, approved, and a commission was given him to illustrate a story called *Peasant Proprietorship*, which appeared with the nervous young artist’s illustration in the number for February 18th, 1860.”

It has been ascertained, however, that it was in a paper called *Everybody’s Journal* that the very first in order of date of Walker’s drawings came before the public. This was an illustration to a tale by Edmond About, entitled in its English dress, *The Round of Wrong*, and it saw the light on January 14th, 1860.

From that time to March, 1863, he was a constant contributor to *Once a Week*. He was responsible for twenty-four drawings in the two volumes for 1860; twenty-nine in those for 1861; and twenty in those for 1862; while in 1863 he contributed a solitary design for *After Ten Years*, the translation of a little poem by Geibel. This showed an elderly wayfarer, who, reappearing after a ten years absence clasps his sister in his arms, while her little ones look on wonderingly. The drawings of the preceding years chiefly illustrate two serial stories, *The Settlers of the Long Arrow* and *The Prodigal Son*. Somewhere at the end of 1860, or beginning of 1861, Walker obtained an introduction, through Mr. George Smith, to Thackeray, then editor of the *Cornhill Magazine*, and the

<sup>1</sup> Preface to the *Catalogue of the Exhibition of Works of the late F. Walker, A.R.A.*, 1876.

chief mainstay among its contributors.<sup>1</sup> “Walker was nervous, and Thackeray after his own fashion strove to set him at his ease. He asked him if he could sketch. . . . and suggested that he should make a sketch of him while he was shaving. This Walker accomplished, and the result was so far satisfactory that at their next interview Thackeray told him that he wanted a drawing for one of the famous ‘Roundabout Papers.’ He indicated what was required in a rough sketch. . . . The principal figure was to be a back view of Thackeray himself, which Walker straightway executed by way of a preliminary study, and then afterwards embodied in the finished design engraved for the magazine.”

The rough sketch, or rather suggestion, for the composition as a whole was, however, on this occasion, supplied by Thackeray himself, a plan which he adopted also in the first drawings executed by Walker under his supervision for *Philip on his Way through the World*, then coming out in the *Cornhill*. This particular sketch, which has been in several Walker exhibitions, and most recently of all in the comprehensive display of his minor works brought together by the Royal Society of Artists of Birmingham, this spring, belongs to the great writer’s daughter, Mrs. Richmond Ritchie. It is infinitely more spirited and suggestive than the finished vignette which appeared accompanying the “Roundabout Paper” of February 1861, in the magazine. It has, indeed, just that freedom and spontaneity which in Walker’s finished performances—be they in black-and-white, oils, or water-colours—is so often obliterated and replaced by a loving elaboration of subject and detail which has its characteristic charm, but also, as will be seen, its great dangers. Walker takes Thackeray’s place as the illustrator-in-chief of *Philip* in the number of the *Cornhill* for May 1861 (with the cut “Nurse and Doctor”), and thenceforward supplies the accompanying designs until the story ends in August 1862. The first cuts are unsigned, but at about the point indicated the initials “F. W.,” which were to remain Walker’s artistic signature, appear modestly in the corner, and this is no doubt intended to mark the draughtsman’s emancipation from leading strings. We know that sometimes when Thackeray was ill in bed, and yet obliged to remain at the helm, he would send for his young protégé, and making him sit down at the bedside, relate the story to him

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

as it developed itself, so as to call up before his eyes the scenes fixed upon for illustration.

It is a little difficult just now to appreciate at their true worth these illustrations of Walker's to *Philip*, much as it is to see the real merit of John Everett Millais's pictures in black and white to Anthony Trollope's too little remembered novel, *Framley Parsonage*. The



*Pencil Drawing made for the "Cornhill Magazine."*

period which both had to illustrate was, as regards externals, a most unfortunate one. The men trimmed (or rather did not trim) their hair and whiskers in a fashion abhorrent to the present generation; their hats, their clothes—even those of the dandies—were, according to present notions, the very essence of unsmartness. The women were, as to their coiffures, their head-gear, their toilette generally, the dowdiest of the

dowdy, and their balloon-like skirts, unrelieved by the festoons and adornments which had rendered acceptable those still ampler ones of the eighteenth century, were of a hopelessly inexpressive monotony and vulgarity with which not even the most gifted draughtsman might hope to deal with success. And then the period represented is still so near to us that the artist's personages appear frumpy and out of date, without getting the benefit of a certain quaintness and unfamiliarity which by association lend charm to things even uncouth and ugly, if only they be sufficiently distant and sufficiently characteristic of the time to which they belong. The defects of Walker's illustrations are in a great measure those inherent in the externals of the scenes which he undertakes to depict. The ungainly garments and surroundings of his figures often overcome him, and he has not, though his drawings vastly improve both in conception and technique as he goes on, the supreme graphic skill which would enable him to rise superior to such disheartening obstacles.

The merit of the *Philip* illustrations lies, as might have been expected, in what was very nearly a first work, less in well-ordered and concentrated design emphasizing the essential and relegating to the background the unessential points of a subject, than in the pathos and truth, the unquestioning simplicity and sincerity of the whole. Thackeray's humour and satire are much less easily within Walker's reach than his pure pathos. It is in depicting the more serious scenes of the novel that he penetrates into the very heart of his subject, and divines, with an intuition rare indeed in so young an artist, the innermost meaning of the great humourist—causing his creations to stand out still more clearly, instead of blurring and confusing them, as many even of the most gifted among illustrators are wont to do. As in the book itself, so in the drawings, a thrill of human tenderness colours and transfigures the whole. It would be an exaggeration to say that Thackeray, the keenest satirist, but also the most genial humourist of his time, is as adequately interpreted as Thackeray, the tear-compelling narrator of the least romantic incidents in English life. To suggest his satire, and what those imperfectly in touch with his art are pleased to style his cynicism, would require the mordant pencil of an Adolf Menzel, with a far bigger dose redeeming humanity than that most masterly of all modern draughtsmen commands.

No one possessed what after his time it has become the fashion to

style the religion of humanity more deeply and truly or more unaffectedly than Thackeray ; and he was never really without pity and pardon even for the most imperfect of the human creatures whose foibles he so unsparingly laid bare. It is here that his youthful illustrator intuitively divines and expresses him. Take for instance the central figure of Philip himself—great, rough, kindly Philip, so loving and so lovable—how admirably and consistently he is expressed throughout ! How faithfully his ill-made baggy clothes, his bushy mane and whiskers are portrayed, and how unmistakably the typical Briton, in his nobler phase, shines out through it all ! With hardly less truth and pathos are the simplicity and purity of English womanhood, the wistfulness of childhood portrayed. The drawing of *Philip in Church* has become famous, especially in its later version, when elaborated as a water-colour. Notable, too, as illustrating the vein of true sentiment without sentimentality which gives distinction to the whole series, are *At the Sick Man's Door*, *Paterfamilias*, *Comfort in Grief*. The design *Charlotte's Convey* reveals an unlooked-for subtlety and sense of values in the use of black and white, atmospheric gradation and the clearness of a starlit night being modestly but most truthfully conveyed. *A Quarrel* and *Judith and Holofernes* are powerfully yet not stagily dramatic ; the latter, however, with all the vigour of its realism is in a somewhat more heroic vein than the subject calls for.

It is the touchingly human quality, the subtle, unobtrusive observation, bringing out spiritual rather than purely physical characteristics, which gives value to these and other early productions of Frederick Walker. Later on when—a new impulse reviving and giving added force to the early impressions received from a rudimentary study of Greek sculpture—the art of the painter develops decorative elements and a certain ambitious classicality in the presentment of everyday life, the poetic realism, the unobtrusive fidelity in the observation and interpretation of fact are obscured, though not obliterated. Whether the gain in the one direction counterbalances the loss or diminution in the other remains to be seen ; this side of the question must be left for discussion a little further on.

After Thackeray's *Philip* our artist illustrated successively Miss Thackeray's *Story of Elizabeth* and *The Village on the Cliff*, succeeding



*At the Sick Man's Door.*

*Reproduced by permission of Messrs. Smith, Elder and Co.*

hardly less well with the delicately outlined figures of the daughter than with the vividly realised creations of the father.

Walker also supplied the drawings for Thackeray's unfinished novel *Denis Duval*, and here he was evidently much less at his ease. It was almost the only instance in which he had to deal with costumes and personages earlier than those of this century, and—in this the antithesis of those artists of whom Meissonier is the type and the most accomplished instance—he was hampered, not stimulated, by the conditions of the task imposed upon him. There is something forced, something approaching mannerism and sentimentality even in the prettiest of these drawings, though they are in a style more calculated to secure popular appreciation than the previous ones. Among the most notable is *Denis Duval's Valet*, with its engaging but not quite simple portraiture of the steadfast, much-suffering little hero—just a little too *contourné*, both in conception and style. The same criticism may fairly be applied to the animated composition, *Little Denis Dances and Sings before the Navy Gentlemen*, while the *Last Moments of the Count of Saverne* is well put together and impressive, but inclines to the stage-dramatic rather than to the drama of reality.

Mr. J. L. Roget has stated that Walker built up his distinctive manner as a draughtsman for wood-engraving, partly on the wood-drawing of Adolf Menzel, whose famous series of illustrations dealing with Frederick the Great and his campaigns was, it appears, much studied by him—partly on the new style and practice introduced by Millais and the Pre-Raphaelites, but with less of hard insistence and more freedom and grace than the latter could command. Certainly if the influence of Menzel is anywhere visible in Walker's black-and-white work, it is in these illustrations to *Denis Duval*. But as a rule that swiftness and supreme mastery of pencil applied to the precise notation of fact, that *crânerie* of the elder master which, if it does not unnecessarily set up never shirks difficulties, are just the qualities which we do not, as a rule, find in our artist. With much more truth may it be asserted that Walker's art at this initial stage is more or less the outcome of that of Millais and the Pre-Raphaelites. If any English artist can be said to have exercised a direct influence over him, it is certainly Millais—the Millais of the first Pre-Raphaelite period at its maturity. But Walker,



*Denis Ducal's Valet.*

*Reproduced by permission of Messrs. Smith, Elder and Co.*



not less as an artist than as a man, was essentially self-developed—a true product of his time, but yet isolated from his predecessors and fellow-workers as have been very few even among painters of undoubted initiative and originality. Once fairly started he owed much less to his contemporaries, whether English or French, than has been imagined, and to ancient art other than classical sculpture, nothing.

This attitude of aloofness is to be noted neither all in praise nor all in blame; it is the natural outcome of Walker's temperament, of his apparently limited power of appreciating such art as was outside the bounds of his own immediate sympathies. It is the result of his absolute self-concentration, and his curious system of slowly, laboriously working up artistic material. Important determining impulses from without he certainly received at more than one point in his career, and in submitting to these he but followed the natural and, indeed, one may say, inevitable order in which a true creative personality, such as his, develops itself. If, without descending to mere imitation, he had shown himself more capable of assimilating the technical results achieved by others, he might have glided more easily over many a stumbling-block, and attained to that perfect, unfettered expression of self which, as it is, he cannot be said to have reached.

Besides *Once a Week* and the *Cornhill* our artist did work in these years for *Good Words*, *Sunday at Home*, and other magazines.

It is during this period that he executed for Messrs. Dalziel his drawings of the Seasons, which are of especial interest as affording elements of comparison with the later versions of the same subjects amplified in his more elaborate style. *Spring* shows with true tenderness and simplicity a girl and boy gathering primroses in a thicket blossoming already, although its branches are still naked and gaunt. *Summer*, a truly Pre-Raphaelite performance in its literalness and naive truth, presents two boys bathing in a pool overhung with trees. It has been pointed out that here we have the original motive out of which grew, first a water-colour in which the figures are more numerous and the design takes a more graceful shape, then one of the artist's most important works, *The Bathers* of 1867. *Autumn* shows a girl in an orchard, standing under a still leafy apple-tree laden with fruit; one of these she has plucked and holds in her hand. The design of *Winter* is



*Little Denis Dances and Sings before the Naxy Gentlemen.  
Reproduced by permission of Messrs. Smith, Elder and Co.*

more restricted and prosaic in conception ; it gives us, much as one of William Hunt's water-colours might have done, only with a certain pensiveness in lieu of jollity, a boy standing at a frozen pump, with a half-bitten piece of bread-and-butter in his hand. In *Spring*, the differences between the earlier and simpler drawing and the later and more developed one, as it appeared, a water-colour of important dimensions, at the Royal Society of Painters in Water-Colours, are particularly striking and instructive. The first *Spring* is a shade stiff, but it is true in gesture and movement—as delicately as accurately observed. The second, more picturesque and decorative in design, is less immediately based on Nature, and therefore less truly expressive. There is something forced and very nearly artificial in the grace of the child's movements, something of that *contourné* quality in the design, upon which there has once before been occasion to remark. The *Autumn* is already a little over-studied in the first rendering ; its expressiveness cannot be said to be enhanced in the subsequent and more elaborate version.

