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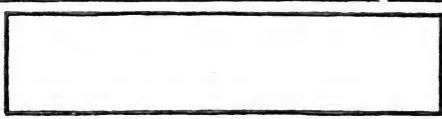


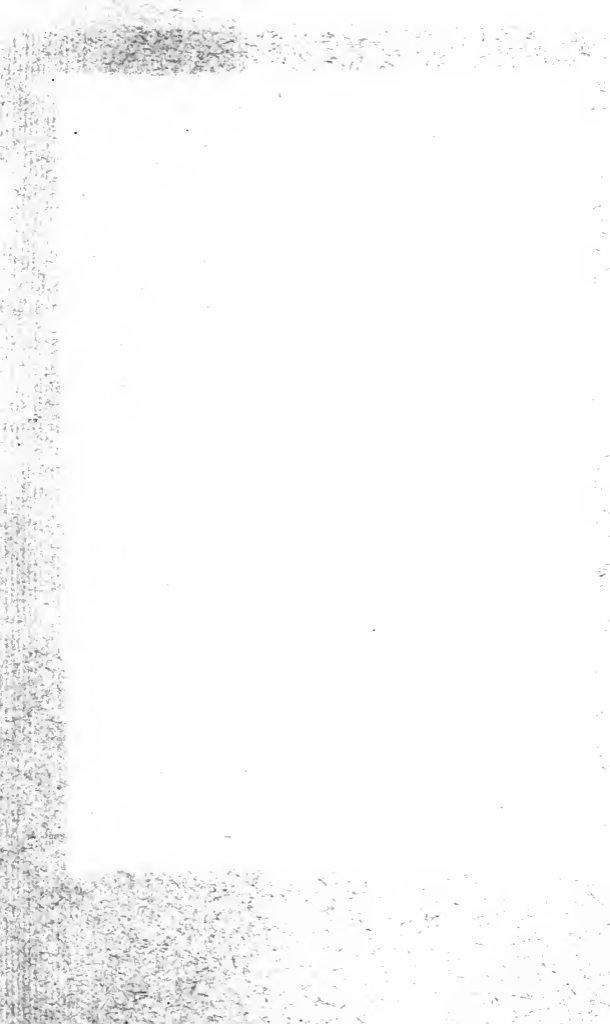
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JOHN  
CONSTABLE

By ARTHUR B. CHAMBERLAIN

DEPUTY-KEEPER OF THE BIRMINGHAM ART GALLERY



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**NOTE.**—The main facts of the artist's life have been taken from the very admirable "Life and Letters of John Constable, R.A.," by his intimate friend C. R. Leslie, R.A., in which the biographical details are so complete that the book must always remain the principal source of information for later writers.

# JOHN CONSTABLE, R.A.

## HIS LIFE

MUCH that is best in modern landscape painting can be traced back to its origin in the Eastern Counties of England, whence so many of our foremost workers in this field have sprung. In the narrow strip of country between the rivers Stour and Orwell two of England's greatest painters first saw the light—Gainsborough and Constable. Their youth and early manhood were spent in the valley of the Stour, one of the most lovely districts in East Anglia, where the rich corn-lands stretch down to the banks of the slowly-moving river, and the narrow lanes wander up and down between high hedges, bordered with a luxuriant growth of wild flowers, and noble trees overhead; where the white farmhouses and cottages, with their high-pitched roofs of thatch, stand amid the fields, or in sheltered nooks under a hill-side crowned with a windmill, while every few miles some village, with the church spire rising above the quaint houses, gives a human interest to the prospect.

The scenery is quiet and peaceful, but at each

fresh turn some charming view is opened up. It is, in fact, in all ways an ideal training ground for the artist; and it was this fair county of Suffolk which first made painters of both Gainsborough and Constable, as they themselves so often acknowledged; while it was the close and constant study of nature as seen at their very doors which laid the firm foundations of their future excellence in painting.

John Constable was born at East Bergholt, in Suffolk, on June 11th, 1776, and it was within a radius of a few miles from this village that he found the subjects of the greater number of his most celebrated pictures.

The family came originally from Yorkshire, but his great-grandfather moved south, and settled as a farmer at Bures, on the border line between Suffolk and Essex. His father, Golding Constable, was a man of some means, holding considerable property in the district. He was a miller by trade, owning the water mills at Flatford and Dedham, and two windmills near East Bergholt, all of them familiar friends to lovers of Constable's landscapes. At the latter place he built himself, in 1774, a substantial house. He married a Miss Ann Watts, and had a family of three sons and three daughters.

His second son, John, was so delicate at birth that he was not expected to live, but, happily, he soon grew into a strong and healthy child. When seven he was sent to boarding school some fifteen miles from home, going later on to Lavenham, and finishing his education in the

Dedham Grammar School under the Rev. Dr. Grimwood.

Before leaving school, at about the age of seventeen, his strong desire to follow the career of a painter had become evident to his masters, and on his return home he continued to spend every moment of his spare time in the practice of drawing and painting. His father, not unnaturally, was strongly opposed to his becoming a professional artist. In those days art, and more particularly landscape art, was looked upon as a most precarious method of gaining a livelihood. Mr. Constable wished him to enter the church, but as nothing would induce the young artist to consider this, it was decided to make a miller of him.

Constable, always a most affectionate and dutiful son, made up his mind to fall in with his parents' wishes, in spite of an ever-increasing passion for art. For about a year he worked with a will at the business, thus gaining that intimate knowledge of the construction and working of both wind and water mills, which he afterwards put to such good use in his painting.

He continued, however, whenever he could steal the time, to study and sketch in the lanes and fields round East Bergholt, and along the banks of the Stour, just as Gainsborough, who was at the height of his fame in London in the year Constable was born, was in the habit of doing in his youth round about Sudbury, only fourteen miles away on the same river. Constable found one other sincere lover of art in the village:

this was John Dunthorne, the local plumber and glazier, a man of superior intelligence, who gave up every spare moment he could snatch from his trade to sketching from nature. The two became inseparable friends, working together out of doors and in a small room they hired as a studio. Constable had now grown up into a tall, good-looking young man, of remarkable muscular strength; his regular features, fresh complexion, and fine dark eyes earning for him the distinction of being known throughout the neighbourhood as "the handsome miller."

About this time he made the acquaintance of Sir George Beaumont, one of the leading amateurs and connoisseurs of his day, whose mother lived at Dedham. Sir George was pleased with some copies the young artist had made of Raphael's Cartoons, and lent him some water-colour drawings of Girtin's to study, and also showed him his favourite Claude, the *Hagar* now in the National Gallery, which he carried with him everywhere. Constable always regarded this first introduction to the great French painter as an epoch in his life, while his admiration for Girtin was lasting, and had an undoubted effect upon his art. Without in any way neglecting his duties at the mills, it became so evident to his relations that his whole heart was set upon painting as a career, that in 1795 his father allowed him to go to London for opportunities of further study, though with no definite understanding that henceforth he would be permitted to follow art professionally. He took with him

a letter of introduction to Joseph Farington, R.A., a now forgotten landscape painter, trained in the school of Richard Wilson, who gave him much good advice, and predicted that his style of treating scenery would one day "form a distinct feature in the art." He also received considerable help and encouragement from John Thomas Smith, the engraver, known as "Antiquity" Smith, who, among other things, taught him the rudiments of etching.

For the next few years his time was spent between London and Suffolk. In 1797 his father lost a clerk who had been many years with him, and Constable seems to have made a final but useless attempt to put aside all thoughts of painting except as a recreation. His mother wrote to Smith that they hoped he would now "attend to business, by which he will please his father, and ensure his own respectability and comfort;" but in spite of many praiseworthy efforts, fate was too strong for him, and in the end he was allowed to renounce the mill for the easel.

On February 4th, 1799, he was admitted as a student in the Royal Academy Schools, and took rooms at No. 23, Cecil Street, Strand; but he got away into the country whenever he could. In this year he was at Ipswich, and writes: "It is a most delightful country for a painter. I fancy I see Gainsborough in every tree." In the summer of 1800 he spent some weeks in solitary study among the oak trees of Helmingham Park, which, later in life, he made the scene of one of

his finest pictures. In the following year he went on a sketching tour in Derbyshire. In 1802 he first exhibited at the Royal Academy a small "Landscape," and it is probable that one or two earlier contributions, including a view of Flatford Mill, were rejected. This latter picture he showed to Benjamin West, who consoled him by saying, "Don't be disheartened, young man, we shall hear of you again; you must have loved nature very much before you could have painted this." West probably did him good service, too, by persuading him to refuse a situation as drawing-master in a school, which Dr. Fisher, Rector of Langham, and afterwards Bishop of Salisbury, procured for him in 1802, telling him that if he accepted the post he must abandon all hope of distinction as a painter.

In the same year he writes to Dunthorne: "For the last two years I have been running after pictures, and seeking the truth at second hand. I have not endeavoured to represent nature with the same elevation of mind with which I set out, but have rather tried to make my performances look like the work of other men. I am come to a determination to make no idle visits this summer, nor to give up my time to commonplace people. I shall return to Bergholt, where I shall endeavour to get a pure and unaffected manner of representing the scenes that may employ me. *There is room enough for a natural painter.*"

In 1803 he exhibited two "Landscapes," and two "Studies from Nature," and in April made



a trip from London to Deal in an East Indiaman. In the following year he attempted a new form of art, an altarpiece for Brantham Church, near Bergholt. It was a composition of life-size figures, the subject being "Christ Blessing little Children," but it had little if any merit, and after one other attempt of the kind he wisely abandoned all thought of historical or sacred art.