Mr. Comyns Carr has in his already more than once quoted essay dwelt with evident sympathy on this peculiar quality of Walker's ; this constant attraction exercised over him by his earliest motives, this system of returning to them over and over again, to change, to amplify, to adorn with the fruits of a passionate and sustained study of Nature in her minutest details. While, however, inventions such as those of our painter may gain in studied grace and ideality, in maturity of conception and richness of amassed detail, by a gradual process of elaboration and completion such as that to which he submitted them, they must necessarily lose in spontaneity and freshness, in swiftness and truth of delineation. It is not easy with such a system to retain that indefinable quality which suggests the instantaneous vision of the painter, seeing his subject complete in essentials ere he attacks it. Over-elaboration—the working out of a subject as it were from different centres instead of as one coherent, dramatic whole—is precisely the drawback from which Walker's art most suffers. His method of progressive development well accounts for the mixed feeling with which we contemplate precisely those works by which his fame has been won ; for the difficulty which, while admiring exquisite episodes in these, we feel in grasping them in their entirety ; for the lack of that current of vitality which should hold together the

component parts of a great work and give it both pictorial and dramatic unity.

It may be as well to deal here with a notable instance in point, though somewhat out of its proper chronological order. There is, perhaps, in the whole range of Walker's *œuvre* no design more forcible, more masterly in its absolute grasp of nature, than the little-known etching *The Wayfarers*. The suggestion of onward movement, the characterisation of the two figures—that of the sturdy, youthful rustic, no less than that of the



*The Wayfarers.*

old and disabled peasant of forbidding aspect who leans on him for support—is perfect. The landscape is certainly more prosaic and less attractive than in the later version—the large canvas of the same name and subject which dates from 1866, and was last seen in public this winter at the Old Masters' Exhibition. This latter landscape with its late autumn melancholy, its moist atmosphere, its maze of tangled branches and twigs nearly stripped of their leaves, is one of the painter's most elaborate and beautiful transcriptions from nature. The figures, however, will not bear comparison with the singular

and more realistic ones of the etching. A sort of pseudo-idealism has been at work sentimentalising them at the expense of the unvarnished truth which, as we may guess, appeared to the artist too prosaic for perpetuation on a large scale. The pretty youth who supports and guides the steps of a vagrant, of milder but less probable mien than that of his predecessor, skates rather than walks on the down-hill road; an air of weak, sweetened semi-realism pervades the whole, and in this instance individual truth is sacrificed, but general truth is not attained in a compensatory degree. The etching not having been published during the painter's lifetime, it is not easy to fix the exact date of its execution. Still it is manifest that it rests upon a design which must, from its very nature, have preceded that of the finished picture in oils.

Among the designs for wood-engraving executed in these early years (about 1863) must be particularly noted *The Dame's School*, which in the drawing on the block, still intact,<sup>1</sup> is much finer than in the published version. This is a typical example of Walker's happy treatment in early days of the simplest of everyday subjects. Here he does not distort his theme, or force into it more than it can well bear. He preserves intact all significant fact, but transfigures it by the glow of his ardent sympathy. Still a little stiff and hesitating in the working out, the composition is finely and evenly balanced, well observed in all its parts, and its unity remains unimpaired.

While working for bread and butter at his black-and-white work, Walker was learning to paint, both in oils and water-colours, though whether his self-education in these directions was assisted by any regular tuition does not sufficiently appear. His first important essay in oils was the canvas *The Lost Path*, which was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1863, and though there skied—as the first production of an unknown man painting in an unfamiliar way may often happen to be—attracted considerable notice and praise. Judging by the powerful etching of Mr. Waltner—the writer cannot call to mind to have seen the picture itself—the design is one of the most convincing, one of the most

<sup>1</sup> This drawing for wood-engraving, which was shown at the Paris Exhibition of 1878, has recently been acquired, together with those of *Antony* and a few subjects from Goldsmith's *She Stops to Conquer*, for the Print Room of the British Museum. The South Kensington Museum has the similar drawing for *The Fishmonger*, and the wood-block for *Summer* above described.

concise and natural in its strength that Walker produced. A woman caught in a snowstorm, which has made of the cross-country path a trackless drift, presses on swiftly, holding her sleeping child wrapped from harm in her shawl; her half-seen face, as she closely presses the precious burden to her bosom, shows courage to fight for life, yet withal but little hope.

It was in August, 1863, after sending in this maiden work in oils to the Royal Academy, that Walker made a first visit to Paris in the company of his friend Mr. Philip Calderon (now R.A.), who, our painter being all guiltless of French, agreed to pilot him round the sister city and show him the artistic lions.

Mr. Calderon notes that, so far as he could judge from appearances, Walker remained but little moved in the presence of even the greatest masterpieces of the Louvre, no single picture attracting his attention sufficiently to induce him to speak of it afterwards.

One great canvas, however, the *Sacre de l'Impératrice Joséphine* by David, then in the museum at Versailles, but within the last few years removed thence to the Louvre, quite fascinated him. Mr. Calderon says: "He kept us a long time in the room studying the picture from corner to corner, and when we at last left it, he gave us the slip and ran back to it, and was with difficulty got away." At first, there seems to be an irreconcilable anomaly in the fact of Walker, the tender, the homely, the child of to-day, bowing down before the stern Græco-Roman David, when neither Raphael, Titian, nor Rembrandt had succeeded in moving him. There is however in the central group of David's great work, showing Josephine in the elegant half-classic costume of the moment, with her imperial robes upheld by the fairest ladies of her court, a perfection of balance, a suavity and a stately grace which must have called up reminiscences of that early classic training among the marbles of Greece and Rome of which the influence was before long to re-assert itself so strongly. Of still higher interest is it to learn from the same informant that at the Luxembourg it was Jules Breton with his *Fin de la Journée*, and not Delacroix, Couture, or any of the more full-blown glories of the century, who attracted our painter's notice.<sup>1</sup> On the occasion of this his

<sup>1</sup> An amusing caricature by Walker, which we might well have assumed to be the subject-matter of this first trip to Paris, were it not stated on good authority that this is not

first visit to Paris in 1863, it by no means follows as a matter of course that he had an opportunity of seeing any original work by Jean-François Millet, who, although he had at that date already produced his greatest masterpieces, was still hotly discussed in Paris, and by no means definitively accepted on all sides. Had our artist waited for the Salon of 1863, which there is no reason to suppose that he did, he would have had an opportunity of seeing the immortal *L'Homme à la Houe*, than which no work of the French master was on its first appearance more passionately praised or more unsparingly attacked. There is much in Jules Breton's serene melancholy never quite reaching the verge of sadness, in the idyllic grace which he infuses into modern rustic life, which must have appealed to Walker even more than the noble generalisations and the massive grandeur of Millet.<sup>1</sup> One must, however, listen to his friend's wise note of warning, and refrain from drawing absolutely hard-and-fast conclusions from Walker's silence about art, and questions connected with it. He was, we are told "the most silent man I have ever known—never joining in a discussion, but listening (with a twinkle in his eye) to what others said, without ever giving a clue to his own opinions, and ending generally by heartily laughing at both sides." Mr. Calderon's conclusion, to which much weight must attach, as that of a brother artist and friend who lived some years in close intimacy with our painter, is that neither French nor indeed English art had any lasting influence on him. Yet, judging Walker by his works and the course taken by his art in unfolding itself—reasoning too, by analogy with the early developments of even the most original genius—this must appear a somewhat exaggerated statement of his position. True, it may be safely said that hardly any modern English artist of mark has so little belonged to a definite group or school; yet it is evident—the remark has already been made here—that the English downrightness, the

the case, is the pen-and-ink drawing *Doug Paris: the Last Day* (collection of Mr. W. H. Hooper), showing our artist in his shirt-sleeves lying exhausted on his French bed, while a companion, whose face is effectually hidden, sits at ease, deep in the *Times*. This sketch is drawn on some notepaper marked with the heading of the Hotel Rastadt.

<sup>1</sup> Yet more strongly was the exquisite art of George Mason, while it showed on the one hand strong affinities with that of the Italian landscape painter, Costa, influenced by that of Jules Breton; as may be clearly seen, for instance, in one of his masterpieces, *The Evening Hymn*.

sincerity and pathos of John Everett Millais in his first manner deeply affected him, and left an easily recognizable trace on the art of his earlier time.

Though it is emphatically untrue that Walker, save perhaps in one or two exceptional instances, deliberately imitated French art, or in any way "Frenchified" himself, it may very fairly be inferred that from the contemplation of such works as those of Jules Breton and Millet, he received a new impulse. May not such an impulse have revived his dormant classical reminiscences, and opened his eyes to the artistic possibilities of modern rustic life presented without the sentimental airs and graces with which it had hitherto been tricked out? Looking back at the painter's artistic career, we find ourselves wondering whether the impulse thus communicated, though at what exact point it would be hazardous to affirm, was not for harm as well as for good—whether Walker's genius might not more legitimately have developed itself on the basis of national art, and with that simplicity free from all *arrière-pensée* with which it started.



## CHAPTER II

*The Royal Society of Painters in Water Colours; "Philip in Church"—At the Royal Academy—Caricatures—Visit to Paris in 1867—Influence of Jean François Millet—Visit to Venice—"The Vagrants"—"The Old Gate."*

THE Royal Society of Painters in Water Colours showed itself much more ready to appreciate Walker's work than the Royal Academy had been; with them he came, he was seen, he conquered. The historian of the Society, Mr. Roget, tells us that he was elected an Associate on the 8th of February, 1864, on the strength of three out of four drawings sent to the spring exhibition; so that he actually made his first appearance at Pall Mall East full-fledged, judged, and accepted as worthy almost without probation. Before referring to these drawings it may be well to deal with one produced a year or two previously. This is *The Blackberry Gatherers* (collection of Mr. John Galsworthy), signed as no other work of the artist's with which we are acquainted is signed, "F. Walker, 1860." It is a curiously stippled little production, which, were it not for a certain personal grace and tenderness making itself felt even thus early, might almost be taken for a Birket Foster.

The water-colours sent to the Society in 1864 were *Philip in Church*; the large *Spring*, to the development of which from the earlier and smaller version, drawn for a woodcut, a passing reference has already been made; *Garden Scene*, a subject from Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*; *Refreshment*, a design showing a group of children at dinner in a field, which, in black-and-white, had already appeared in the same year in *Good Words*. These first contributions to a water-colour exhibition show different degrees of maturity, and from the *Garden Scene*, to *Philip in Church*, the advance is so marked, that the two

drawings cannot well have been produced simultaneously. The *Garden Scene* (collection of Mr. George Smith) carefully stippled in the artist's first manner is hard and dry in colour, stiff in composition, and does not show a complete grasp of the personages represented—Rochester and Jane Eyre. It has, on the other hand, that perfect *naïveté* and sincerity which may win pardon for many faults, that realism, poetized by feeling but not by any tampering with everyday truth, which belongs to English Pre-Raphaelitism in its first and most genuine phase.

*Philip in Church* (collection of Mr. Henry Tate), is a fuller and more detailed realization of the beautiful woodcut which appeared in the *Cornhill Magazine*, but happily not a new variation or a fuller development of the subject. It reveals even more strongly the influence of this same Pre-Raphaelitism, as embodied above all in Sir J. E. Millais's earliest and most remarkable efforts. It is infinitely richer in colour, more perfect in drawing, happier altogether in realization than the companion picture just now referred to. Of its kind Walker has done nothing finer, perhaps nothing so fine, and one can well understand the verdict which a little later on, at the Paris International Exhibition of 1867, conferred upon the artist in respect of this very work, the second-class medal, a distinction not obtained by any other exhibited drawing in the same medium. What is particularly winning about the *Philip*, apart from its more easily reckoned up merits—its happy combination of wonderful finish with a sufficient breadth, and the essential quality of physical and spiritual life—is that it is typically English, altogether true and national in its growth. A radiance of sympathy emanates from the artist and envelops his creations, lighting from within with beauty a certain homeliness and dowdiness inherent to the subject. Inevitably, when a little later there is superimposed on this homely English realism an element of decorative classicism, beautiful in itself, but not legitimately evolved from its essence, the dramatic, the creative side of Walker's art sinks a little into the background, and what is gained in graciousness is lost in vital truth.

Our painter on this the occasion of his *début*, proved himself to be already a highly skilful executant according to the peculiar method which he had elaborated for himself. His results were obtained by a lavish use of opaque pigment, the high finish of every part, in which there was



*Old Time*





*Spring.*

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nothing perfunctory or "niggling," being due to a juxtaposition of the minutest touches. This use of opaque body-colour was carried to an extreme point in such later water-colours as *Stobhall Gardens* and *Lilies*, where the high-lights are rendered with a regular impasto which at close quarters give these drawings a speckled appearance, such as may be noticed in Constable's later oil-paintings.

The next two years after the first important success had been achieved were not, if we are to judge by what was actually brought before the public, a period of rapid or sustained production. No oil picture saw the light, and even water-colours were few and far between. Among these may be mentioned *Denis Duval's Valet*, showing the redoubtable Madame Duval dressing the hair of her brave little son; this is an elaboration without material alteration of the illustration to Thackeray's unfinished novel in the *Cornhill*. It was exhibited in the winter of 1864-5, and to the same period must belong another similar drawing, *Evidence for the Defence*, derived from the same source, and giving the scene where little Denis proudly exhibits his pistol to his school friend.

By the 30th of November, 1866, on which day he became a full member of the Old Water-Colour Society, he had only, says Mr. Roget, after his initial appearance, added two more drawings to the summer exhibitions and three sketches and studies to the winter ones. Among these were, in 1865, the large *Autumn*, which is the second edition of the design for a wood-cut, already referred to; in 1866, *The Bouquet*, a gardener presenting a nosegay to two children dressed in black, which had also been preceded by a drawing on wood of somewhat different treatment; and in 1866-7, *The Introduction*, with figures in the costume of about 1800. He had not again at that date submitted himself to the ordeal of the hanging committee at the Royal Academy, but in 1866 exhibited his large canvas, *The Wayfarers*, at Gambart's Gallery in King Street, St. James's. The picture has already been incidentally described in its connection with the etching of the same name.

With *The Wayfarers* (now belonging to Mr. William Agnew), and the more celebrated *Bathers* of the subsequent year, Walker approaches the period which must be called that of his maturity as an oil painter, although, had he lived, this too would have proved itself, no



*Autumn.*

*Reproduced by permission of Messrs. Agnew and Sons, owners of the Copyright.*

doubt, to be but a transitional stage. The *Bathers* appeared at the Royal Academy in 1867—his second contribution to its exhibitions—and was there unfavourably hung, though not at such an altitude as its predecessor, *The Lost Path*. It is in many respects the best of Walker's productions on this large scale, broader and freer in execution, if less minutely finished and less exquisite in local passages of colour, than its fellows, more synthetic in treatment, and of a classicality sounder because arising more naturally out of the subject depicted. In an evening landscape studied, we are told, from Walker's beloved Thames between Cookham and Marlow, on the rush-grown banks of the low-lying river, beyond which rise tall trees bordering an unseen road, appear, under one of the painter's favourite warm evening skies, a company of naked youths and boys, some stripping themselves for the bath, some dressing again, some larking with the smaller fry, some puffing and blowing in the stream itself. If the composition is by no means perfect as a whole, it has many admirable groups and passages. It happily breaks, too, with its buoyant variety what would otherwise be the monotony of the long horizontal lines made by river and banks. Many delightful episodes arrest the eye by their truth and plastic beauty. See to the extreme right the youth hurrying along to the edge a half-unwilling urchin; and again the boy in his shirt hauling another up the bank; and yet again the young swimmer with his head only visible as he breasts the current. The central figure of a nude youth half-kneeling jars, on the other hand, in the midst of all this nature, though his head is beautiful as that of a Greek ephebus on the painter's favourite frieze of the Parthenon. Here the element of studied classicality imported *quand même* into the subject is felt to be an intrusion as it is also in the erect figure of the nude bather who stands dreaming a moment, as he strips off his last garment and braces himself for the plunge. The too deliberately sculptural character of these and one or two other elements of the design harmonizes but imperfectly with the undistorted truth, with the genuine spontaneity of the rest. There is, no doubt, in the unshamed nakedness of youth, so supple and free in movement, a kind of classicality of its own, but in these particular figures, though not elsewhere in the picture, it is carried too far, and obtained too much at the expense of the life and sincerity of characterization which are of the very essence of the subject. It is to be noted that,



here and in most other instances, Walker's flesh tints incline too much to a leathery brownness, and that the open-air effect of light playing upon the surfaces of the nude human figure is hardly realized. Thus, that the importation of this new element into Walker's art—or better this fuller development of a latent tendency—is not wholly due to an impulse given by contemporary French art is proved by the *Bathers*. Yet it is none the less to be inferred from facts, and from a consideration in chronological order of the work produced in these particular years, that its infusion into purely rustic subjects belonging to the England of to-day was due in a measure to such an impulse, though the method followed in suggesting ancient Greece under modern England was Walker's own.

Some of the most genuinely inspired of his drawings for woodcuts were those which illustrated Miss Thackeray's stories, and not a few of them were afterwards worked up more elaborately in water-colour, without any essential deviation from the original designs. One subject from *The Village on the Cliff* appeared at the Old Society in 1867, and in 1870-71 (to mention it a little out of its right place) another, the exquisite *Let us Drink to the Health of the Absent*—a perfect accompaniment in its reticent tenderness to the prose of the gifted writer, and technically remarkable for the skilful lighting, the extraordinary yet not excessive finish of the draughtsmanship. Two designs from *Jack the Giant Killer*, in Miss Thackeray's volume, *Five Old Friends, and A Young Prince* (published in 1868) were in the year of their production treated in water-colour, one *The Chaplain's Daughter*, the other one of our painter's masterpieces of invention and expression, *The Three Fates*, both these subjects being sent to the exhibition of the Old Society in 1868. The Clotho Lachesis and Atropos of Miss Thackeray's pathetic tale are three grim provincial old ladies of to-day—Walker's, to-day which is now a quarter of a century old—whose strange figures are woven together with a technical and dramatic subtlety, and treated with a pictorial charm, with a genuine humour not often paralleled in Walker's works. For humour, except in a few of his caricatures, was the quality least often found in what he produced. A ray of unshadowed joy at the more beautiful aspects of life often broke through the atmosphere of reflective melancholy which was his favourite mood ;

but this had not the boisterousness of a frank gaiety, still less the indefinable quality of humour. This quality of genuine humour was not always attained even in the regular caricatures in which he occasionally indulged, amusing as these were in their own quiet way, notwithstanding a certain stiffness and deliberation in the draughtsmanship which not altogether suits this sort of work, of which spontaneity is the essence. Well known is the drawing *Genius under the Influence of Fresh Air and Beautiful Scenery: Sunday, August 30th, 1863*,<sup>1</sup> with



*The Three Fates.*

caricatural portraits of two intimate friends, Mr. Calderon, R.A., and Mr. Stacy Marks, R.A.; and here both drawing and fun are a little forced. Another caricature marks the election of Sir Frederick Leighton and Mr. Calderon as full members of the Royal Academy in 1867, and shows the two painters enthroned side by side, receiving pontifically the homage of the professionals and worldlings who press forward to make obeisance to them.

<sup>1</sup> *Portfolio*, 1876.

Walker actually, in the year 1865, when the proprietors of *Punch* were casting about them to find a successor to Leech, whose death had taken place in October, 1864, executed several drawings—with not unqualified success—for the *London Charivari*. One of these was *New Bathing Company (Limited)—Specimens of Costume to be worn by the Shareholders*; another, *Captain Finks of the “Selfish” and his Friends enjoying themselves on the River*. In the latter Walker speaks, or rather draws, feelingly; for he loved the Thames above all things, and resented the selfishness of the blatant pleasure-seekers who with their steam-launches ruffled its waters and the tempers of those who made more legitimate use of them. The *Portfolio*<sup>1</sup> has in former years given some specimens of the sketches in which he made mock of his own inordinate passion for fly-fishing. One of the most amusing of these is the pen-and-ink drawing done in September, 1873, in answer to an alluring invitation to go North and indulge in his favourite sport. He shows himself tempted by visions of huge fish, one of twenty-six pounds, caught by a friend, being introduced to him by a kilted gillie, and others swimming around ready to be hooked. This is quaintly styled *The Temptation of St. Anthony Walker*. With these exceptional excursions into realms which were not his by right, we may mention the very large cartoon (85 by 51 inches) which he did for the theatrical poster advertising a dramatised version of Wilkie Collins's *Woman in White*; this was exhibited at the “Black and White” Exhibition of the Dudley Gallery in 1872. Judging by the preliminary study in the rich collection of Mr. J. P. Heseltine, this is rather too much in the academic and impersonal style, too little suggestive of the element of weirdness and mystery in the story itself.

Not to be classed as caricatures, though a gentle vein of merriment, appropriate, and indeed, indispensable under the circumstances, pervades them, are the three beautiful designs for invitation cards executed for Mr. Arthur J. Lewis when he played host to the Moray Minstrels at Moray Lodge, Campden Hill. Of the exquisite delicacy of these little decorative compositions the readers of the *Portfolio* have the means of judging from the reproductions now given for the first time—in two

<sup>1</sup> In the *Portfolio*, volume for 1875.

instances from the cards themselves, in the third from Walker's own design. It is curious that this mock-Greek group of musicians and dancers, parodying, but ever so slightly, some Anacreontic scene from a



*The Woman in White. Design for a Poster.*

red-on-black vase of the best period, is Walker's only extant attempt to give form to a subject actually and avowedly classical, although the style of ancient Greece, and especially its style in sculptural relief, was rarely absent from what he did in his later years. The dates of these

*The Moray Minstrels. 1865*

ARTHUR J. LEWIS.  
AT HOME  
MORAY LODGE, CAMPDEN HILL,  
KENSINGTON

SATURDAYS  
January 28 | March 25  
February 25 | April 29

MUSIC 8.30.

OYSTERS AT 11.

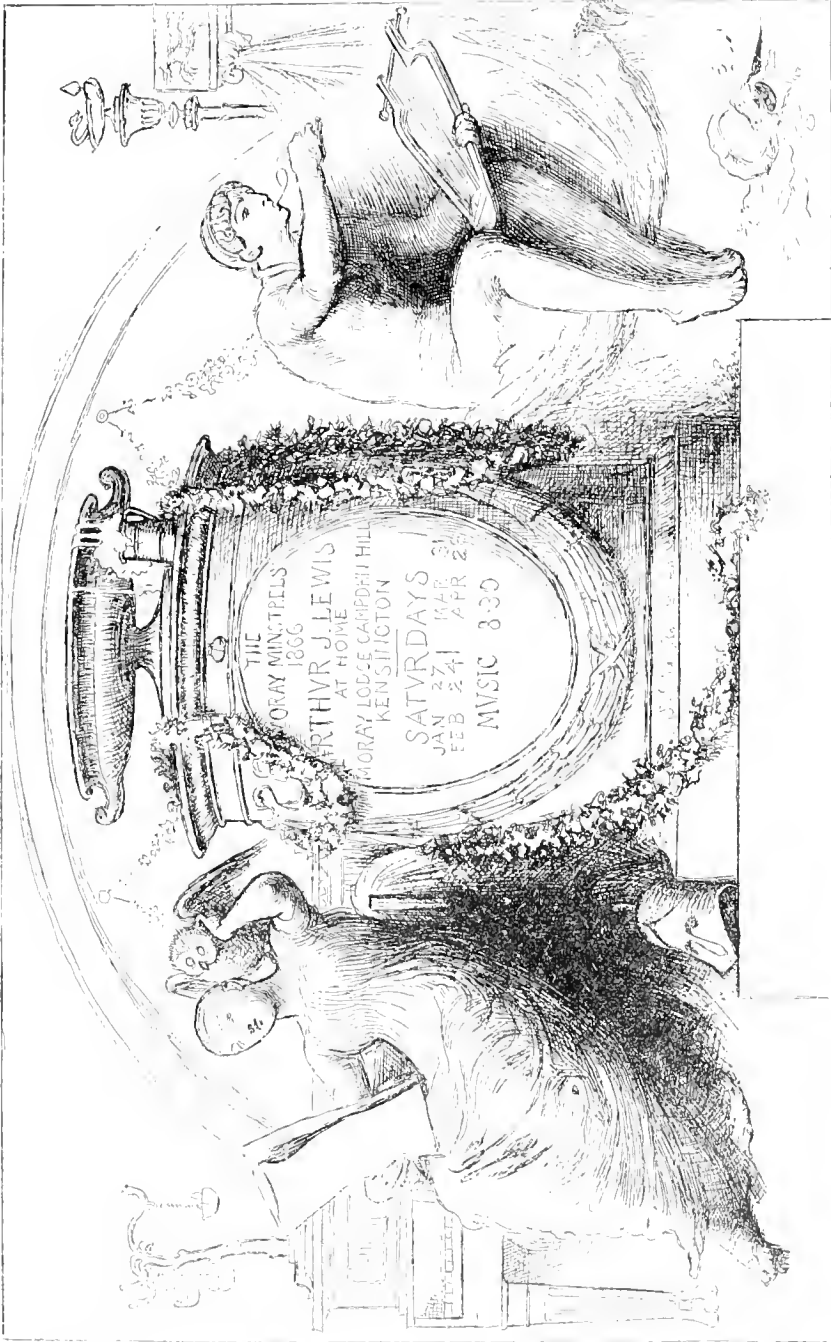
*Invitation Card.*

invitation cards were respectively 1865, 1866, and 1867, the designs having been made in the latter part of the years preceding.

But to return, after this too long digression, to the discussion of the artist's more important works in their proper sequence, and to the facts more directly bearing upon the evolution of these. And first, it is on record that he went to Paris for the Universal Exhibition of 1867, and this circumstance is of high importance in determining the degree of influence, if any, exercised over him by contemporary French art.