In 1806, he spent two months in the English Lake District, making many large sketches, both in colour and black and white, some of which he exhibited in the following year, although he never attempted to paint a picture from them. The grandeur and solitude of the mountains overpowered him, and he turned again with delight to the quieter scenery of his native Suffolk. About this time he found some remunerative occupation in making a number of copies of family portraits, chiefly by Sir Joshua Reynolds, for the Earl of Dysart, and for several years he undertook work of this kind, which, although it kept him from the fields, was of undoubted service in improving both his sense of colour and of light and shade, as well as bringing in a little needful money. He continued to exhibit every year at the Royal Academy and British Gallery, and in 1809 produced his second and last altarpiece, a single half-figure of "Our Saviour" for Neyland Church, which was in all ways a better performance than his first one, but gave no promise of distinction in this direction. He was now on terms of intimate friendship with such painters as Jackson, Stothard, and Wilkie,

sitting to the latter more than once for characters in his pictures.

Each year marked an improvement in his art, although it was too unobtrusive to attract attention in the exhibition-room. Simplicity of treatment was a marked characteristic of his small landscapes, as well as a fine feeling for the beauty of nature. No one, however, showed any inclination to buy them, and his relations urged him to keep to portrait-painting as the only branch of art that paid; but his love of landscape was too strong, and although he occasionally painted portraits throughout his whole career, he was not uniformly successful. Though always willing to listen to the advice of others, he was most tenacious of purpose, and nothing could turn him away from the ideal he had set himself. "You know," he writes, "I have always succeeded best with my native scenes. They have always charmed me, and I hope they always will. I have now a path marked out very distinctly for myself, and I am desirous of pursuing it uninterruptedly."

In 1811 his friends became anxious about the state of his health, which was far from good. Love was at the bottom of it. He had become deeply attached to Miss Maria Bicknell, whose father, Mr. Charles Bicknell, was solicitor to the Admiralty. He had known her as a little girl as far back as 1800, as she was in the habit of paying visits to her maternal grandfather, Dr. Rhudde, the rector of Bergholt. The lady's relations, however, were strongly opposed to the

match, more particularly Dr. Rhudde, who undoubtedly had reason on his side, as Constable's prospects were far from brilliant, and in those days the artistic profession was regarded with some suspicion by many otherwise worthy people. Miss Bicknell's father was of a more pliable disposition, and might finally have given his consent, if it had not been for his fear that his daughter would lose all prospects of inheriting her grandfather's fortune, which was a large one.

The lovers were kept apart for five years, years of anxiety and to some extent of unhappiness, more especially to Constable, who was ardently in love, and had great difficulty in suppressing his feelings. Their correspondence during this period of waiting is given in full in the "Life" of the artist by C. R. Leslie, R.A., and it makes very charming reading. There is a delightfully old-world tone about these letters which makes them more fascinating than a novel. The lady was more cautious and practical than her painter. Having been strictly and correctly brought up, she felt that it was impossible to take any step against the wishes of her parents, and she saw clearly that marriage without means might end in disaster. It is impossible to attempt here any adequate quotation from these very real, if old-fashioned, love letters, which tell a story of constancy and fidelity unusually charming.

Throughout this period of uncertainty his health suffered continually, and he was advised to live as much as possible in the country; but he was busy with copies of pictures for Lady

Heathcote and Lady Louisa Manners, and also painted as many portraits as he could, with the desire of showing his friends that to follow art did not necessarily mean starvation. Happily for him, he had already formed the great friendship of his life,—with the Rev. John Fisher, afterwards Archdeacon, who was Chaplain to his uncle, the Bishop of Salisbury. The two men became the closest of friends, although Fisher was sixteen years Constable's junior, and to the artist, at least, this friendship was invaluable in many ways.

In 1813 his pictures in the Academy were *Landscape: Boys Fishing*, and *Landscape: Morning*. In the next year he was joined by John Dunthorne, the son of his old friend, who came to London as his assistant. His art, however, still met with little appreciation, so that it was an agreeable surprise to him to sell two pictures, the larger one, *A Lock*, to Mr. James Carpenter. In the summer he visited both Suffolk and Essex, staying in the latter county at Feering, near Kelvedon, and finding good subjects for his pencil, notably at Hadleigh, where the ruined castle greatly attracted him. In this year, too, he painted, entirely out of doors, the picture called *Boat Building*, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, a very fine example of his work at this period, perfect in its accuracy of detail, and full of sunshine and atmospheric truth.

In 1815 Constable's mother died. He was devotedly attached to her, and felt the blow very deeply. Only a few days afterwards Miss Bicknell also lost her mother. In the autumn

his father was attacked by serious illness, and in order to be near him, Constable spent some months at East Bergholt. Mr. Constable died in the following May; but the year, which began so sadly, was to end in a much happier fashion, when the constancy and devotion of five weary years were at length rewarded. Patience has its limits even for so tender-natured a man as Constable, and he now urged the lady so strongly to marry him in spite of family opposition that she gave way. They were married at St. Martin's Church, on October 2nd, 1816, by his friend Fisher, who came up to town for the purpose, and the honeymoon was spent in his rectory at Osmington. Mr. Bicknell soon forgave them, and though Dr. Rhudde gave no sign that he was reconciled to the match, he left his granddaughter, on his death in 1819, a very welcome and unexpected legacy of £4,000.

They began their married life in a small house in Keppel Street, Russell Square, where their two eldest children, John and Maria, were born. Their union seems to have been an ideal one, and Constable's art was never more perfect than at this time, though still but little appreciated by the public. It was not until a later period of his life that he aimed at those grand and evanescent effects of nature, which to-day cause his pictures to be so highly prized; at this time he was mainly occupied with her more simple aspects, which he rendered with a sympathy, accuracy and sincerity which have rarely been surpassed.

The year 1819 was an important one for him.

He exhibited at the Academy, among other pictures, his *Scene on the River Stour*, a placid representation of a serene gray morning of summer, better known as *The White Horse*, the largest and most important canvas he had as yet produced. It was, no doubt, one of the chief causes of his election as an Associate of the Royal Academy in the following November. His anxiety as to ways and means was also greatly relieved, not only by his wife's legacy from her grandfather, but by his own share of his father's property, which also amounted to £4,000. Fisher, too, proved to be a real friend by purchasing his *White Horse*, thus rendering him a service of the utmost importance at this turning-point of his life. The Archdeacon, who was a man of taste and judgment, as well as of sound common sense, was the first to thoroughly appreciate Constable's art, and he was unceasing in his encouragement, and liberal of help with his purse. Shortly after buying *The White Horse*, he purchased another large picture for one hundred guineas, as a present to a friend. This was the *Stratford Mill on the Stour*, with boys fishing in the foreground, which at Mr. Huth's sale in 1895, fetched 8,500 guineas.

The first mention of Hampstead is made in Constable's correspondence in 1820, in which year he settled his family on the Heath, at No. 2, Lower Terrace, though himself continuing to work in his studio in Keppel Street; and in the following year he exhibited his first picture of Hampstead Heath. He also sent his third six-

foot canvas, under the title of *Landscape: Noon*, the celebrated picture, now in the National Gallery, known as *The Hay-Wain*. In 1822, feeling the want of larger rooms, he moved to 35, Charlotte Street, Fitzroy Square, recently vacant through the death of Farington, whose advice he had found of some service years before. He still spent every moment in study and painting. Leslie possessed a number of large studies of skies, all done about this season, with written notes as to wind, weather, and colour, which show how he was always striving to improve his art by incessant study of the most fleeting natural effects. In this year he painted, for the Bishop of Salisbury, the extremely beautiful view of the Cathedral from the Palace Gardens, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum. (See p. 56.)

In the autumn of 1823 he paid a visit to Sir George Beaumont at Coleorton Hall, and stayed for a month, the longest time he ever spent away from home. While there he chiefly occupied his time in copying the Claudes and other pictures by the old masters in which his host's collection was so rich. "The Claudes, the Claudes, are all, all, I can think of here!" he writes to his wife. His opinions of the old masters coincided, to a great extent, with those of Sir George, but they differed very materially on many points of art and technique, so that warm but amicable discussions had frequent place. Sir George, whose "brown tree" has rendered him immortal, thought Cónstable much too daring in the

methods he adopted to obtain the quality of freshness in his pictures. On one occasion he recommended the colour of an old Cremona fiddle as a good model for the tone which should prevail in a landscape. Constable's only answer was to place the instrument on the green lawn in front of the house. At another time came the now famous remark, "Do you not find it very difficult to determine where to place your brown tree?" "Not at all," was the artist's prompt answer, "for I never put such a thing into a picture in my life."

In 1824 he exhibited only one picture in the Academy, *A Boat Passing a Lock*, a scene close to Flatford Mill, and one constantly painted by him. It formed a decided feature of the exhibition, and received more praise than as a rule fell to his works. "Its light cannot be put out," he wrote to Fisher, "because it is the light of nature, the mother of all that is valuable in poetry, painting, or anything else where an appeal to the soul is required . . . But my execution annoys most of them, and all the scholastic ones. Perhaps the sacrifices I make for lightness and brightness are too great; but these things are the essence of landscape, and any extreme is better than white lead, and *dado-painting*."