At this Exhibition Walker had his first great opportunity of seeing and judging Millet, who was there represented by no less than eight of his finest oil paintings, among these being such now famous examples as *Une Tondeuse de Moutons*, *Les Glaneuses*, *L'Angélu du Soir* (as it was then more accurately entitled), *Un Berger*, *Récolte des Pommes de terre*, and *Un parc à moutons : clair de lune*. M. Jules Breton, by whom, as has been pointed out, Walker had already been attracted on the occasion of his first visit, was represented by no less than ten important canvases, among which were *Le Rappel des Glaneuses*, *La Bénédiction des Blés*, *Les Sarcleuses*, *Une Gardeuse de Dindons*, *La Fin de la Journée*, and *La Moisson*. What was the impression made at the time by these works on Walker the silent there is—so far as the writer can gather—nothing definite to show, for on such subjects he would not, or could not, open his heart, even to his most intimate friends. But we may surely quite legitimately infer from the decided movement in a given direction imparted to his art about this time, and in particular from the increased effort to infuse into the treatment of rustic and open-air subjects a certain ideality of treatment, a certain rhythmic harmony—in fact the qualities essential to though not alone making up style—that he was deeply moved and permanently influenced by what he saw. Of plagiarism or of deliberate imitation, except in one exceptional instance presently to be dealt with, there can be no question. Walker's peculiar temperament did not permit him, even had he striven to do so, to take up permanently this sort of attitude towards any other painter, and his style was, even thus early, so far formed that the whole basis of his art would have been disturbed by the attempt to follow in the footsteps of another.

It has been said here more than once—it was an impulse received rather than an influence submitted to; the painter was already



*Invitation Card.*

prepared to look for certain definite things in the everyday humanity, in the everyday nature which may almost be said to constitute an integral part of that humanity. He was by the noble examples before him made to see more clearly certain higher possibilities in the rendering of the rustic scenes to which he felt himself increasingly drawn. Whether, given his strong artistic individuality with its well-defined limitations, given his way of lovingly dwelling on the particular rather than looking for the general in nature, we must judge him to have taken at this point the straight or the devious path, depends on our appreciation of the works now to be described.

The one instance in which it must be held that Walker's art is directly imitative of that of Jean-François Millet is the *Mushroom Gatherers*, in the collection of Mr. Somerset Beaumont, painted about 1868. The solemn, mournful tonality of the landscape, with its illumination of earliest dawn, but above all the figure of the man stooping, basket in hand, in the foreground, irresistibly reminds the beholder of the noble style, the balance in action, of the solemn poet-painter of rustic life. The design more particularly recalled is that of *Le Semeur*, which does not appear in the list of works exhibited in 1867. It had, however, been shown as far back as 1850, at the Salon of that year, and had been much popularised by a fine lithograph, so that an acquaintance with the design, if not the picture, may be presumed without taking too much for granted. And then again there were among Millet's works shown at the Universal Exhibition not a few from which a similar inspiration might well have been derived. To tell the truth, this solitary attempt of Walker's to make his own the manner and the subjects of Millet is not one of his happiest efforts, even though the tenderness which never deserts him gives undeniable charm to the conception. The attitude and action of the male figure in the English painter's *Mushroom Gatherers* is less legitimately explained, more compulsorily strained into classical grace than that of Millet's unforgettable figure. The picture in its present state is a finished sketch in oils on paper affixed to a panel. We learn from Mr. Comyns Carr that it was intended to develop it into a composition of more important dimensions, and that a large study for the landscape alone was actually found in Walker's studio after his death.



To about this period belongs, as may be inferred from its style, the exquisite water-colour, *In an Orchard*, belonging to Mr. J. P. Heseltine. This is almost as markedly an exception in Walker's *œuvre* as the picture just described, but a happier excursion, and one in an entirely different direction. The scene is a plantation of fruit-trees, depicted in all the glory of delicately tinted blossom and bright unstained foliage, under blue heavens literally flooded with joy-giving sunlight. Beneath the



*Design for an Invitation Card.*

trees, all youth and growth like them, a company of happy children toddle along. At first sight one might take the picture for an unusually subtle and lovely *plein air* of foreign growth, so boldly is the difficulty of full sunlight attacked and overcome, so happy the treatment of the coloured shadows. But the figures are English, and English in the best sense of the word; they are touched with just that sympathy, that reticent truth upon which it is difficult to insist too strongly, as one of Walker's finest and most distinctive qualities.



*The Mushroom Gatherers.*

*The Street, Cookham*, exhibited in 1866-7 (and therefore noticed a little out of its right sequence), is one of the best of those more spontaneous designs in which the artist treated a simple subject with no other aspiration than to express by legitimate means all its natural beauty. With a well-suggested continuity of onward movement a young girl drives before her, through the broken-down red-roofed houses of the winding village street, a flock of cackling geese. What loving care



*The Street, Cookham.*

Walker gave to every essential detail of even such a subject as this may be gathered from the fact that the geese were studied from life, not once, but repeatedly, and at leisure, from some birds kept for the purpose in his small garden at Bayswater.

One of the loveliest of this class of purely English drawings, one of which might be said, with far more truth, what a French critic recently said of the marine pictures of Mr. Hook—that they seemed to breathe forth a mute prayer—is *The First Swallow* (collection of Professor

Hubert Herkomer, R.A.), the exact date of which does not appear to have been ascertained. A great white hawthorn in all the exuberant loveliness of full May mirrors its fragrant snow in a shallow stream, across which skims the swallow which gives its name to the picture. Through the sun and shadow of the walk just beyond move gently, in full enjoyment of the moment, a fair-haired young girl and a boy still younger, her brother beyond doubt—she sheltering herself from the sun's first hot rays, and encircling the boy with one arm—he dividing his enjoyment between his sister's caress and the big tome which he lazily holds. The may-tree in bloom is painted as perhaps no may-tree was ever painted before, with perfect accuracy in every detail, and yet with a breadth and feeling for the fairness of the thing as a whole, to which our painter did not always attain. The swallow and its reflection are taken a little too much *au pied de la lettre*, and the picture thus loses something in spontaneity and suggestiveness. The wonderful little figures are drawn with that exquisite finish which the artist was wont to lavish upon such elements of his designs. Beautiful in themselves they are manifestly too elaborate for the place they occupy in the picture; they could not be seen thus by the eye which takes in the whole. In a different way, but from something like the same cause, the sincere and uncompromising art of Bastien-Lepage suffered from his unflinching accuracy in detail, from the searching modelling of those unique rustic portraits which he was wont to frame in the landscapes of his beloved province.

Many of Walker's most celebrated water-colours date from the year 1868, and it must be owned that in none of these smaller works does the French influence which has been noted above maintain itself.

Those drawings have already been noticed which are elaborations in water-colour of illustrations done for Miss Thackeray's *Five Old Friends and A Young Prince*.

*Lilies* (collection of Mrs. William Graham) may be taken as typical of that class of drawing in which Walker has depicted with an unsurpassed lavishness of detail, with innumerable pure and delicate touches, the exuberant yet well-ordered splendour of the English flower-garden in full summer beauty. If we concede to the painter the peculiarity of his standpoint, and accept that in English water-colour so revolutionary technique which was his own invention, the thing could hardly be better



*The First Swallow.*

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done. The only disturbing element is the figure of the young lady in summer attire who bends down to water the tall white lilies that give their name to the picture. This is strained and awkward; it wants the charm which the artist, as a rule, knew how to impart even to his mistakes. Of *Mushrooms and Fungi* (collection of Mr. Humphrey Roberts) it has been said, not without reason, that it showed a desire to emulate the achievements in the same style of William Hunt. If so, we must agree with Mr. Ruskin when he says, "It entirely beats my dear old William Hunt in the simplicity of execution, and rivals him in the subtlest truth." This group of creamy-white mushrooms and fungi of a disquieting beauty, with their lovely hues in vivid contrast to the bright green of the bed on which they lie, is far more delicate in colour than anything of Hunt's, and as accurate in execution. Moreover, it is a picture with a suggestive charm beyond its mere elements, which is just what Hunt's wonderfully stippled plums, hawthorn-blossom, birds' nests and eggs were not. The earlier artist was a master when he rendered the happier side of rustic life, when he inimitably caught and fixed the waggishness, the bubbling laughter of untamed boyhood; but those still-life pieces of his were surely an elaborate and capital mistake.

To this same year belong Walker's *Beehives*, and *A Stream in Inverness-shire*, the latter being one of his rare recollections of that Scotland which he loved mainly because it afforded him his favourite sport of salmon fishing, and but little on account of its scenic beauties. These were too obvious, they had been too frequently laid bare by others for a nature-lover of his temperament; and then they were so much less expressive, in their orthodox picturesqueness, of man and his struggles than the familiar yet never commonplace beauties of his own beloved Thames.<sup>1</sup>

Proof of a first visit to Venice in this year is afforded by the water-colour, *A Gondola* (collection of the Right Honourable Joseph Chamberlain, M.P.). Nothing is more instructive than an examination of this drawing, nothing more completely proves by negative evidence where Walker's talent really lay, and how entirely national it was in essence.

<sup>1</sup> A drawing *Fisherman and Boy*, the outcome of his fishing experiences on the banks of the Spean, was exhibited in 1867. *A Lady in a Garden, Perthshire*, appeared in 1869-70.

Away from the embrace of his own mother earth he lost his warmth and strength, he remained but coldly observant of what had often stirred in others a romantic passion. Here the peculiar swing and tread of the gondolier are accurately noted, the black and gold gondola itself is unexceptionably drawn and coloured, the carefully curled signora seen in the cool half-light of the little covered chamber is evidently a portrait-study. Yet how cold, how narrow and formal, how truly un-Venetian is the picture put together out of these elements, how



*Mushrooms and Fungi*

little it recalls the sweet South or gives back that indefinable something which stirs the blood of the true Venice-lover!

The most important achievement of this year (1868) is the large oil picture, *The Vagrants*, which was exhibited at the Royal Academy, and now hangs in the National Gallery, for which it was purchased at the William Graham sale. The reproduction here given renders a detailed description unnecessary. In a marshy landscape, sad in its loneliness, but beautified by its yellowing autumn tints—such a one as shelters but hardly

comforts the wanderer—these vagrants, gipsies by their picturesque type, but not the true dark-skinned “Egyptians,” have halted for rest and refreshment. Though the figures are here more happily married to the landscape, more inevitably a part of it, both pictorially and in mood, than is the case with many of the important compositions of Walker’s last period, the faults as well as the qualities of this last period stand out here, already manifest. The peculiar method of elaborating not only the execution of a subject but its conception, of thinking the thing out as it were in parts, is the cause that we have here a collection of beautiful episodes bound together more or less in design, but not with that deeper, that not easily definable yet all important relation which was always present in Walker’s earlier and less ambitious efforts. The classicality is less marked, less *voulu* than in *The Old Gate*, *The Plough*, *The Harbour of Refuge*, but the effort to superadd a plastic and spiritual beauty rather than to free it from the husk which obscures it, is still too strongly felt. The erect figure of the moody, handsome gipsy, lost in her musings, but evidently dreaming no happy daydream, is a noble conception nobly realised ; there is a not inappropriate grandeur, too, in the figure of the mother bending over her child as she sits in front of the newly lighted fire of twigs. If the action of the boy feeding the fire is singularly trivial and even false, the two children, clinging together, are thought out with tenderness, though with a shade of sentimentality. Still we have rather the elements of the picture than the picture itself ; the elaboration from separate centres has arrested the sources of life. The finished pen-and-ink sketch of *The Vagrants*, which appeared at the exhibition of the old Society in 1870 was apparently not a preliminary study for, but a reduction from the original.

*The Old Gate*, which appeared at the Royal Academy in 1869, must count as one of the three or four representative performances in the same style upon which the fame of Walker is mainly built ; the others being *The Vagrants*, *The Plough*, and *The Harbour of Refuge*.

Through the weather-worn stone gate which gives its name to the picture, down the long flight of steps which leads from the manor-house, slowly walks the pensive widow, draped rather than clad in her sable weeds ; a sturdy country wench has opened the gate, and, as she passes through, gazes up sympathetically at her. Lower down on the steps





*Caravans.*



children are playing, and to the right of the picture is one of Walker's most characteristic groups, that of two workmen, man and boy, who, interrupting their walk with a respectful curiosity, await the coming of the widow. The man stands erect in the conscious pride of early manhood, wearing with the grace of untrammelled ease his suit of fustian; with one hand he rests his spade on his broad shoulder, with the other, by a half unconscious movement happily indicated, he takes his pipe from his mouth. The youthful prentice workman appears somehow in attendance on the elder, much as the youths of the Parthenon Frieze are in attendance on the young warriors.

The figures are framed in a landscape prospect which in execution is one of the artist's best, and what is more, delicately harmonizes with the pensive mood of the central figure. Most accurately observed, too, and finely rendered is the moss-eaten stone of the old gateway. Stately naked trees, such as Walker loved to depict with incisive firmness of outline accentuate the middle distance; beyond stretches tranquil, in the sadness of late autumn, a hazy blue distance, rendered with a rare charm—one of the very few prospects of the kind that our painter has attempted. To detail is to find passages of beauty almost everywhere. Unfortunately the weakest point in the whole is the figure of the widow, which is self-conscious and sentimental beyond anything else from the same hand. The rosy-cheeked, vigorous, country-girl, the children at play are in themselves well-considered and carefully balanced. Superb in strength and rhythm of design, and well harmonized with that of its companion, is the figure of the muscular young workman—a veritable life-study although thinly veiled in the coarse garments of the labourer. In painting, too, it shows an unusual freedom and brush-power, and if isolated might count as one of the painter's best achievements—an example of what our neighbours in artistic jargon style *le morceau*. None the less is this fine group a false note in the picture. It is aggressively Pheidian in its calculated classic grace, it savours a mile off of Elgin Marbles and Panathenaic Frieze. There has been revealed to the artist, whether by intuition from within or by impulse from without, that in the free yet necessarily well-balanced and regularly repeated movements of labour lurk the elements of classic beauty. He determines to find them there *quand même*, and not going the right way about—for he cannot if he would sacrifice the tendency to

individualise which is the very essence of his art—he finds himself obliged to force the note, and to press into his work what he cannot legitimately evolve from it. Millet's *Semeur*, his *Glaneuses*, his *Gardeuse de Dindons*, his *Bergère*, are classic, if you will, inasmuch as their beauty of expressive, synthetic design is got at in much the same way as the Greeks got at the designs of their friezes and their vases. But the Frenchman's figures are not conscious of classicality, they do not appear to be deliberately seeking for it, as do Walker's when they are of the type that has just been taken as an example. And then it must be said—though the writer should by perpetual carping expose himself to be called after the Proto-critic in Goethe's *Faust*, “*Der Geist der stets verneint*”—that all the component parts of this composition upon which the artist has lavished his skill and his sympathy—and the beauty of these has been freely admitted—do not make up a picture in the higher sense of the word. Judging the canvas as we must primarily from the painter's standpoint, we find that he has not got his subject together, that it straggles, that it does not express itself as a whole. Nor does it, judging from the dramatic and human standpoint, give the impression of *la chose vécue*, even transfigured in the golden light of art. The inevitableness of the scene, the natural cohesion of its parts, is not conveyed, and thus the greater part of the significance of the subject, whether pictorial or dramatic, is lost. One feels somehow that here, as in the kindred works of his maturity, Walker has not worked as Delacroix declared the painter should work—he has not seen his picture with the painter's vision complete and definite in its essential parts before he painted it.

To this year, 1869, belongs one of the most elaborate of the class of drawings in which that well-ordered paradise, the English garden, is taken as the chief theme—a class of which *Lilies*, already described, is the most popular example. This is *Stobhall Gardens*, which at the great sale of Walker's water-colour drawings at Christie's in 1886 fetched only £567 to the £1365 of its rival,<sup>1</sup> and yet must be allowed to take quite equal artistic rank with it. The warm gray stone of the old baronial mansion could not in this style be more finely rendered, nor the detail of all this wealth of

<sup>1</sup> *The Street, Cookham*, on the same occasion fetched £903. (J. L. Roget's *History of the Old Water Colour Society*.)

splendid summer blossoms be more wonderfully wrought out. As in *Lilies* the only drawback is the central figure—this time the queerly proportioned figure of a tall young lady seated on a knoll in the foreground near a sundial, robed in an ample velvet gown of greeny-brown hue. Just a breath of the later and less naive Pre-Raphaelitism seems to have passed over Walker here, and coloured his work, but luckily this influence, if it really did touch him with its wing, disappeared, leaving no other trace behind. Among other drawings belonging to this year are *A Lady in a Garden, Perthshire*; and *How dare you say such things to Jim Grandpapa* (collection of Mr. John Aird, M.P.).

### CHAPTER III.

“*The Plough*”—*First Signs of Failing Health*—“*Marlow Ferry*”—*Associate of the Royal Academy*—“*At the Bar*”—“*The Harbour of Refuge*”—“*The Fishmonger’s Shop*”—*Winter in Algiers*—*Illness and Death*—*Unfinished Pictures*—*Etchings*—*Survey of his Work*.

AT the Royal Academy Exhibition of 1870 appeared *The Plough*, which is at once Walker’s noblest and most poetic invention, and of all his later oil pictures the one which is the most open to criticism as regards its realization. The landscape is pure English, simple and unassuming in character, and yet the artist has been so possessed with the mysterious, transforming harmonies of sunset that he succeeds in infusing into his scene—without meddling with its structure as a Turner would without hesitation have done—something of a portentous, tragic splendour. If only the nature-motive had been as adequately expressed as it was nobly conceived, if only the human motive had been more firmly based on, and built up out of, natural fact, we might have had here a great picture. The foreground is one of those clear shallow streams, with low banks that Walker loved to paint; from these, and in their neighbourhood, spring here and there trees and tall shrubs, their naked branches outlined with a firmness and precision, with an accentuation of every detail that recalls Albert Dürer. In the middle distance, already half-veiled in the luminous half-dark of twilight, the plough advances slowly across the fields, with its team of grey horses, urged on, whip in hand, by a boy, while the ploughing husbandman follows at the tail. At the back rises, dyed a rosy red, a tall cliff, trenchant in tone against the clumps of trees that nestle for shelter into its hollow, against the grass with which its summit is crowned

Above it, seeming to rest on its very shoulder, rises the huge mass of cloud which gives the keynote to the whole picture, frowning a flaming purple-red in its momentary glow. The crescent moon, silver in a corner of grey-blue sky, modestly peeps, almost unobserved, over the trees. What must first be blamed here is a certain airlessness in the whole. The cliff, the proper distance of which is accentuated by the diminutive size of the trees growing into it, has not its due aerial perspective; the great cloud seems actually, and not merely figuratively, to rest upon it—to be not only in the same plane but of the same substance. 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 works. 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. What we have is in the first place the attempt to emulate the rhythmic grace of the Greek bas-relief, and only in the second place that to render the true movement of man and beast in its natural beauty.

One feels somehow that Walker has here for once had his complete vision of his subject—not that of the eyes only but the inner mental vision—yet that he has been hindered by his slow, laborious system of evolution and his preconceived notions as to classic harmony from giving it a thoroughly true and spontaneous realization.

Is it pardonable to speculate as to what another artist would have done with this great motive? George Mason had hardly either Walker's passion or his power of penetrating deep into a subject, and he would perhaps have infused into his design less tragic power, and have coloured it more openly and avowedly with the idyllic character. On the other hand he would have produced a work more homogeneous, 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.

*The Plough* was last seen in public at the most recent of the winter exhibitions at Burlington House, to which it was contributed by the Marquis de Misa. Next to it happened then to be placed another fine sunset landscape, *The End of the Harvest*, by a too little remembered Scotch artist, George Paul Chalmers, who therein showed himself much affected by the art of Millet and Josef Israels, but technically an accomplished master, well able, though thus influenced, to stand by himself. Chalmers, as here revealed, had not a tithe of Walker's genius or his strength of artistic individuality, yet in some respects *The Plough* would not bear comparison with his picture. A prolonged contemplation would and did show that the one was the work of an admirably skilled and sympathetic adapter rather than of an original painter; that the other was the work of a man of original genius still struggling for perfect command over his material, and hampered by his very style and method in the expression of a great moment in nature such as this which he had divined and sought to make his own. Still the lesser performance maintained a certain superiority over its more celebrated neighbour because it had the true painter's quality, because it was a complete picture of its kind, a complete though a reticent pictorial expression of its theme as its author understood it.

There exists a reduced version of *The Plough* in oil on panel, described as a finished study for the larger picture. Judging, however, both from the style of the panel itself and from Walker's system in such matters, it might more properly be put down as a finished reduction from the picture. Thus a pen-and-ink reduction of *The Vagrants* (1868) appeared at the Old Water-Colour Society in 1870; a water-colour version of the *Harbour of Refuge* (1872) at the same place in 1873-74; and a like version of *The Old Gate* (1869) in 1875.

A letter addressed in the May of this year to an appreciative friend who had written to congratulate Walker on the success of *The Plough* at the Academy, is worth mentioning as showing at once the sensitiveness and the perfect simplicity of the young painter. He writes: "I assure you I have a very keen desire for such spontaneous praise, especially from those whose taste I know to be good and pure. I can only say I am *seriously glad* that you admire my picture." He goes on to say that he is leaving for Venice next week, and that (first



ominous sign of what was to overtake him a few years later) he has had a succession of colds, for which he feels that complete change is the best cure. He appears, at the time, to have had plans for seriously working while at Venice, and for returning to his work in the following autumn; but there is nothing to show that these plans were carried out, almost the only trace of this second visit being a slight sketch of the house in which he lived in the City of the Lagoon, with Mr. W. Q. Orchardson (then A.R.A.) at the window. This was shown at the Memorial Exhibition in 1876, and again at Messrs. Dunthorne's in 1885.

*Marlow Ferry*, one of the most popular and one of the most beautiful of Walker's water-colours, was exhibited in 1870 at the Old Society's summer exhibition. Here the ferry-boat, rowed by a fair, sun-browned youth, who is just shipping his oars, is seen approaching the landing-place with its passenger; on the banks are figures of villagers and children feeding swans, and in one corner a group of lazy river-side gossips done to the life. The flesh-tints are the too hot and brown ones which Walker affects, the harmony, with its dominant note given by the red-brick houses, tawny in excess; but with his faults we have his exquisite charm of delicately detailed draughtsmanship, of perfect sympathy for his subject. Here, too, he is quite English and entirely himself, dropping that striving after Attic grace of line and movement which, in the opinion of the writer, never sits quite easily upon him or becomes an inherent part of his subject.

A quaint drawing, which was sent to the winter exhibition of the Water Colour Society in 1870-1, showed, with a trace of quiet humour such as on rare occasions crept in to the artist's serious productions, a coachman in a kitchen-garden cutting cabbages, and was entitled *The Amateur*. It re-appeared at Burlington House in 1891 under the title *Coachman and Cabbage*.

There was a technical obstacle to Walker's being elected an Associate of the Royal Academy, seeing that he had previously become a member of the Royal Water Colour Society. In the original statutes of the Academy was included a provision to the effect that no member of any other Society having the same or similar objects should be eligible for election—this being a bye-law aimed doubtless at that supplanted rival, the

Incorporated Society of British Artists. This rule was, however relaxed, in favour of Sir John Gilbert, upon whom the Associateship was conferred, when in 1871, he received the honour of Knighthood, as President of the Royal Water Colour Society, and advantage was taken of this opportunity to confer the like distinction upon Walker, who thus made his first appearance as A.R.A. at the exhibition of 1871.

On this occasion he brought forward *At the Bar*, an important if not a wholly successful effort to take new ground, or rather to return with added experience to the class of production to which his first venture, *The Lost Path*, belongs. It is somewhat difficult to speak of this unusual work now, since it no longer exists in its integrity. It is one of the very few extant attempts by Walker to deal with the human form on the scale of life, and as such it must be judged with all the allowances due to an experiment. From the Rembrandtesque gloom which enwraps the greater part of the canvas emerges the full-length figure of a woman still young in years, who in agonised suspense and bewilderment stands forth in the dock of a criminal court, in the presence of judges all but invisible to the beholder. A lurid light is concentrated on the wretched prisoner, now evidently at the turning point of her fate, and the only other human being allowed to be clearly visible is a warder, whose head appears at the foot of the picture. It was a happy idea to adopt the Rembrandtesque method in order to give force and unity to a scene of outward gloom and inward distress, and in the painter's conception he has avoided the dangerous rock of melodrama and reached true tragedy. A lack of breadth and solidity, such as might have been looked for under the circumstances, detracts, however, from the power of the work and gives to it, even apart from the injury to which reference will presently be made, something of a tentative and uncertain character—the appearance of a sketch on a large scale rather than a picture. Mr. Comyns Carr speaking of the picture as then exhibited, describes with unstinted praise the tragic expression of the woman's face—her “desperate and hunted aspect.” We know, however, that Walker, made extra-sensitive by criticism, which he could at no period bear with equanimity, and himself dissatisfied with what was intended to be the keynote of the whole—the climax to attain which all else was sacrificed or subordinated scraped out the face, when he got the canvas back from the Academy,

with the intention of repainting it. This intention he, at any rate, never carried into effect, for *At the Bar* remained in this incomplete state at his death four years after, and was almost the only one of his important works not included in the Memorial Exhibition of 1876. It is an open secret that the head, as it now appears, was at the special request of the deceased painter's representatives, painted in by Mr. R. W. Macbeth, A.R.A.

It may be assumed that it is this, the most important version of the picture, which has this year reappeared in public, at the very interesting exhibition of Walker's works in oils, water-colours, and black-and-white, organized by the Royal Birmingham Society of Artists. The head in this example has a certain glassiness of texture, and although in it the beauty of the painter's conception is still to be divined, it cannot be said, as it now is, to deserve Mr. Carr's encomiums. The appearance of the picture thus confirms the truth of the assertion that it was repainted after the artist's death as has been stated; and, indeed, among his friends and those who know most about him and his art this is not denied. This being the case, it is somewhat surprising that when the present owner, Professor Silvanus P. Thompson, lent the picture to the Birmingham Society, no statement should have been made in the catalogue as to the dual authorship. A finished study in oils on canvas was exhibited at the Dudley Gallery in 1872, but this cannot well have been the version seen at Birmingham, the dimensions of which would appear to coincide with those of the original. Almost the only point in *At the Bar*, which recalls the Walker of the later years, the painter of rustic life set in landscape, is the pose of the woman's figure, which has in it something of studied elegance, of well-ordered design, which one would be more prompt to admire did it not too much appear as if introduced rather than observed. What is gained in harmony is lost in tragic intensity and significance.