The most noteworthy event of 1824 was the exhibition of some of his pictures in Paris, which brought him more fame and recognition on the continent than he had ever received at home. Some French dealer or agent had been in negotiation with him for a year or more, and in the end



he carried off the *Hay-Wain* and *The Bridge* for the sum of £250, Constable throwing in a small picture of *Yarmouth* into the bargain. The two larger pictures were exhibited in the Louvre, where they had an immediate success with the painters, although many of the critics were annoyed by the freshness of the treatment, and the newness of his outlook on nature. In France the revolt against the waning classical school, with its lifelessness and over-smoothness, was just beginning, and Constable's pictures came as a revelation to more than one artist who was striving to get back to nature. Eugène Delacroix, in particular, was so impressed by them, that, before the opening day, he almost entirely repainted his *Massacre de Scio*, which was one of the great sensations of the exhibition. A friend wrote to Constable from Paris, that he had created a division in the school of the landscape painters. "You are accused of carelessness by those who acknowledge the truth of your effect; and the freshness of your pictures has taught them that though your means may not be essential, your end must be to produce an imitation of nature, and the next exhibition in Paris will teem with your imitators. I saw one man draw another to your pictures with the expression, 'Look at these landscapes by an Englishman—the ground appears to be covered with dew.'" He was awarded a gold medal, and an attempt was made to purchase *The Hay-Wain* for the nation. In the following year his *White Horse* was exhibited at Lille, and gained for him a second gold medal.

In 1825, S. W. Reynolds began to engrave *The Lock*, but did not live to complete it. The engraver wrote of this picture that it was "true to nature, seen and arranged with a professor's taste and judgment. The execution shows in every part a hand of experience; masterly without rudeness, and complete without littleness. The colouring is sweet, fresh, and healthy; bright not gaudy, but deep and clear. Take it for all in all, since the days of Gainsborough and Wilson, no landscape has been painted with so much truth and originality, so much art, so little artifice." The artist himself, in writing privately to so intimate a friend as Fisher, when he felt that he could give natural expression to his real feelings about his own art, says: "My 'Lock' is now on my easel; it is silvery, windy and delicious; all health, and the absence of anything stagnant, and is wonderfully got together; the print will be fine."

His picture of 1825 was the *Canal Scene*, better known as *The Leaping Horse*, from the horse in the foreground, with a boy on its back, which is leaping over one of the barriers which are placed across the towing-path along the Stour to prevent the cattle straying. In preparation for this picture he made two large studies, on six-foot canvases, one of which is now in the Victoria and Albert Museum. The picture itself a very splendid work which found no purchaser, is in the Diploma Gallery of the Royal Academy. In the following year he was at work on *The Cornfield*, one of his most perfect pictures (see p. 59), and also on a

subject which he repeated a number of times, the best-known example being *The Glebe Farm* in the National Gallery, a scene at Langham, in which he departed widely from exact topographical truth.

In 1827 his family had increased to six, three sons and three daughters, and he settled permanently in Well Walk, Hampstead, letting the upper part of his town residence. His affection for breezy Hampstead had grown very deep. "Our little drawing room," he writes, "commands a view unsurpassed in Europe—from Westminster Abbey to Gravesend. The dome of St. Paul's in the air seems to realize Michael Angelo's words on seeing the Pantheon: 'I will build such a thing in the sky.' We see the woods and lofty grounds of the East Saxons to the north-east." Some of his happiest days were spent in this house and its neighbourhood. Here his last child, Lionel Bicknell, was born on January 2nd, 1828. Other leading events of this year were the success of his large upright picture of *Dedham Vale* in the Academy, and the death of Mr. Bicknell, who left his daughter a fortune of twenty thousand pounds. "Now," said the artist to Fisher, "I shall stand before a six-foot canvas with a mind at ease, thank God!"

Unhappily his mind was not at ease for long. Throughout the year his wife was seriously ill, and though she seemed to be getting better during the summer, there was no hope; for her disease was consumption, of which she died on November 23rd, 1828. The blow was a terrible

one, from which he never completely recovered. Their marriage had been ideal in its happiness, and Constable was never the same man during the remainder of his life. He brought his children back to the house in Charlotte Street, and only retained the one in Well Walk as an occasional residence. In the middle of a very sad letter to Leslie, written in the following January, he says: "I have been ill, but am endeavouring to get to work again, and could I get afloat on a canvas of six feet, I might have a chance of being carried from myself. I have received a commission to paint a *mermaid* for a *sign* to an inn in Warwickshire. This is encouraging, and affords no small solace after my previous labours in landscape for twenty years."

On February 10th, 1829, he was elected an Academician. He had waited a long time for this recognition on the part of his fellow artists, and any pleasure he felt was embittered by the thought that it came too late for his wife to share the distinction with him. "It has been delayed until I am solitary," he said, "and cannot impart it." Probably no painter of equal genius was less known in his native country than Constable. When Wilkie saw his pictures in Paris he was indignant at the injustice of withholding full Academic honours from the painter of such splendid canvases. Leslie tells a story which shows how little his original art was understood or appreciated by his fellow Academicians. When he first served on the Hanging Committee, a small picture of his (*Water Meadows near Salis-*

*bury*, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum) which had been placed among the "outsiders" contributions by mistake, was rejected by the majority of his colleagues, only one of them crying, "No, stop a bit! I rather like that. Why not say 'doubtful?'" When Constable acknowledged it to be his, the Council at once saw its merits, but he refused to have it hung. In a letter to Leslie about his picture *Hadleigh Castle*, just sent in to the Academy, he says, "I am grievously nervous about it, as *I am still smarting under my election.*" He was, in fact, regarded by his fellows as a painter of the humblest class of landscape, and even the President, Sir Thomas Lawrence, seemed to think that he ought to be very grateful for his election, when so many meritorious painters of history and "high art" were left outside. Constable, on the other hand, both highly sensitive and bitterly sarcastic, did not disguise from the President that he considered it to be an act of bare justice rather than of favour.

The *Hadleigh Castle* received scant praise at the hands of the newspaper critics. On varnishing day the irrepressible Chantrey, after telling Constable that its foreground was too cold, seized the palette from his unwilling hand and passed a strong glaze of asphaltum all over that part of it. Constable, who stood behind him, said in great alarm to Leslie, "There goes all my dew!" and promptly removed it when the sculptor's back was turned.

About 1829 he began to prepare his *English Landscape* for publication, having secured David

Lucas as engraver. During the rest of his life he spent infinite pains and labour over this publication. In spite of so fine and sympathetic a mezzotinter as Lucas, it was by no means a financial success, and was a source of extreme anxiety and worry to the artist almost from the first. It was issued in parts, under the title of "Various Subjects of Landscape characteristic of English Scenery, principally intended to display the Phenomena of Chiaroscuro of Nature," and consisted of twenty mezzotints, in five parts, and was completed in 1833. It was followed by another series of fifteen plates, called "English Landscape." Both series, with a few extra plates (forty in all), were published in a single volume by H. G. Bohn, in 1855, under the title of "English Landscape Scenery." Lucas also executed magnificent engravings, on a larger scale, of *The Cornfield*, *The Lock*, *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows*, and some others.

In 1830 his principal pictures were the *Dell in Helmingham Park* and a *View of Hampstead Heath*. In the following year he was Visitor in the Academy Life School. He took his duties very seriously. Every figure he posed was taken from some well-known picture of a great master. He began with Raphael's *Eve*, followed by two from Michael Angelo's *Last Judgment*, and he always managed, by the aid of bushes and foliage, to give each figure some kind of landscape background. He dressed his "Eve" in a bower of laurel, which he called his "Garden of Eden," and his men were twice stopped by the police,

as garden-robbers, when coming from Hampstead with the greenery for it.

He suffered constantly from ill-health during these last years, especially in the spring, when he was often behindhand with his picture for the Academy, which resulted in over-work, irregular meals, and lack of proper exercise. In one of his many letters to Lucas he says, "I have made a great impression on my large canvas. Beechey was here yesterday, and said, 'Why d——n it, Constable, what a d——d fine picture you are making; but you look d——d ill, and you have got a d——d bad cold!' so that you have evidence *on oath* of my being about a fine picture, and that I am looking ill." This canvas, which Sir William may be said to have damned with no faint praise, was the famous *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows*, sometimes called *The Rainbow*, now belonging to Mrs. Ashton, which was in the Academy of 1831, together with a smaller one of *Yarmouth Pier*. The former was christened "Chaos" by one of the newspapers.

Although he was seriously ill during the winter, and suffered from acute rheumatism, he was able to finish his *Opening of Waterloo Bridge* in time for the Exhibition of 1832. This picture, which represents royalty embarking in state from Whitehall Stairs on June 18th, 1817, in the midst of a flotilla of gaily-decked barges, with many flags fluttering in the breeze, had been in hand for a long time. He had started upon it in 1819, and often took it up and laid it aside again. It probably caused him more trouble and worry than

any of his pictures. He had already completed more than one smaller version of it, one of them, which is in Mr. Humphry Roberts' collection, being painted from a point much closer to the bridge than in the larger version of 1832, which belongs to Sir Charles Tennant. It was a subject out of his usual line, and though he was tempted to essay it by the expanse of cloud and rippling water, the absence of any of his favourite rural associations made it in some ways distasteful to him. In it Constable, in order to obtain that "sparkle" in the local colour for which he was always searching, made perhaps his most vigorous use of the palette-knife, the instrument with which, as he himself said, "he had cut his own throat."

In this year he lost two of his oldest friends, Archdeacon Fisher, and John Dunthorne the younger, who succumbed to rapid consumption. The latter he had helped in a number of ways, and had recently established him as a picture cleaner in London. These deaths, following so closely on that of his wife, made the blank in his life still greater.