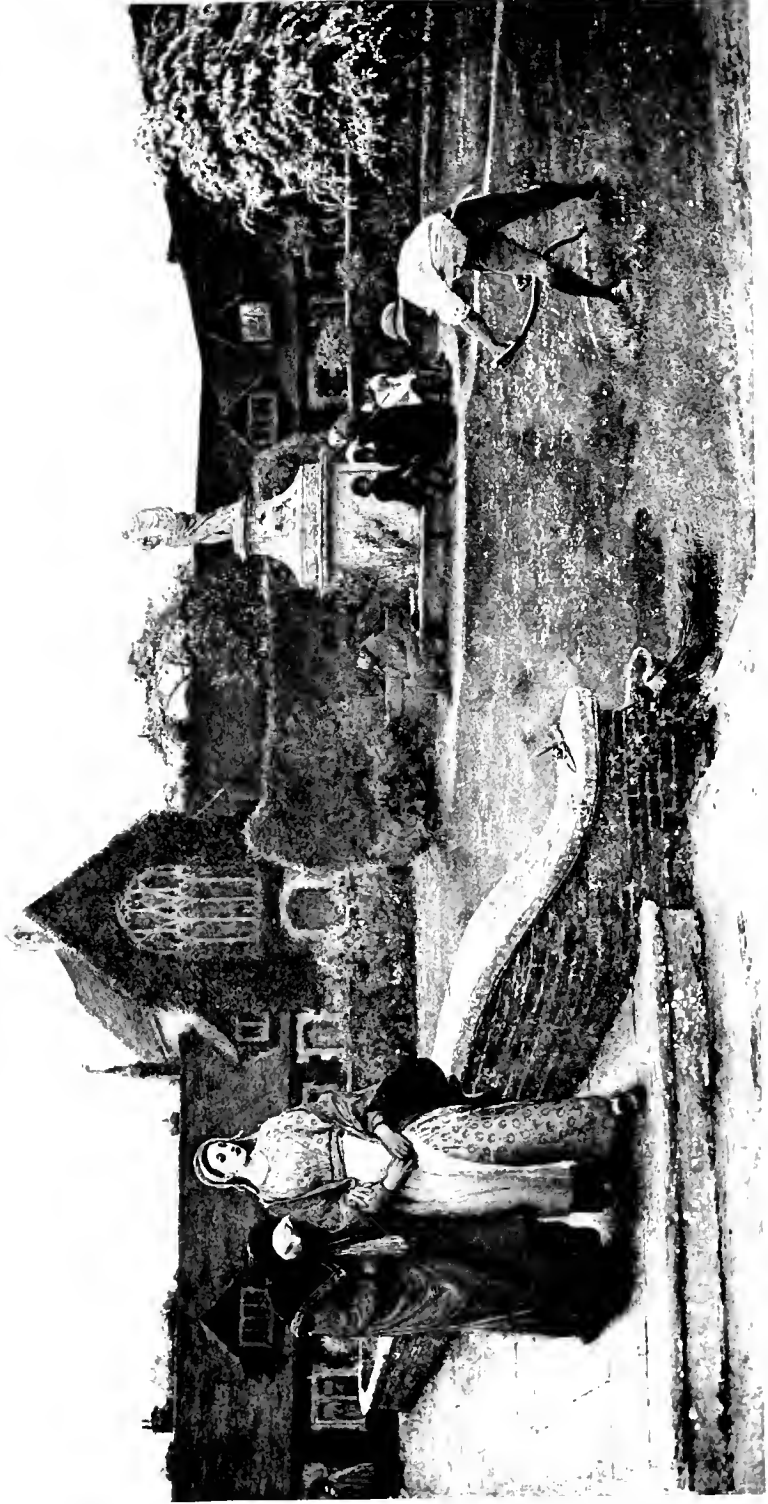
Among the water-colour drawings exhibited in 1874 may be noted *A Girl at a Stile*; *The Housewife*, showing a woman seated in a courtyard shelling peas; and *The Old Farm Garden*. This last is one of the English garden subjects, to which the painter knew how to impart so much charm, but hardly one of the best.

To the year 1872 belongs *The Harbour of Refuge*, which is perhaps

the most widely appreciated of all Walker's works, and certainly contains the very essence of his latest style, with all its beauties and most of its defects. Nothing could well be lovelier than the *mise-en-scène* he has chosen to enframe his figures, this red-brick, purple-toned quadrangle of buildings,<sup>1</sup> with the finely-placed and finely-composed statue on its pedestal in the middle of the greensward made bright with star-like blossoms, with its flowering may-tree, only less beautiful than the one in *The first Swallow*. True, the apricot sky makes as usual with the brown flesh tones and the broken reds of the buildings a harmony too hot in its richness; but the combinations are in their way exquisite all the same. Most skilful use is made of different tints of blue, from deep rich indigo to a shade which is nearly grey, in relieving somewhat this over-richness. Nowhere has Walker lavished a greater skill on the painting of detail, or given a more jewel-like quality to his work, than in certain passages here; and yet there are many signs of a broadening of technique such as is not to be traced in earlier examples.

To judge firstly the pictorial, and secondly the human significance of *The Harbour of Refuge*, one must analyse it into its component parts, since it lacks unity not less of general impression than of composition. Not that the absence of a definite subject of the sentimental and anecdotic type is to be blamed; on the contrary, this is to be counted here and elsewhere as one of Walker's greatest merits. It is that his peculiar system of elaboration from several distinct centres renders his work difficult to take into the eye or the mind as whole, and appreciably best by passing from one to another of its motives. The best episode in the picture is the pathetically suggestive central group gathered round the statue in the centre of the quadrangle—that of the shipwrecked of life, anchored at last in a safe harbour after many storms. To the right we have the well-known figure of the mower, more classical still than the fustian-clad divinity of the *Old Gate*, and more self-conscious in its measured grace. To the left, slowly moving along the stone terrace, from which descends a flight of steps is a group more admired still, that of the sturdy, red-haired lass who, dreaming as she walks, supports on her strong young arm a poor old dame, *sans* eyes, *sans* teeth, *sans* everything: on the one hand dreams of the future, on the other dreams of the past. Here, as in the case of

<sup>1</sup> Studied from the Fishmongers' Almshouses at Bray.



*The Warriors of Retush*



the splendid young mower, the contrast between youth and age is moving enough, but too deliberate, too much forced upon the beholder, to attain its full effect. The composition is straggling and episodic; it lacks concentration both of line and motive, and as in *The Vagrants*, and *The Old Gate*, we have rather beautiful elements of a picture than a picture. We may each of us pick out our favourite figure, our favourite passage of lovely detail or colour, and from no part is beauty absent; but we cannot, without preliminary study, take in the impression of the picture as a whole, because it is not seen or felt as a whole.

The *Harbour of Refuge* is now, through the munificence of Mr. William Agnew, the property of the nation. Its present place is on a screen in the Turner Room, where it is crushed by its mighty surroundings—those canvases so tremendous in power, even when they are mighty mistakes. A finished replica, executed on a smaller scale in water-colours (collection of Mr. Humphrey Roberts) appeared at the exhibition of the Old Society in 1873-4. It is perhaps in some respects an improvement on the original, of which it retains the beauties unimpaired, while reduction of size gives greater concentration. The movement of the mower—but this may be fancy—appears in this version rather truer to nature. This last was in the group of water-colours by Walker shown at Burlington House in the winter of 1891, on which occasion it was, for not obvious reasons, re-christened *The Vale of Rest*. There exists an unfinished design for the *Harbour of Refuge*, which was No. 149 in the Memorial Exhibition of 1876, and also, in the collection of Mr. Somerset Beaumont, a repetition of the two figures on the terrace—the young girl supporting the aged woman—this being one of the last works upon which the painter was engaged.

To 1872 belongs also *The Escape*, which is the working-out in water-colours of a drawing done for *Once a Week* in 1862. This may be regarded as the precursor of the unfinished design, *The Unknown Land*, the two versions of which will be referred to a little later on.

In the winter exhibition of the Old Society of 1872-3 appeared *The Fishmonger's Shop*, which many connoisseurs have held to be our painter's finest achievement in water-colour. Daring and splendid in the harmony of its tints, so finely balanced as to produce that unity of tone most difficult to compass with contrasting hues of a frank brilliancy, it is nevertheless

more of an amusing, richly-tinted object-study than a picture in the truest sense of the word. The group which is the centre of the colour-harmony,



*The Fishmonger.*

the blue-aproned, rosy-cheeked fishmonger who bends forward across the marble slab as he offers his fish to a gaily dressed damsel in the habit of about 1800, though it is well enough placed in the brilliant ensemble,



lacks vitality and significance. The *tour de force* lies in the happy combination of the bright green woodwork which frames the shop with the blue-green and the red of the sparkling fish, with the indigo blue of the jolly salesman's apron, and the yellow and tawny of the girl's pretty, old-fashioned costume, relieved by the coral pink ribbon in her hat. This is undoubtedly a brilliant performance of its kind, a nearer approach to the *bravura* of the purely technical exercise than anything Walker has produced. Yet it is difficult to understand on what grounds Professor Hubert Herkomer, R.A., is entitled to speak of it, as he is reported to have done recently in an address delivered at the opening of the Birmingham Walker Exhibition, as marking the climax of modern English water-colour. To accord such a place to it is surely to take a strange view of the past as well as the present of that most national branch of English art. Walker repeated the *Fishmonger's Shop* on a smaller scale in a drawing which was not publicly exhibited during his lifetime, but was No. 9 in the Memorial Exhibition of 1876.

This year, 1872, marked the climax of our artist's achievement. He had inherited a tendency to pulmonary disease, and just now when his talent was still rapidly developing itself and his technical powers had matured to a point higher than they had yet reached, his health began seriously to decline. In 1872-73 (or was it 1873-74?) he took refuge from the severities of a northern winter in Algiers, but became restless at his severance from art and friends, and lost whatever benefit he might have derived from the African sunshine by his return to brave the cold winds of March. Like Bastien-Lepage, who fled thither a few years later in the vain struggle with disease, he does not appear to have been deeply impressed—at any rate artistically impressed—with the splendours of the North African coast. There is nothing to show that, like his friend and brother in art, Mr. J. W. North, he took to the Algerian scenery, or seriously sought to interpret its peculiar charm. We know that for him even Scotland appeared too vast and too scenic; that the homelier beauties of the Thames Valley, the English scenes and the English life had his heart.

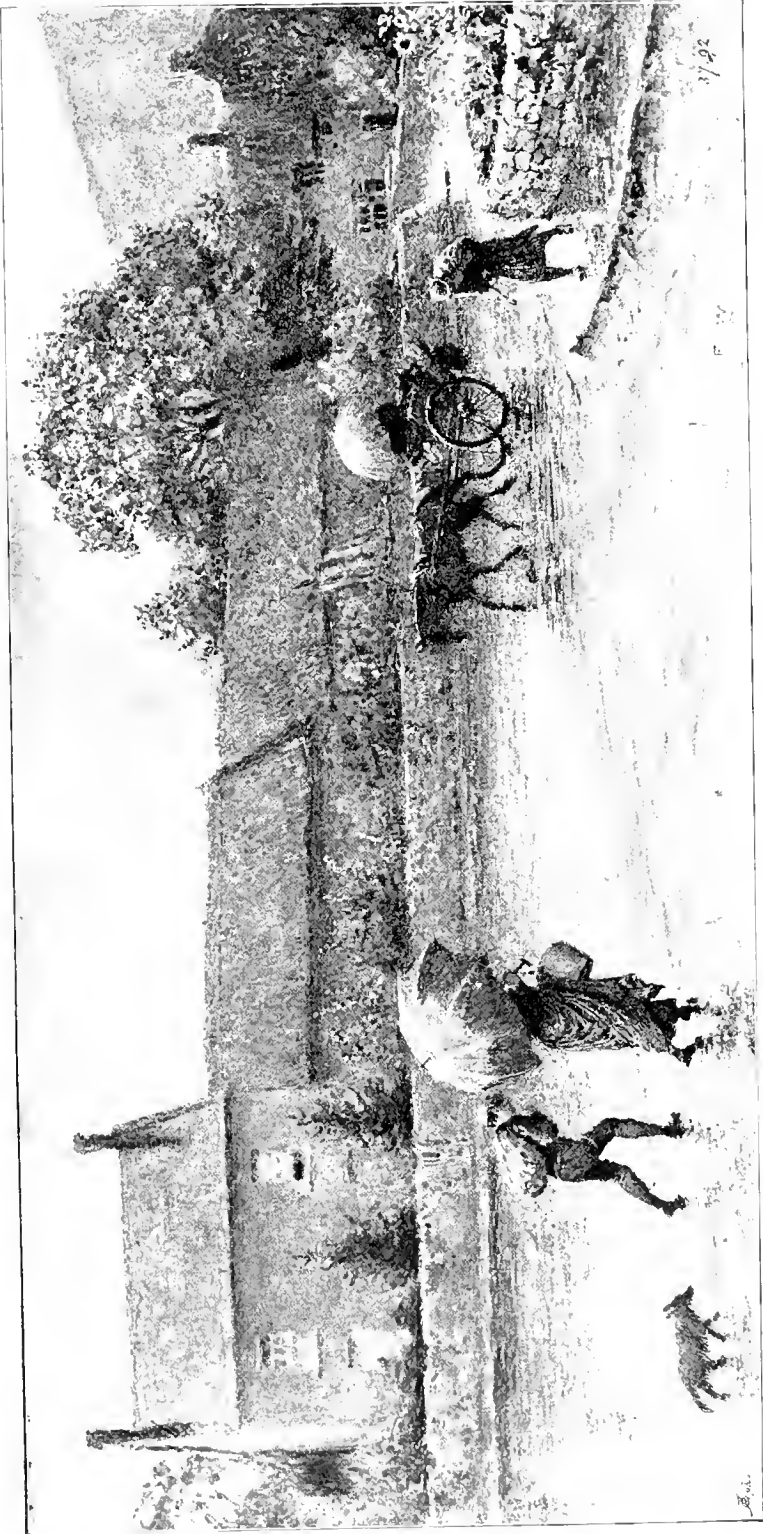
Walker was unable to contribute anything to the Royal Academy exhibitions of 1873 and 1874, and sent the Water Colour Society in the summer of the former year only *The Village*, the chief motive of which

is a red-brick bridge with little knots of country people on and about it. Marked by even more than the painter's usual truthfulness and exquisite-ness of detail, this is slightly more prosaic and topographical in its careful finish than other similar productions. The smaller *Harbour of Refuge* was in the same place at the winter exhibition of 1873-4, but he was unrepresented at the summer exhibition of 1874, while at the winter one of 1874-5 only *The Rainbow*, an interior with two girls looking out of the window, reminded the public of their favourite.