In 1833 he was induced to give a lecture on "An Outline of the History of Landscape Painting," in the Hampstead Assembly Room, and this he afterwards developed into a course of four, which he delivered in London. In the winter he had another severe attack of rheumatic fever, which lasted for so long a time that he was unable to exhibit any important picture in 1834. He had recently made some new and valuable friends in Mr. Evans, his doctor, Mr. Purton of



Hampstead, and Mr. George Constable of Arundel, a namesake only. He visited the latter in 1834, drawing fresh inspiration from the scenery of the Sussex Downs, and from Arundel he went for a fortnight as Lord Egremont's guest at Petworth. Leslie, who was a fellow visitor at the latter place, records that "his dressing table was covered with flowers, feathers of birds, and pieces of bark with lichens adhering to them, which he brought home for the sake of their beautiful tints;" and while at Mr. George Constable's he collected in bottles specimens of coloured sand and earth, and many fragments of stone. In passing some slimy posts near an old mill, he said to his host, "I wish you could cut off and send their tops to me."

His single contribution to the Academy of 1835 was the well-known *Valley Farm* or *Willy Lot's House*, which was done from an early sketch, and pleased even the critics. It was purchased by Mr. Vernon, and is now in the National Gallery. Mr. Vernon, when he saw it on the easel, asked if it were painted for any particular person. "Yes, sir," replied the artist, "it is painted for a very *particular* person—the person for whom I have all my life painted." Speaking of this picture to Mr. George Constable, he says: "I have kept my brightness without my spottiness, and I have preserved God Almighty's daylight, which is enjoyed by all mankind, excepting only the lovers of old dirty canvas, perished pictures at a thousand guineas each, cart grease, tar, and snuff of candle." When it

came back from the Academy he had another turn at it before sending it to its owner, and writes: "Oiling out, making out, polishing, scraping, etc., seem to have agreed with it exceedingly. The 'sleet' and 'snow' have disappeared, leaving in their places, silver, ivory, and a little gold."

In 1836 his chief picture was *The Cenotaph* (see p. 62), one of the few instances in which he chose a scene in late autumn for his theme. He also exhibited a large drawing of *Stonehenge*, of fine quality, which is now at South Kensington. He was much busied, too, with the preparation of the four lectures to be delivered at the Royal Institution. In December he wrote to Leslie that Mr. Sheepshanks was going to purchase his *Glebe Farm*, or *Green Lane*, "one of the pictures on which I rest my little pretensions to futurity."

In February, 1837, he had begun to work on his *Arundel Mill*, which he intended to make his best picture. "It is safe for the exhibition," he writes to his namesake, "as we have as much as six weeks good." But it was never to be finished, and was hung in the Academy after his death in its incomplete state. In March he was again a visitor in the Life Schools. On Thursday, March 30, he attended an Academy meeting, and walked home with Leslie afterwards. He appeared in good health, and they parted laughing. During the whole of the next day he was at work on the *Arundel Mill*, and though he did not seem well, it was put down to the strain of painting against time. He went out in the even-



*Hanfstätgl photo.*

*[National Gallery.]*

THE CENOTAPH.



ing on some business in connection with the Artists' Benevolent Fund, and after a hearty supper went to bed. Later on he awoke in great pain, but thought so little of it, that he would not allow his family to send for a doctor. He became rapidly worse, however, and was dead in less than half an hour after the first attack. No trace of disease was discovered at the post mortem, and the extreme pain he suffered could only be attributed to acute indigestion.

He was buried at Hampstead by the side of his wife. It was proposed by a number of his friends and admirers that one of his pictures should be purchased for presentation to the National Gallery, and *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows* was selected, as being from its "magnitude, subject, and grandeur of treatment, the best suited for the collection." It was thought, however, by the majority of the subscribers, that this great work was too bold in treatment to meet the public approval, and in the end the beautiful *Cornfield* was chosen.

Constable's character was stamped with both simplicity and nobility. He was faithful in all ways, both to his friends, to the memory of his wife, and to his art. No disappointment, no adverse criticism, could move him an inch from the path which he thought the right one to pursue as a landscape painter. His disappointments—and he had many of them—he always bore with a brave front, and with none of that continual railing against fate and his fellow men which has marred the character of more than one unappre-

ciated artist of far less capability than his. He had faith in himself, and was true to his ideals. The chief fault in his character was his bitterly sarcastic humour, which made him many enemies. He expressed his opinions on art and on the work of his fellow painters with a freedom and independence which deeply offended, and his firm belief in his own powers was set down as vanity. Fisher, writing to him in 1823, gives an amusing appreciation of one side of his character. "Where real business is to be done," he says, "you are the most energetic and punctual of men. In smaller matters, such as putting on your breeches, you are apt to lose time in deciding which leg shall go in first." His nature was a benevolent one, and he was constantly engaged in acts of quiet kindness and help, while the sufferings of the poor made a strong appeal to his sensitive temperament. He was a very entertaining talker, and noted among his friends for saying good things. The study of nature was his constant and chief delight, while his whole life was entirely given up to his painting. In his youth he was devoted to the study of music, but, unlike Gainsborough, he abandoned it when he found that it interfered with his work; nothing, in fact, was allowed to stand in the way of that, and so, by unceasing application, added to that passionate love of the rural scenery of his native Suffolk which first fired his genius, he became the founder of a new school of faithful landscape art, the influence of which can be traced throughout English painting from his time down to the present day.

## HIS ART

IT may be said with a large measure of truth that a profound love of nature made Constable an artist. The familiar scenes of his earlier years were regarded by him with such affection that he felt impelled to try to paint them. He knew by heart every foot of the country in the immediate neighbourhood of Bergholt and Flatford. Every reach of the willow-fringed river Stour was stored in his brain, down to the smallest details; every tree in the fields and lanes round his father's mills had been studied until he could draw each one from memory. The thatched cottages and farm-buildings amid the woodlands, or standing in the middle of a sea of golden corn, and the old churches whose gray towers could be seen rising above the distant pastures, he was never tired of painting. His apprenticeship to the milling-business, incomplete as it was, not only gave him a life-long affection for depicting old wooden water-wheels, but first taught him to study the sky, an essential part of the training of the wind-miller, to whom every change of weather is important. In this way he obtained that accurate knowledge of the shapes, movements, and colours of clouds, which forms so striking a feature in

his art; and this knowledge he increased continually throughout his life by the constant making of large sky-studies. The "weather" of his pictures is always one of the first things to attract the spectator. The bursting of the rain-cloud, the sunlight struggling through masses of piled-up cumulus, the rush of the wind through the bending tree-tops, the arc of the rainbow stretched across the leaden path of the departing thunder-storm, or the sparkle of grass and foliage after a summer shower, these were the effects which he best loved to paint, effects which he had so constantly studied that he could render them with a vivid realism. Constable's skies were no mere flat white sheets acting as a simple foil to his subjects, but a dominant part of the composition, just as they are in nature.

In his own day, Constable's point of view, and his methods of realizing it in paint, were quite new, and his art, therefore, was only appreciated by the few. The old traditions as to what should go to the making of a fine picture were still the sheet-anchors of the critics, and governed most of the popular landscape painting of the period. His earlier efforts, modest, quiet, and aiming only at a simple realism, passed unnoticed on the exhibition walls; and when, later on, his powers developed, and his portrayal of nature grew more vigorous and vivid, his pictures were subjected to much abuse and scornful criticism. His recognition by the Royal Academy was tardy. Many of the Academicians still regarded landscape as a minor branch of historical painting only worthy



of consideration when it aimed at the "grand style." He was elected an Associate when thirty-three years of age, and had to wait for ten years longer before full honours were accorded him.

It must not be imagined, however, that his art lacked all encouragement during his lifetime. The little band of his admirers constantly received new adherents, and many of his pictures found purchasers, though a number of them remained in his possession until the end. In France his success was immediate, and his art had great influence on a number of the younger landscape painters. When his pictures were first exhibited in the Louvre in 1824, the revolt against classicism was just beginning—a classicism more severe and more widely spread than in England, where Wilson and Gainsborough had laid the foundations of a real school of native landscape in the previous century, and where such men as Turner, Girtin, Cozens, and the early water-colourists were already at work—men whose early training had been on traditional lines, but whose practice was based upon a sincere study of Nature, resulting in the gradual throwing off of the useless fetters which only hampered their progress. In France the influence of David still reigned supreme, so that Constable's fresh, realistic painting came as a revelation, and was felt more vividly, and had more immediate effect, than in England. Here the true appreciation of the vital qualities of his art grew more slowly, and was far from universal for many years after his death.

Even in 1853 it was still so little understood that the editor of "Bryan's Dictionary of Artists" spoke of it as follows: "His mode of painting was peculiar; he neither imitated the ancient masters, nor the modern; whether he really copied nature, time will discover. The singularity in his pictures makes them striking. His skies are clouded, and his clouds turbulent; they are charged with thunder, lightning, and rain; and when the shower falls, instead of verdant freshness, his trees and meadows are covered with fleeces of snow. These appearances his admirers consider the proofs of strict attention to nature; that they truly exhibit her gloomy grandeur; and that the scattered lights are sparkling touches of genius distributed with a masterly hand. All this may be so; it is useless to dispute on a matter of taste; it will be for connoisseurs fifty years hence to decide on the merits of Constable's pictures."

In reading Leslie's "Life" of the artist one is struck by his constant protest against tradition. ✓ He never hesitated to express, and with the utmost vigour, his scorn for the connoisseur of his day, who only admired a picture when it was buried under a coat of dirty varnish, and built up on certain formulae, against which it was high treason to protest. He had, on the other hand, the deepest admiration for all that was finest in the painting of the old masters, and a thorough knowledge of the work of earlier painters of many schools. In his younger days he spent much time in copying their pictures, a practice he

carried on from time to time throughout life. He took a particular delight in Claude, and copied his landscapes with great skill whenever he got the opportunity. Ruysdael, Hobbema, and Rubens, among others, he studied in a similar way. In his letters he frequently writes with the greatest delight and appreciation of such painters as De Hoogh, Watteau, Gainsborough, and Turner, while his praise of the younger Cozens was extravagant. His own art, too, was influenced by his close study of the earlier men, and his system of chiaroscuro, in particular, was based upon their methods. In this way his art is connected with the masters who had preceded him, though he developed it upon lines which were essentially new ones, owing nothing except to his own genius.

Upon entering the Academy Schools he was obliged to follow the ordinary routine of work, and so gave a certain amount of study to figure painting; but he never followed up this branch of art, in which he was not fitted to excel. With the exception of his portraits, his only serious attempts beyond the limits of landscape painting were the two altarpieces already mentioned, which gave little promise of success in the direction of religious or historical art. He might, no doubt, have won for himself a very respectable position as a portrait painter if he had confined himself to it, as his relations wished him to do, but his love of landscape was too strong. He painted portraits from time to time at various periods of his career, and the best of them have

many charming qualities. This was, no doubt, in some degree owing to the knowledge he gained when making copies of a number of family portraits by Sir Joshua and other eighteenth-century artists, upon which he was employed as a young man. He was never really happy, however, except when at work upon a landscape.

His first efforts were based upon his studies of the Dutch masters, but from the beginning he was anxious that his art should be untrammelled by tradition; and was always striving to get back to nature, and to learn from her alone. He snatched at every opportunity of escaping from London into the country, where he gave himself up to painting out of doors, working from morning until night in solitary communion with nature. His art was late in its development, and even when he was twenty-five gave little promise of more than ordinary talent. His study and imitation of the older masters continued until after his thirtieth year, while his technical skill grew gradually more certain and assured; and it was not until 1806, or thereabouts, that his originality began to make itself evident. Until then art and nature had claimed him alternately; but it was nature which finally conquered. His true inspiration he always found in the rural scenes he loved so well. As Mr. C. J. Holmes, when comparing him with Millet, well puts it: "He regards them rather as things to be loved in themselves than as pictorial material to be disposed this way or that, as an artist's taste or knowledge might suggest. Hence his tendency, in holding

the balance between nature and art, is to an all-round compromise, and not to that abstraction and emphasis of particular facts which characterizes the best painting of Millet. Millet thus, in spite of all his 'local colour,' is the property of the whole world. "Constable remains the unique master of English rustic scenery."

Constable set himself to paint nature in her true colours. He saw that the most characteristic feature of his native country was the greenness of her woods and fields, and so he determined to paint her. Summer was his chosen season, when the foliage was at its brightest and finest. Only on rare occasions did he attempt to depict autumn with its glowing tints of red, yellow and brown. Green trees and green grass, illuminated through and through with sunlight, or glittering with moisture after recent rain, with patches of blue sky seen between masses of fleecy clouds, these were the effects which appealed to him most strongly, and these he strove to render in their natural tones of cool colour.

The aspect under which he painted English scenery was a new one. Until his time the ordinary practice had been for the artist to paint with the sun behind him, out of the picture, low down on the horizon, suffusing the whole landscape with a golden haze, producing those effects which Claude and Cuyp rendered so finely. Constable, on the other hand, liked better to work with the sun high above his head, out of the canvas, but still in front of him; and painted almost always *under* the sun. This was one of the

chief causes of the earlier adverse criticism of his pictures, as his point of view was too novel to be thoroughly understood, or, at least, appreciated by those who had been taught to regard the more usual method as the only artistic way of rendering sunlight in landscape. Constable's greatest peculiarity in their eyes, which arose largely from this habit of his, was the sparkle and glitter of white lights upon his foliage. This they laughed at as spotty, splashy, and meaningless, and nicknamed it "Constable's snow." He adopted the use of spots and points of pure white paint as the best method at his hand by which to render the bright light which all foliage, especially after rain, reflects from its countless surfaces, when seen between the spectator and the sun. As he grew older this brightness and sparkle, which he saw more and more on all sides, made still greater appeals to him; but his point of view was not immediately understood.

✓ The breezy freshness of our English climate was an ever growing delight to him. He loved the majestic roll of the clouds, and the brisk showers of rain which intensified the vivid greens of the meadows, and the flying shadows over hillside and valley. High noon was his ideal painting hour; rarely did the mysterious beauty of dawn or the solemnity of fading evening-light tempt his brush, though the few canvases in which he has depicted them display an imaginative feeling such as is not always to be found in the great body of his work. His continual delight in tempestuous weather called forth an

amusing comment from Fuseli, who said, in his broken English, "I like de landscapes of Constable; he is always picturesque, of a fine colour, and de lights always in de right places; but he makes me call for my great coat and umbrella."

✓ His realism was the realism of effect rather than of line or form, although neither line nor form were neglected in his earlier pictures. In these the drawing is accurate enough, and the details of the subject indicated with great truth to nature. A number of his studies of trees are to be seen at South Kensington, and these show how well he could draw, even with minute exactitude, when necessary; but as his art grew bolder, and his desire to set down the more evanescent effects of nature more intense, much of the detail was deliberately sacrificed in the attempt to render what were, to him, natural facts of much higher importance. Yet the art of his earlier period, in which he was content to copy nature at her simplest, and amid the most homely scenes, was, in some respects, finer than anything he accomplished afterwards. In the picture of *Boat Building*, already spoken of, painted in 1814, he has given many of the details with Dutch-like accuracy, and, with the cool grays and greens of his colour scheme, has reproduced, with admirable effect, the atmosphere of a hot summer's noon.

✓ At his maturity the qualities for which he chiefly searched were, in his own words, "light—dews—breezes—bloom—and freshness—not one of which has yet been perfected on the

canvas of any painter in the world." Chiaroscuro was another main aim in his painting, and one which he was anxious to get at any cost. "I was always determined," he writes, "that my pictures should have chiaroscuro, if they had nothing else."

His method was the exact opposite of that followed by the English Pre-Raphaelites, who patiently finished their pictures inch by inch. ✓ Constable carried on every part of his subject together, first laying in all the masses in a dead colour, and then working in the details gradually, so that at no time was any particular portion advanced much beyond the rest, until the whole picture was finished. In this way he was able to give his attention to those subtle gradations of light and shade and colour which to him were the loveliest aspects of landscape, and in capturing them for the admiration of posterity he was obliged to abandon a too careful delineation of details of form. This constant attempt to depict ✓ these more evanescent truths, and that brightness of nature in sunlight which is almost beyond the power of mere paint to express, was, no doubt, the chief cause of his peculiar method of execution, which was laughed at by many of his contemporaries. He became a brilliant, perhaps too brilliant wielder of the palette knife, the use of which he sometimes carried to excess. The almost immoderate use of it can be seen in such pictures as *The Opening of Waterloo Bridge*, and the full-sized studies of the *Leaping Horse* and *The Hay-Wain*.



These unusual methods of manipulation were not practised by him with any idea of catching the public eye by means of eccentricity, for he was always scornful of public opinion. He gradually evolved them in his search after a perfect rendering of those grand and more transient atmospheric effects which he found it impossible to express with freedom by a more laborious finish or execution. By laying in most of his pictures with the palette knife he obtained great broadness and flatness of touch, and also the full purity of the pigments he used.

His study of nature had been so careful and so unceasing, and his memory was so accurate, that he gradually gave up painting pictures directly from the scene itself, but relied instead upon studies and sketches made out of doors. It was his frequent habit before beginning an important canvas, to make a large sketch of the subject of the same size as the finished work, to which he made constant reference. His procedure on such occasions is described by Redgrave as follows: "The subjects are laid in with a knife, with great breadth and a grand and large manner. Various glazings have then been passed over the parts, to bring together and enrich them (even the skies are glazed)—and then the whole has again had enhancing points of colour added, brightness and daylight being obtained by further draggings and knife-touches. With the exception of the glazings it would seem as if the brush had not been used upon them; hence there is a complete absence of any detail. Having carried the

study thus far he would leave it without further completion, perhaps fearing to lose what he was so satisfied with—and begin again on a new canvas, endeavouring to retain the fine qualities of the studied sketch, adding to it such an amount of completeness and detail as could be given without loss of the higher qualities of breadth and general truth." Such studies as these Constable looked upon as his working-tools, and very seldom parted with them. He had no objection, he used to say, to part with the corn, but he would not let go the field which grew it. They enabled him, in fact, to keep his finished work up to the right pitch. No completed picture can equal the brilliancy and abandon of a sketch, because the vividness of a rapid impression becomes dulled in the process of so-called "finish."

✓ These qualities of his art, this perpetual seeking after freshness, even at the sacrifice of "breadth" and repose, this scattering of light and shade in emulation of natural sunshine, were too little understood by the professional critics of his day. Even Ruskin was unjust to him, possibly because he lacked the infinite variety and poetic imagination of Turner. He cannot help praising him for his loving, faithful study of nature, but he qualifies his appreciation by adding: "The feelings of Constable with respect to his art might be almost a model for the young student were it not that they err a little on the other side, and are perhaps in need of chastening and guiding from the work of his fellow-men.