Things were rapidly going from bad to worse with poor Walker, and it is pretty evident that, seeing how strong was the predisposition of his family to phthisis, he must have felt himself to be in a grave condition. There is reason to believe, however, that the doctors fearing that his intense nervousness might precipitate the catastrophe, spared him the knowledge that the danger was imminent. Thus, if Walker exposed himself more than under the circumstances he ought to have done, he was, it may be hoped, spared the worst of all griefs to the man in whom sickness has not extinguished youth and genius—that of seeing himself slowly die and feeling that he died with his work only half done, with his ideal only half expressed, with potentialities within him of far nobler things than had yet been achieved. It was thus that Bastien-Lepage died inch by inch, after a manful hand-to-hand struggle with the grim enemy, and with him the agony of the light prematurely quenched, of the hand no longer nerved to express what the brain conceived, was far worse than the physical suffering of dissolution. On the 23rd of July of this year<sup>1</sup> Walker wrote to S. P. Jackson, who had offered to help him as to lodgings: "I fear I must give up the notion of being at the 'Thames' side this season, for since I wrote to Leslie on the subject I have had a letter from my doctor, who thinks I ought for this season to avoid the 'Thames' as 'lowering' and 'relaxing' compared with certain spots I have mentioned to him as good from an artistic point of view—and as there is some chance of my going to Scotland a little later, perhaps it is better for me to give up the notion."

To the Royal Academy he sent in 1875 his final contribution, *The Right of Way*, which cannot be classed among his most successful efforts. It depicts a meadow with a winding stream, in the foreground of which

<sup>1</sup> J. L. Roget's *History of the Old Water Colour Society*.



*A Rainy Day at Cookham.*

are two figures—a woman carrying a basket of eggs, and a little boy who, frightened at the advance of an ewe, clings to her skirts for protection.

While this picture was yet hanging on the walls came, with terrible suddenness, the news of the painter's death. He had gone to Scotland, to indulge once more in the sport which he so passionately loved, had been seized with a violent cold, which aggravated the most fatal symptoms of his disease, and succumbed after a very few days' illness at St. Fillans, Perthshire, on the 4th or 5th of June, 1875. He was buried at Cookham, his favourite Thames-side resort, beside his mother and a brother who had fallen a victim before him to the same fell disease. A memorial tablet with a medallion portrait carved in low relief by Mr. H. A. Armstead, R.A., was afterwards placed in Cookham Church by the painter's friends and admirers.

Among the unfinished works left behind was one canvas of importance, so far advanced towards completion that it has been exhibited on more than one occasion since the artist's death. This is called *Sunny Thames*, and now temporarily hangs in the picture gallery of the Guildhall, to which it has been contributed by Sir Charles Tennant. A little company of youthful rustics is seen fronting the spectator on a high bank by the river; one of them, a boy bigger than the others, sits on the edge fishing, his bare legs dangling over the rich red earth, overgrown with wildflowers and weeds. This figure is in itself, like so many of Walker's single figures, a noble design, but the picture as a whole is, perhaps on account of its unfinished state, unpleasantly hot and "foxy" in colour. It compares unfavourably with the much smaller rendering of a similar subject by George Mason, known as *Young Anglers*, and last seen at the winter exhibition of the Royal Academy of 1893-4. Here the bright grey sky, the pale waters, the landscape, the little fisher-folk seem all to fit naturally into one undivided and indivisible whole, which is just what the component parts of Walker's pictures so rarely do.

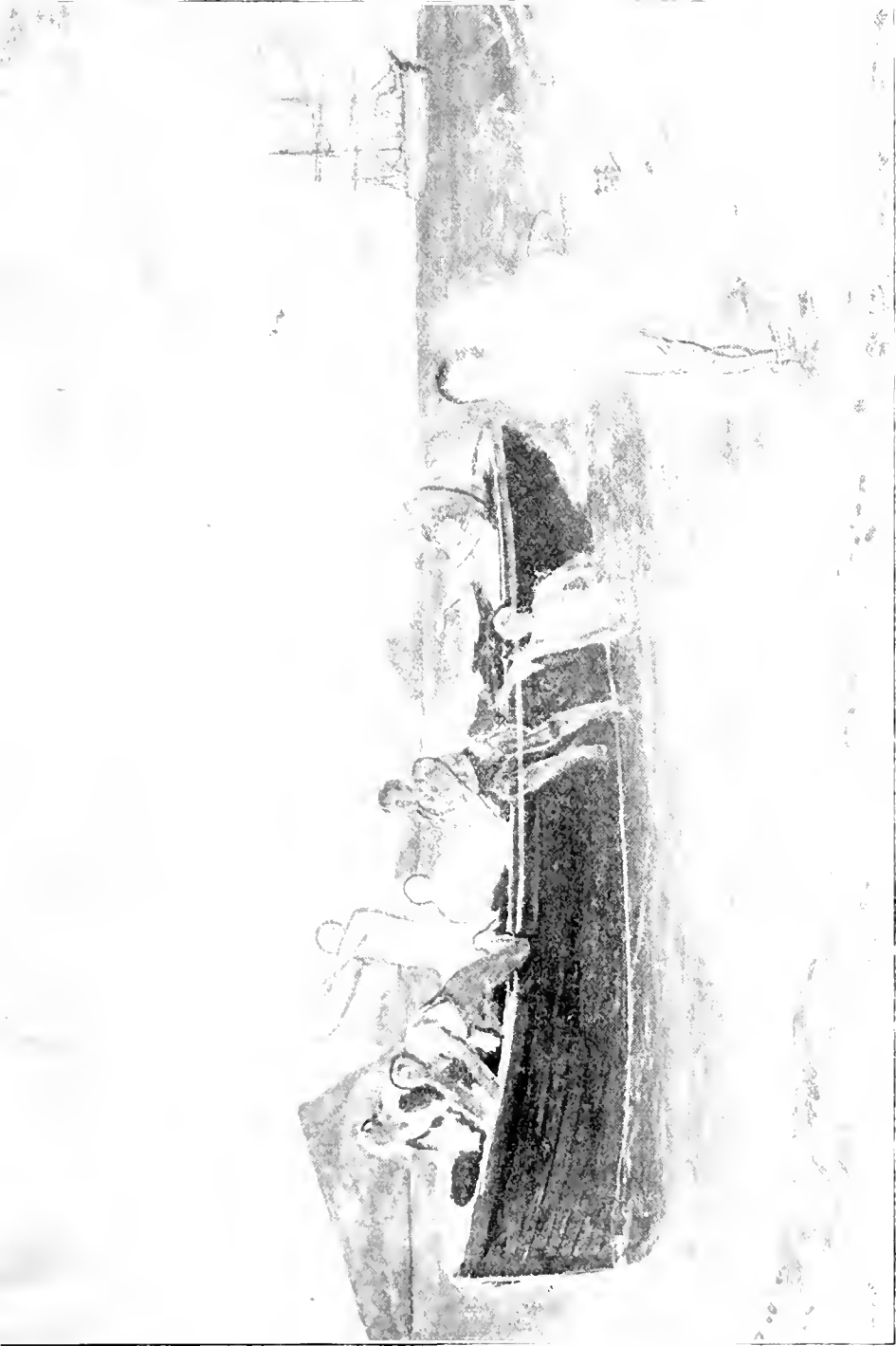
A peculiar interest, a peculiar pathos, attach to one composition, *An Unknown Land*, of which two quite distinct versions, both of them still in the stage of the preparatory sketch, were found with the ill-fated painter's artistic remains. It is hard to resist the conviction that here



*The Unknown Land. First design.*

solemn thoughts prompted Walker to revive an earlier design, already twice seen in progressive stages of development. For once he not only develops, but altogether widens and transfigures his invention. In the first of the two unfinished designs the boat of the explorers, who have reached the unknown shore, is being hauled on to the beach by statuesque, semi-real youths, such as he loved to depict, in a light which may be that of sunrise or sunset, but in its rainbow-hued changefulness is more like the latter. In the second and finer design—that belonging to Mr. H. R. Robertson—Walker allows himself to float away from and above the reality on which he has hitherto based all his pictorial inventions. There is something of the poet-painter's radiant vision, of the mystery and vastness of the unknown, in this bold powerful group, forcefully outlined against the blazing orb which rises, huge and awful, from the bosom of the sea, filling all space with its rays.

Walker etched a few plates which did not appear during his lifetime, but were after his death purchased and brought out in a complete set of six by the well-known print-publisher, Mrs. J. Noseda, of 109, Strand. The first of these were necessarily of a tentative kind, but in the later numbers of the short series which represents all that he had leisure to produce the progress in technique is very marked, and it is made clear that with more practice he might have commanded a considerable success in this side branch of his art. The etchings are published without any titles, so that by way of identification one has to make these for ones self. The first and most tentative of the set shows a girl shelling peas in the back-yard of a London house. The artist himself called it, we are told, after the huge butt which is a prominent and unlovely feature of the whole, *Mrs. Collins's Waterbutt*. This plate he took to his friend Mr. J. P. Heseltine, of Queen's Gate—the noted collector whose name there has been occasion to mention more than once already in the course of these remarks—and they bit it together. The result was not very successful, but it was the etcher's first attempt, and he was not then familiar with the small technical difficulties which nothing but experience can overcome. The second in order of date of the set we may guess by its stiffness to be the *Little Girl Eating Porridge*, a design more or less in the style of William Hunt. His own portrait, an etching which was never carried beyond the head, shows him with hair picturesquely



*The Uke von Landi. Seech. d. d. d.*





dishevelled—a typically Bohemian apparition. An unfinished study, more delicate and reticent than strong, has as its motive an old couple of primitive aspect seated in a kitchen—she working apparently at a stocking, he with a clay-pipe in his hand, and a beer mug at his side. Then we have a preliminary study, principally in dry-point, for the old man in *The Wayfarers*. Last, and best by far, comes *The Wayfarers* itself, that splendid piece of incisive realism to which reference has already been made in discussing the picture of the same name. The execution of the plate shows the artist very far on the way to high accomplishment as an etcher. For truth and power of suggestion these two figures are at least as fine as anything of the kind Walker has done, although they may not be acceptable to those who prefer the milder and less boldly characterized version of the oil-painting.

Not much has been said in the course of these remarks about Walker the man, and that for many reasons. In the first place his life was not, as regards its outward landmarks, an eventful one. Like that of so many artists of genius and ardent endeavour it was swallowed up in his life-work, and had no independent course.

Still, while nothing is more unsafe than to draw rule-of-three inferences from a man to his work, and *vice versa*, it is always interesting to study the artistic temperament—to note where it is at one with, where it diverges from the human personality. In England we are wont to exercise a certain reticence in such matters, and to refrain for a long space of time from lifting the innermost curtain which veils the private life of those whose works have made them in a sense public property. In France the biographer is franker, or more indiscreet if we like to call it so; and the result is that we get a more complete picture of the man, with those strongly marked lights and shades which naturally go to make up the figure of the creative artist. Thus not only the life but often the art is made more clear to such students as are not content with the mere surfaces of things.

It must be left to those who knew Frederick Walker, who were bound



*Portrait of the Artist.*

to him by bonds of friendship or family ties, to tell, if they can, the story of his all too short life, and fill up the outlines of the character to which not even his most intimate friends were sure that they possessed the key. It has been seen that from the very start he was nervous, feverish, excitable, of a physical temperament which is best described by the adjective *maladif*, while he remained, even to those brother artists to whom he gave his friendship and confidence, almost impenetrable on all subjects connected with his art. Not only did he never formulate or dogmatize, but he hardly ever even stated a point of view in words, or underlined a preference. The curious thing was that this physical unhealthiness never coloured his art, as physical disease has been known to do in the case of more than one great artist who could be named. All it did was to impart to it a more tremulous sympathy, a more regretful tenderness. It is easy to understand how, to a nature such as his, criticism—to which, indeed, the painter rarely, if ever, submits with the good grace which in the man of letters so often disarms antagonism—should have been intolerable. Even his most intimate friends, when they visited his studio, were not allowed to see the unfinished canvas; the easel was hastily wheeled round with its face to the wall! Perhaps, seeing what Walker's temperament was, he chose, in so doing, the wisest course. Mr. Comyns Carr has well said on this point: "With a nature so keenly sensitive his own criticism of himself was perhaps all he could endure. The advice of others, however well intended, would only have had the effect of paralysing his efforts." That this was indeed the case is best shown by the fact that adverse criticism induced him to obliterate in *At the Bar* what has been described by those who remember it, as "one of his most singular and exceptional efforts," and that he seems, if we may judge from the result, to have distrusted his power to improve upon what he had destroyed.

Mr. Hodgson, R.A., in *An Artist's Holidays*,<sup>1</sup> has given a vivid picture of his laborious method of conceiving and working out a first sketch:—  
 'Never did artist groan as he did in the throes of production. It was painful to see him; he would sit for hours over a sheet of paper, biting his nails, of which there was very little left on either hand; his brows would knit, and the muscles of his jaw, which was square and prominent,

<sup>1</sup> *Magazine of Art*, September, 1889, pp. 388, 389.

would twitch convulsively like one in pain. And at the end all that could be discerned were a few faint pencil scratches, the dim outline of a female figure perhaps, but beautiful as a dream, full of grace, loveliness, and vitality. A few scratches would indicate a background which seemed a revelation, so completely was it the appropriate setting to the figure."

Mr. Hodgson gives us in this same paper a fearless and searching criticism of Walker the man, the most complete in its sharp outline that we at present possess, though it errs, perhaps, in the failure to perceive that mind and body cannot in summing up, as he does, be dissociated. The irritating traits so vividly noted being manifestly but an outcome of the terrible disease which, as the writer himself records, from the first held Walker in its grip, should not have disintitiled the man to one jot of the sympathy which is so generously accorded to the artist.

It is necessary to quote further from this firmly sketched portrait; for the *De mortuis* is surely not applicable to men of Walker's stamp, but only to the smaller fry, in respect of whom British reticence and decorousness enjoin that an even balance should be struck:—

"Everything about him betokened an early death, not because he was frail and delicate, for frail and delicate men sometimes drag out the thread of life to great lengths, nor, as in the case of his host (Richard Ansdell, R.A.), was he in any danger from over-industry and application. His mind was not very cultivated; he was inarticulate, and his conversation gave no idea of his powers. His intellect, I should opine, was of rather a slow and lethargic cast. . . . There was a taint of hereditary disease in his blood, and its development was no doubt hastened by an abnormally irritable and sensitive nervous system. There was a strong tie of friendship between Ansdell and him, and nothing could be stranger than the contrast between them; the one a man of iron nerve, whom no fatigue, no misfortune or annoyance could perturb—proud, resolute, and self-relying; the other blown about by every wind, childishly elated at one moment, depressed almost to despair at the next. . . . When annoyed even by trifles, he was beside himself. He had a passion for telegraphing; when the fit was on him he would send off messages at intervals all day. It was terrible to hear him complain of the injustice and ill-treatment of which he supposed himself a victim, quite unreason-

ably as it appeared to me, as the world seems to have agreed to treat him indulgently, as a delicate and spoiled child of genius. He was passionately fond of fishing, and seems rarely to have touched a pencil when away from home for a holiday. . . . In speaking of painting, he once said that 'Composition is the art of preserving the accidental look,' which is as good as anything that has been said on the subject. He had splendid gifts; but some malignant fairy, some disappointed godmother at his baptism, must have filched away the most essential concomitant, without which even happiness seems impossible, the gift of a placid mind, and that equipoise of faculties which leaves the mind serene and imperturbable."

It is necessary to say a word or two more about Walker's relation, or supposed relation, to two contemporary Englishmen whose names have often been bracketed with his. In the course of these remarks the art of George Mason has already been discussed, and such a discussion is indeed inevitable when it is sought to give a picture of Walker and his time. While it would undoubtedly be wrong to assume an intimate artistic connection between the two men, or a leaning of one on the other, it is an over-statement of the true position to assert that the apparent relation between them is only a superficial one, depending upon their choice of subjects—upon their predilection for rustic figures of our own time, framed in landscape having more than a casual and exterior relation to those figures. The real link between Mason and Walker is that both saw the truth that harmony, grace, rhythm—the elements of style—might be revealed where they lay half hidden in the everyday subjects of to-day, and that without undue falsification in distortion; that the inherent pathos of life and of nature is not best expressed by pictorial anecdote or by a cheap sentimentality.

Whence each derived impulse and vivifying power must remain a point for inference rather than assertion. An effort has here been made to show what fired the train in Walker's case. The genesis of Mason's art is clearer, since we must take into account his long residence abroad, and the influence which Sigr. Costa cast over him on the one hand, and—as we do not know for a fact, yet must necessarily infer—M. Jules Breton on the other. It may be that the artistic passion glowed with less intensity in Mason than in Walker, that his genius was of a less original,

a less national, type ; but he was certainly the more complete, the more perfectly balanced artist of the two. His aim was—like that of Millet



*Boy Looking at a Dead Bird.*

himself, with whom he had otherwise little or nothing in common—to see men and things in a large synthetic way, to express the beauty and harmony of the type, not the individual ; to marry the human element

to the environing landscape so that the one cannot be conceived of without the other. Making the necessary sacrifices, and going perhaps too far—seeing what were his subjects—in the direction of elegiac grace and the suggestion of linked and balanced movement, he expressed his idea to the utmost, as Walker, torn by the two conflicting currents of his nature and his will, was never able to do. We may find passages in *The Plough*, *The Old Gate*, *The Harbour of Refuge*, that move us more deeply, that have a more penetrating, a more intimate charm than anything in *The Evening Hymn*, *The Harves Moon*, or *An English Pastoral*. We may note in Walker's work wonders of delicate execution such as Mason did not attempt; but as works of art, as things of absolute accomplishment in their own particular way, Mason's best productions must take precedence of Walker's.

It is well known that personal sympathy, as well as a certain community of aim in art, closely united Walker to another contemporary, Mr. J. W. North, A.R.A. It has even been said by those well qualified to speak on the point, that after Walker had become acquainted with Mr. North, his colour became less chalky, more various and richer, his landscape "took a deeper, richer glow in the shadows, as if in the twilight they exhaled the heat of the long summer day." This might well be so, since the relation between the landscape of the two artists is manifest even to those who have never heard of their personal connection. On the other hand, we have seen how self-centred Walker was, no less in art than in life; that he was open on occasion to impulse from without, but much less easily to an influence affecting the minutiae of technique. There are no such startling breaks or leaps in the evolution of his landscape as absolutely to preclude us from assuming that it was self-developed; so that its exact relation to Mr. North's must remain a point to be decided by individual appreciation, unless further and more direct evidence be brought to bear upon it by those near to the sources of information. It was a happy inspiration of the Royal Society of Birmingham Artists to juxtapose in their recent exhibition the works of the two painters. While the undefined relation between them was affirmed, it was made additionally clear that Walker, whatever he may have owed to his friend and companion in art, ended by overshadowing him on his own ground. The strength, the definiteness of Walker's draughtsmanship, the firmness

and beauty of his patient yet never trivial execution, caused Mr. North's landscapes, with all the over-subtlety of their loving elaboration, with all the charm of their tangled luxuriance, to look a little pale and ineffectual.

Mr. Hodgson, elsewhere in the sketch from which so much has already been quoted, thus praises the painter :—"To Walker we may truly apply Charles Lamb's words, 'Upon him his subject has so acted that it has seemed to direct him, not to be arranged by him.' He had the divine faculty of inward sight ; his vision was slow to obey the summons, he had to perform many exorcisms and incantations, but it arose at last, and once there he held it fast."

This is high praise indeed, and fully deserved by the earlier, if not wholly by the more mature works of the artist. The Walker of *The Lost Path*, of *Philip in Church*, of *The First Swallow*, even up to a certain point the Walker of *The Bathers*, was so acted upon as to be directed by his subject. The Walker of the works by which his highest fame has been won, of *The Vagrants*, *The Old Gate*, *The Plough*, *The Harbour of Refuge*, was acted upon by conflicting influences, and finally drawn to adopt or rather to form a style which was not, in the opinion of the writer, that in which his genius could find the freest and truest expression. It matters little, after all, whence came the spark which set alight again his dormant love of Greek art, with its essential characteristics of synthetic simplicity and idealised truth. On the one hand, his blood was fired with the desire to evoke, to lay bare, the hidden classicality in nature, on the other the very minuteness of the gaze which he lovingly fixed upon humanity and nature rendered him incapable of the sacrifices necessary to the attainment of the classic ideal. He must perforce dwell on every lineament of the human face, on the individual man, not on man the type or the class. He loved every blossom, every leaf, every branch, every meadow, every eddy of the stream, every turn of the road, every moss-grown stone and purple-red tile of the house ; from nothing beautiful under the heavens could he bring himself to part. Necessarily he thus sacrificed much ; putting force and unity of impression, largeness and simplicity of intention and execution, truth of atmospheric envelopment, into the background, and preferring to them exquisiteness of local truth and wealth of isolated and highly developed motives. Thus, when

he willed to be Greek *quand même* in depicting English rustic life, and yet to remain realistic and truthful, he was manifestly, with his individuality, and with his artistic equipment, striving for the impossible. Unconsciously he was induced to force into, instead of evolving from, his rustic figures a classicity, a rhythmic grace, which might well lurk in



*Onion in Flower.*

them, but which the portraitist of the individual did not and could not go the right way about to lay bare.

It was otherwise with Jean-François Millet, whose name naturally presents itself in this connection. It is by a legitimate process of synthesis, such as the Greeks themselves adopted, by stripping off the outer husks of men and things, by effacing the individual and leaving only the general and typical, that he arrived at a true classicity more



nearly akin to the Greek spirit than anything that modern art can show. His peasants are not the "ambitieux" that Delacroix called them, because they are unconscious that they represent more than *The Sower*, *The Gleaners*, *The Man with the Hoe*, *The Shepherdess Tending her Sheep*, *The Washer-Woman*, *The Slayers of Swine*. Still, they are not only magnificent pictures of the things for which they primarily stand—pictures in which the higher and more typical truth is secured by the sacrifice of the lower—but they are the noblest representations of humanity in its struggle with Nature—mother or step-mother. Who shall quarrel with Millet if his *Man with the Hoe* typifies all labour with its never-ending outlook; if his *Mother watching her Child* is all maternity with its untiring solicitude? Who shall complain if on many another canvas that could be named, he shows—as the painter, not the lyrist or the argumentative man of letters—the indefinable links between man, the higher, nobler animal, but still the animal, and the patient beasts of burden of whom he is one—between man and the earth, which is to conquer and cover him at last?

It may well be doubted, as those who know Walker best have doubted, whether, with the peculiar artistic temperament, with the peculiar quality of artistic vision which marked all that he produced, he would ever have acquired the unity of style, the power of selection, the breadth of view necessary to give full value to the subjects he affected, if they are to be interpreted in the manner in which he in his later style strove to interpret them. It is probable that throughout he would have remained the portraitist of nature and of man—the rare and tender portraitist, it is true, prompt to divine the least obvious beauties of what he saw, but still the portraitist. This being so, and his very nature in its essence rendering it impossible that he should renounce the presentment of the individual so as to attain to the presentment of the type, it is not easy to divine how the vain struggle to reconcile two tendencies absolutely antithetical would have ended. Would Walker have persevered in the path upon which he had entered, would he have continued to elaborate works full of beauty—or rather of beauties—yet also of irreconcilable contradictions? Would he have sacrificed his tendency to the individualization of men and things in order to obtain that large synthetic grace, that sculptural harmony of line and movement after which

he so evidently thirsted? Would he with increased skill and increased sensibility have returned to the unquestioning simplicity, to the naive and true mode of interpretation of his earlier manner? As it is, it must be said, with all respect and admiration for a painter whose artistic personality is so exquisitely sympathetic, so interesting in its struggle for a more complete and homogeneous development, that we have in the art of Frederick Walker, as it presents itself even in its latest phase, promise rather than complete achievement, the scattered and even, it may be said, the conflicting elements of beauty, rather than beauty in the sense that beauty means unity, strength, and complete significance.

Whatever view we may take as to the exact place of Walker's life-work in the English art of this latter half of the nineteenth century, it is impossible to regard him otherwise than as one of the most interesting figures of that time; so isolated does he stand among the painters his contemporaries, so little does he owe on the whole to English or foreign example; so strenuous, so pathetic is his striving after the higher ideal as he saw it, or deemed that he saw it. During the years that have elapsed since his death his fame has stood higher far than ever it did in his lifetime, and there is as yet no outward sign that it has diminished or will diminish. It is possible, nevertheless, that posterity may not uphold to the full the view of the last two decades. As to this it would be mere presumption to hazard a prophecy, especially on the basis of an appreciation which is certainly at present not that of the majority. Even should a later and more dispassionate judgment not completely confirm the peculiar position accorded to Walker, if not above, yet at any rate apart from that of a home-grown artist of his day, it will assuredly assign to him a niche in the British Walhalla, and uphold his reputation as one of the most English of modern English painters—perhaps the one in whom the wistful tenderness which goes so far to redeem our time of trouble and misgiving, in art as in life, has found the most touching expression.

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