We should use pictures, not as authorities, but as comments on nature ; just as we use divines, not as authorities, but as comments on the Bible. Constable, in his dread of saint-worship, excommunicates himself from all benefit of the church, and deprives himself of much instruction from the scripture to which he holds because he will not accept aid in the reading of it from the learning of other men."

The answer to such criticism is a simple one. Constable did make use of the learning of other men, and carried this habit throughout his life. That he would not allow the lessons he learnt from them to stand in the way of his endeavour to depict certain aspects in nature which had not hitherto been attempted in art is equally true. Wider knowledge of his paintings would have made this clear to Ruskin, who proceeds with further sweeping assertions, which display a strange lack of power to appreciate the finer qualities of the artist's work.

"Unteachableness," he says, "seems to have been a main feature of his character, and there is a corresponding want of veneration in the way he approaches nature herself. His early education and associations were also against him ; they induced in him a morbid preference of subjects of a low order. I have never seen any work of his in which there were signs of his being able to draw, and hence the most necessary details are painted by him insufficiently. His works are also eminently wanting both in rest and refinement ; and Fuseli's jesting compliment is too

true ; for the showery weather in which the artist delights misses alike the majesty of storm and loveliness of calm weather ; it is greatcoat weather and nothing more. There is a strange want of depth in the mind which has no pleasure in sunbeams but when piercing painfully through clouds, nor in foliage but when shaken by the wind, nor in light itself but when flickering, glistening, restless and feeble. Yet, with all these deductions, his works are to be deeply respected as thoroughly original, thoroughly honest, free from affectation, manly in manner, frequently successful in cool colour, and especially realizing certain motives of English scenery, with perhaps as much affection as such scenery, unless when regarded through media of feeling derived from higher sources, is calculated to inspire."

This criticism is, in the main, strangely unjust. His early associations, far from being against him, were the main cause of his passionate love of nature, and made him a painter. It is impossible to regard his subjects as low ones, and it is not easy to understand what Ruskin means, unless he uses the term as opposed to grandiose. Constable painted the scenes in which he took the most delight. "I love every stile and stump, and every lane in the village," he writes in 1799, "so deep rooted are early impressions;" and that feeling remained with him throughout life. It is not true that he could not draw; even a casual acquaintanceship with the innumerable studies he made for his pictures, particularly of trees and clouds, is sufficient to show the unfair-

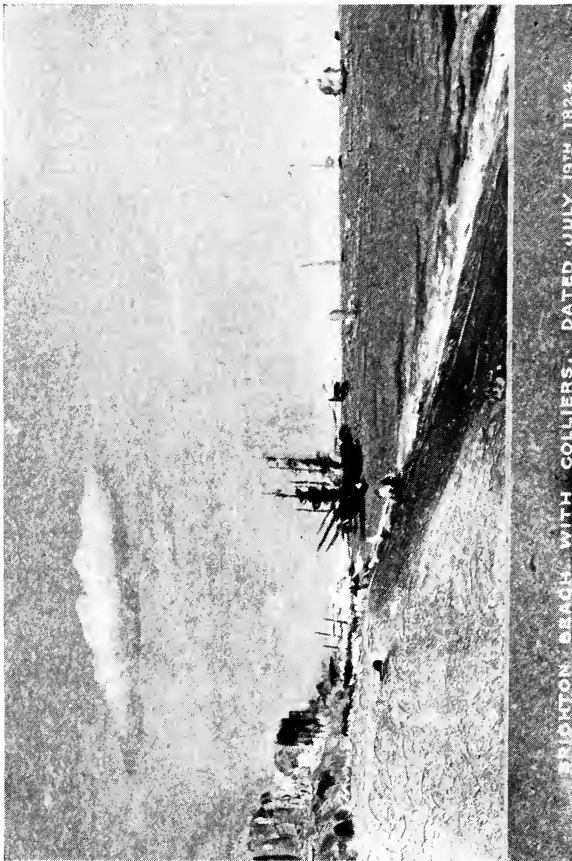
ness of such a statement, based, no doubt, on insufficient data. The "necessary details" of his pictures were purposely neglected by him in order that he might concentrate his efforts upon the rendering of what were to him higher and more important truths. The accusation of want of reverence in approaching nature would have been laughed at as absurd by those who knew him intimately. True veneration is to be discerned in this sentence from a letter to his wife, written from the country in early spring: "Everything seems full of blossom of some kind, and at every step I take, and on whatever object I turn my eyes, that sublime expression of the Scriptures, 'I am the Resurrection and the Life,' seems as if uttered near me." Again, what could be more reverent than this passage, taken from his last lecture: "The young painter who, regardless of present popularity, would leave a name behind him, must become the patient pupil of Nature. . . . The landscape painter must walk in the fields with a humble mind. No arrogant man was ever permitted to see Nature in all her beauty. If I may be allowed to use a very solemn quotation, I would say most emphatically to the student, 'Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth.'"

The charge of lack of variety in his point of view was voiced amusingly by his friend Fisher, who wrote to him in 1824: "I hope you will diversify your subject this year as to *time* of day. Thomson, you know, wrote not four Summers, but four Seasons. People get tired of mutton at

top, mutton at bottom, and mutton at the side, though of the best flavour and smallest size." Constable's answer to this charge is well worth quoting. He knew so well what he could do best, that though always ready to listen to criticism he paid little heed to it.

"I am planning a large picture," he wrote in reply, "and I regard all you say, but I do not enter into that notion of varying one's plans to keep the public in good humour. Change of weather and effect will always afford variety. What if Vander Velde had quitted his sea-pieces, or Ruysdael his water-falls, or Hobbema his native woods? The world would have lost so many features in art. I know that you wish for no material alteration, but I have to combat from high quarters—even from Lawrence—the plausible argument that *subject* makes the picture. Perhaps you think an evening effect might do; perhaps it might start me some new admirers, but I should lose many old ones. I imagine myself driving a nail; I have driven it some way, and by persevering I may drive it home; but quitting it to attack others, though I may amuse myself, I do not advance beyond the first, while that particular nail stands still. No man who can do any one thing well will be able to do any other different thing equally well; and this is true even of Shakespeare, the greatest master of variety."

This creed he always carried out in practice. He struck at few nails, but they were large ones. He had sense enough to see that his genius was



BRIGHTON BEACH, WITH COLLIERS. DATED JULY 19TH 1824.

*Gray photo.*

*[Victoria and Albert Museum.]*

**BRIGHTON BEACH, WITH COLLIERS.**





not many-sided, and so made choice of certain restricted aspects which appealed to his artistic sense more keenly than any others, and gave up his whole life to painting them more truthfully and powerfully than they had ever been rendered before. The nails which he drove home most deeply, were strength, depth, brilliancy, and vitality. His art, as Ruskin said, was essentially manly and English; and though it is impossible to follow the great art-critic in his statement that Constable did not know how to draw, yet it is perfectly true that as a draughtsman he was far below such men as Turner and Gainsborough, having little of their grace, delicacy, and swiftness and certainty of touch. The quality of force in his handling he sought for even at the sacrifice of refinement. "He painted prose, if you will," wrote Mr. James Orrock, "when compared with Turner, but it was splendid and virile prose, thrilling with sympathy and life."

Force is undoubtedly one of the most marked characteristics of the large body of sketches and studies, and hasty memoranda of effects, which he left behind him, very many of which are, happily, available to the student in the Victoria and Albert Museum, through the generosity of the Misses Maria and Isabel and Mr. Lionel B. Constable. It is, of course, impossible to attempt any description of them here. One of the most vivid and brilliant of them is the *Brighton Beach* (see p. 64), while the *Mill near Brighton*, No. 588, only a few inches square, is an admirable example, as within this small space is to be

found the expression of all those qualities which meant the most to Constable. The sunlight streams through the heavy clouds, and a black storm of rain is breaking on one side. It is filled with movement, glitter, and colour, and that freshness and "sparkle" which will be always associated with his name. Other brilliant little studies in oil will be found in the National Gallery, notably four bequeathed by Mr. Henry Vaughan. No. 1819, *Stoke by Nayland, Suffolk*, is extraordinarily powerful, and seen at a little distance, the dark olive green of the trees, and the bright blue and purple of the sky stand out with startling effect. It has little form, and has been slashed in with a palette knife with the utmost vigour. Its impressionism is curiously modern. The depth and brilliancy of the colour, and the great sense of movement in each of these four sketches is most striking.

No one has written with such sympathetic appreciation, or with so much knowledge of Constable and his aims, as Mr. C. J. Holmes, whose two volumes are essential to the student who wishes to grasp the true position and influence of the painter in the history of English landscape art. He is of opinion that Constable had reached his highest point some years before his death, and that during the last decade of his life his search after certain qualities in painting was gradually becoming so exaggerated in its expression that his art as a whole would have deteriorated. "The passion for brightness, movement and glitter," he says, "becomes increasingly

predominant, to the exclusion of graver artistic qualities, till at times the result is strikingly modern . . . In certain sketches he went still further, and by a loose tremulous handling caught the effect of atmospheric vibration. . . . The logical result of such experiments is scientific imitation rather than Art, and, though a longer life might have enabled Constable to become even more modern than he is, it is doubtful whether he would have added to his fame as an artist.

“The actual scope of his achievement is already wide enough. In early life his aim had been to find out how far the cool fresh colours of the skies and streams and fields and trees of his beloved Suffolk could be suggested within the then accepted limits of oil-painting. In middle age this aim was complicated by the desire of rendering effects of wind and storm, so that his work became the channel of deeper and stronger emotions than those aroused by rusticity in its every-day aspect. . . . After his fiftieth year Constable became a devotee of light and air. He found, as the moderns have found, that this devotion was incompatible with the traditional handling of oil-paint—with smooth shapely brush work passing by adroit transitions into a harmonious foundation of broken grey or brown, and afterwards mellowed by a warm glaze. To suggest the shimmer of wet grass and leaves in sunlight, or the intense brightness of the summer sky, he had to use paint fresh from the tube, loading parts of his canvas with spots

and masses of pure pigment, so that no single atom of illumination might be lost. His method, in fact, was almost identical with that of our modern scientific painters except in one important respect.

✓ “The essential difference is that Constable retained to the last his sound foundation in monochrome. Paintings like *The Leaping Horse*, *The Valley Farm* and *The Cenotaph*, with all their splashing and spotting and scraping and loading have thus a certain unity and dignity, which enables them to hang by the side of the paintings of the old masters, without looking garish or undecided. . . . It is only necessary to compare his work with that of his predecessors or contemporaries, to realize how vast was the revolution that he initiated, more especially in the matter of colour, which he treated with a combination of frankness and temperance as yet unsurpassed. No man has hitherto combined so much of that beauty of aspect which we all admire in the Art of the past, with so large a measure of the wind and sunshine which have become the conditions of the painting of our own day. Had Constable carried realism further, it might have been difficult to claim so much for him.”

His range may have been a narrow one, but within its limits he was one of the most sincere painters this country has seen. He was the first who attempted with success to place nature upon canvas with pigments that faithfully matched her true, rich, and fresh colours. Her almost unceasing movement he rendered with a master-hand, ✓

so that his pictures are full of life, and one can almost hear the rush of the wind through the tree tops, or the lashing of the rain upon the leaves. He felt the majesty of the tempest and the thunder-cloud, and the beauty of the rainbow which signals the storm's departure. "Sunshine and Shower" would serve admirably for the title of many of his works; for these were the effects he painted most constantly, and with the greatest truth and power.

## OUR ILLUSTRATIONS

**H**APPILY for the lover of English landscape-painting, the whole range of Constable's art is admirably illustrated in the National Gallery, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Diploma Gallery of the Royal Academy, and the British Museum; and it is possible, therefore, to study it with ease and completeness, and without that expenditure of time and money which is so often necessary before the life-work of a painter can be seen in something like its entirety. Many of his masterpieces are, of course, in private possession, but a number of these have been exhibited from time to time in the Winter Exhibitions of the Royal Academy and elsewhere in London, through the generosity of the owners, so that the materials for a full appreciation of his genius are unusually abundant.

Most of the pictures included among the eight illustrations in this little book are well known even to those who are ignorant of much that Constable accomplished. It is almost impossible to do more than scant justice to his landscapes when reproduced on so small a scale; but they may serve to bring to those who have studied the originals a quickened memory of their beauty,

and may, perhaps, induce others who are ignorant of the fresh and stimulating art of this great painter, to go to the pictures themselves, and thus form an acquaintanceship which will be an abiding delight to them. In addition, an example of Constable's portrait-painting has been included, as his work in this direction is met with very rarely.

The title of one of the pictures which Constable sent to the Royal Academy in 1817 was *A Scene on a Navigable River*. In all probability this was the landscape called *Flatford Mill, on the River Stour*, now in the National Gallery, No. 1273, which is signed and dated "Jno. Constable f. 1817." He had exhibited a picture of *Flatford Mill* in 1812, in which, Benjamin West told him, he had attained "real excellence." He was, indeed, so much in the habit of painting a favourite subject over and over again, from different points of view, but under the same title, that it is not always easy to decide their exact chronological order. It was also his practice, when a picture was returned on his hands unsold from the exhibition, to paint upon it again from time to time, with the idea of improving it, so that the date finally placed upon it does not always indicate the year in which the work was first begun.

*Flatford Mill*, which was bequeathed to the nation by the Misses Maria and Isabel and Mr. Lionel Constable, represents one of those quiet English scenes amid which the artist's boyhood was passed; just a short stretch of a slowly

moving river, down which one or two heavy barges glide sluggishly, and at the bend in the distance one of his father's mills, in which he served his apprenticeship to the trade. The barge-boy on the horse in the foreground, who is waiting while a man adjusts the towing-rope, the distant figures on the path and in the hay-field on the right, add those touches of human interest to the landscape without which the artist was never completely happy. There is little indication here of that bold and restless manipulation which distinguishes such pictures as *The Leaping Horse*, painted later in life, though there is a great sense of movement in the masses of white cloud, full of sunshine, which are rolling across a luminous pale-blue sky. All the details in this picture have been very faithfully and accurately painted. The slow movement of the clumsy barges, as they come floating down from the distant lock and the red-roofed mill-buildings, is admirably suggested. The group of large trees in the right foreground throws the towing-path into shadow, while between the trunks glimpses are obtained of a meadow dotted with hay-cocks, with the recently cut grass a vivid green under the sunlight. This part of the picture is very sunny, and glows with rich colour: The "sparkle" is little in evidence here, though there are faint indications of it in some of the trees. A faithful rendering of nature in her every-day habit was Constable's one object in painting it. The horse and boy have been excellently studied, and the foreground flowers and weeds put in with loving

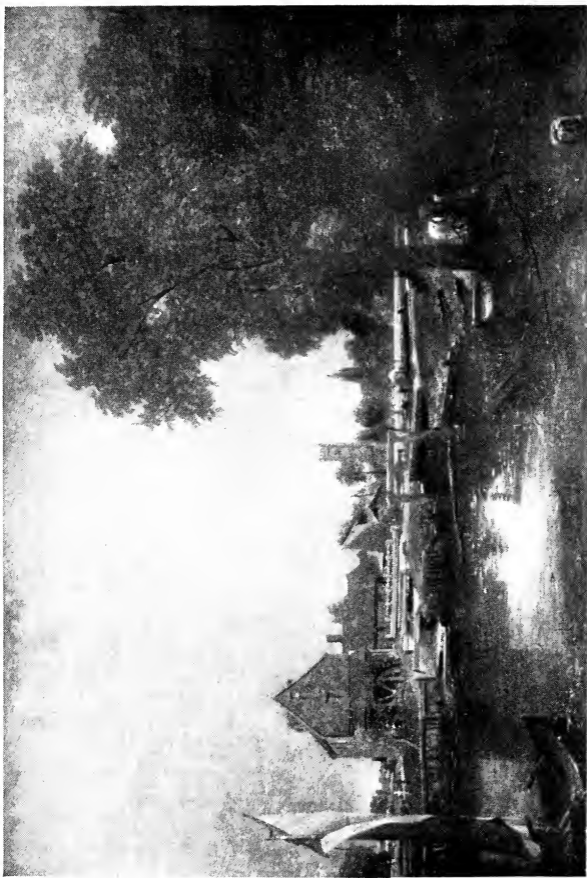


care. It certainly contains many of the qualities at which he chiefly aimed all his life, and is fresh, sunny, and true—qualities which he has obtained mainly by the use of cool colours, blue, green, and gray.

The picture of *Dedham Mill, Essex*, No. 34 in the Victoria and Albert Museum, is dated 1820, but it bears traces of Constable's study of the Dutch masters, and so may have been begun and laid aside again some four or five years earlier. It is very quiet and harmonious in tone, and in its truthful representation of a peaceful rural scene greatly resembles the *Flatford Mill*. Here again there is none of that searching after movement, or the glitter of sunlight which fills the bolder work of the last decade of his life. The fine group of trees on the right has been faithfully copied from nature, with an elaboration of detail suggestive of Hobbema. It is a picture of green summer, diversified by the reddish hues of the mill-building, with its great wheel, in the centre of the composition, and the flapping sail of the boat seen in part under the bank in the left foreground. The gray water of the mill-pool reflects a pale cloudy sky, in which an approaching storm of rain is driving up from the horizon. In the distance the tower of Dedham Church stands out clearly against the white clouds. Here, too, the flat meadows, through which the barges are approaching the locks, lie golden under the sunlight. This is one of the quietest and simplest of Constable's pictures, tender in

tone and sympathetic in feeling, in great contrast to the *Stratford Mill*, with boys fishing, a very striking and powerful work of the same year, which was purchased by Archdeacon Fisher for 100 guineas as a present to a friend, and sixty-five years later fetched 8,500 guineas in the auction room. The difference in style and handling between these two canvases seems to indicate an earlier origin than 1820 for the greater part of *Dedham Mill*.

*The Hay-Wain*, No. 1207 in the National Gallery, was presented by Mr. Henry Vaughan. It was painted in 1821, and included in the Academy Exhibition of that year under the title of *Landscape: Noon*. Constable wrote to his friend Fisher on April 1st: "My picture goes to the Academy on the 10th; it is not so grand as Tinney's (the *Stratford Mill*). Owing, perhaps, to the masses not being so impressive, the power of the chiaroscuro is lessened, but it has a more novel look than I expected. I have yet much to do to it, and calculate on three or four days there." The Archdeacon, in a letter dated July 19th, after the close of the Exhibition, refers to the picture under its better known name. "How does *The Hay-Wain* look now it has got into your own room again?" he writes, "I want to see it there, for how can one participate in a scene of fresh water and deep noon-day in the crowded copal atmosphere of the Exhibition? Which is always to me like a great pot of boiling varnish." Constable replied



*Hanfständigl photo.*

DEDHAM MILL, ESSEX.

*[Victoria and Albert Museum.]*



that the picture looked well, "but I shall do more to it." Later on in the correspondence Fisher refers to it as *Midsummer Noon*.

In the following year it was exhibited in the British Gallery, and the painter received an offer for it of £70, without the frame, for exhibition in Paris. "I hardly know what to do," writes Constable. "It might promote my fame, and procure me commissions, but it is property to my family, though I want money badly." It was still unsold in 1823, and Fisher was anxious to have it. "I have a great desire to possess your *Wain*, but I cannot now reach what it is worth, and what you must have; but I have this favour to ask, that you will not part with it without letting me know. It will be of the most value to your children by continuing to hang where it does, till you join the society of Ruysdael, Wilson, and Claude. As praise and money will then be of no value to you, the world will liberally bestow both." To this the artist replied that, "Sir William Curtis has a hankering after my *Wain*, but I am not sanguine, and you I should much prefer; we can talk about it when we meet. It was born a companion to your picture (*The White Horse*); it must be yours. It is no small compliment to the picture, that it haunted the mind of the Alderman from the time he saw it at the Institution; but though a man of the world, he is all heart, and really loves nature."

Early in 1824, he writes again to Fisher saying that, "the Frenchman who was after my large picture of the *The Hay Cart* last year is here

again. He would, I believe, have both that and *The Bridge*, if he could get them at his own price. I showed him your letter, and told him of my promise to you. His object is to make a show of them at Paris, perhaps to my advantage." Fisher's reply is to the point: "Let your *Hay Cart* go to Paris, by all means. I am too much pulled down by agricultural distress to hope to possess it. I would, I think, let it go at less than its price for the sake of the *éclat* it may give you. The stupid English public, which has no judgment of its own, will begin to think there is something in you if the French make your works national property. You have long lain under a mistake; men do not purchase pictures because they admire them, but because others covet them." The story of the final sale of this picture, its exhibition in Paris in 1824, and the gold medal awarded to it, has already been told (see p. 14).

The scene represents a small farmhouse on the edge of the stream near Flatford, known popularly as "Willy Lott's Cottage," from the name of the owner, who was born in it, and died there at the age of eighty-eight, without having spent four whole days away from it. He was buried in Bergholt churchyard, where his epitaph calls the house Gibeon's Farm. Constable painted it a number of times, and from all points of the compass. The most exact view of it is the one mezzotinted by Lucas for the "English Landscape," with the title of *A Mill Stream*. It is also the subject of the famous

*Valley Farm*, dated 1835, No. 327 in the National Gallery, in which picture he has painted the building from the opposite side to the one in *The Hay-Wain*.

This masterpiece of landscape-painting is so true to nature in all senses, and is so filled with the quiet loveliness of an English country-side seen under the sunlight of a summer day at high noon, that it is difficult to understand why it received such scant appreciation from many of Constable's fellow artists, more particularly as it is characterized by none of the "splashiness" and "spottiness" which so offended his critics. Its repose, indeed, is in marked contrast to the brilliant impressionism and vigorous palette-knife work of the full-sized sketch for it, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, No. 987.

In the foreground the shallow stream spreads out to form a ford, through which the hay-cart with two men in it is passing, the harness of the horses decorated with red tassels and trimmings. The red roof of the house on the left, in front of which a woman is kneeling to fill her pitcher, stands out well against the background of dark trees, which throw the lane on the other side of the water into deep shadow. On the right of the stream the flat meadows stretch out, golden green in colour, with groups of trees casting cool shadows on the grass, and backed by a distant belt of woodland of rich blues and greens. The ripple and movement of the water is finely indicated, as are the masses of white cloud drifting across the sky, and the darker ones on the left,

a sign of an approaching shower. On the right a fisherman, half concealed by a bush, stands near his punt. The whole forms one of the artist's greatest achievements, being manly, English, and free from all restlessness of manner.

It differs in some slight details from the large sketch at South Kensington. He has kept the dog in the foreground, but the boy mounted on the drinking horse has been omitted. This sketch, when compared with the finished picture, is full of movement. It is a study in tones of reddish-brown, grays, and deep blues, with little indication of the exact colour of individual objects. The trees, which have been dashed in with the utmost vigour, seem to sway about in the fresh breeze, and the sky is magnificent. The whole has a sparkle and movement which at that date Constable had not yet ventured to display in his exhibited pictures, and in this respect it is, perhaps, finer than the completed work.

The picture of *Salisbury Cathedral, from the Bishop's Garden*, No. 33 in the Victoria and Albert Museum, was begun in the earlier part of 1822. It was a commission from the Bishop, and was exhibited in the following spring. Dr. Fisher also ordered a smaller version in the same year as a wedding present for his daughter, and expressed a wish that it might have "a more serene sky." In May, 1823, after the opening of the Exhibition, Constable wrote to the Archdeacon: "My Cathedral looks uncommonly well; it is much approved by the Academy. . . .





*Woodbury Co. photo.*

*[Victoria and Albert Museum.*

SALISBURY CATHEDRAL, FROM THE BISHOP'S GARDEN.



I think you will say when you see it that I have fought a better battle with the Church than old Henry Brougham and all their coadjutors put together. It was the most difficult subject in landscape I ever had on my easel. I have not flinched at the windows, buttresses, etc., but I have still kept my grand organ colour, and have, as usual, made my escape in the chiaroscuro. . . . Calcott admires my Cathedral; he says I have managed it well." In June, 1824, the Bishop sent it back for some alterations which he thought would improve it.

The various pictures he painted of this subject are a little confusing. We find him writing in November, 1825: "I have nearly completed a second Cathedral, and I think you will perhaps prefer it to the first, but I will send it to Salisbury for your inspection;" and a few days later he adds: "My new picture of Salisbury is very beautiful, and I have repainted entirely that belonging to Mr. Mirehouse. . . . These pictures of the Cathedral have caused me of late to be almost abiding with you." In the journal he kept for his wife he noted, at the same date, "Painted all day at Mr. Mirehouse's little picture of *The Cathedral*, making in all three 'Cathedrums' as pretty Minna (his eldest daughter) calls them." In July of 1826, Fisher writes to him: "The Cathedral looks splendidly over the chimney piece. The picture requires a room full of light. Its internal splendour comes out in all its power, and the spire sails away with the thunder clouds."

“In the foreground,” says Leslie, “he introduced a circumstance familiar to all who are in the habit of noticing cattle. With cows there is generally, if not always, one which is called, not very accurately, *the master cow*, and there is scarcely anything the rest of the herd will venture to do until the *master* has taken the lead. On the left of the picture this individual is drinking, and turns with surprise and jealousy to another cow approaching the canal lower down for the same purpose. They are of the Suffolk breed, without horns; and it is a curious mark of Constable’s fondness for everything connected with his native county, that scarcely an instance can be found of a cow in any of his pictures, be the scene where it may, with horns.”

In the management of the two fine elm trees in the foreground, which form an arched frame for the soaring spire of the Cathedral, the artist probably departed from exact topographical truth in order to obtain an effective and decorative composition, as in the small pencil study, also at South Kensington, No. 292, the tree on the right is absent. The magnificent building, as seen between this framework of living green, and across the flat sunny meadows, stands out with almost startling effect against the white, gray, and blue of the stormy sky. Constable has certainly striven hard for architectural exactitude in the painting of all the details, and with a great measure of success, though he seems to have found the unusual task a difficult one. The rigid architectural lines of the building necessitated a form-

ality of treatment to which he was unaccustomed, while his passion for chiaroscuro could not come into full play. In this picture "for this first time we notice," says Mr Holmes, "that tendency to paint glittering sunlight by spots and scumbles of pure bright pigment which is characteristic of Constable's later manner. He had for some years practised this method in his sketches, but the "Salisbury" is the first instance where it is used extensively in a large finished picture." In spite of this new searching after "sparkle," the trees have been studied with something of the patient detail of a Dutchman. The prevailing colouring of the composition is, of course, green, amid which the tender brown-gray of the old stone walls of the cathedral, bathed in sunlight, makes a most harmonious contrast. This picture should be compared with the famous "Rainbow" Salisbury, belonging to Mrs. Ashton, painted in 1831, and with the brilliantly impressionistic sketch, a nearer view from the Bishop's grounds, in the possession of Mr. George Salting.

In 1826 he painted the *Cornfield*, perhaps the most widely known of all his works, and certainly one of the most beautiful. In spite of its great attractiveness it remained on his hands until his death, when, as already stated, it was purchased by a number of his friends for 300 guineas and presented to the National Gallery. (*See frontispiece.*)

It was begun early in the spring, and in March his friend Mr. Phillips, of Brighton, sent him a

long list of wild flowers which he might introduce into his foreground: "I think it is July in your green lane," he begins. On April 8th Constable writes to Fisher:—"I have despatched a large landscape to the Academy, upright, of the size of the *Lock*, but a subject of a very different nature—inland corn fields, a close lane forming the foreground. It is not neglected in any part; the trees are more than usually studied, the extremities well defined, as well as the stems; they are shaken by a pleasant and healthful breeze at noon;

' While now a fresher gale  
Sweeping with shadowy gusts the fields of corn,' etc.

"I am not, however, without my anxieties, though I have not neglected my work or been sparing of my pains." Later in the month he says, "The voice in my favour is universal, it is my 'best picture.'"

This is one of his most vigorous and powerful masterpieces. The trees, as he says in his letter to Fisher, have been rendered with a loving fidelity to nature, and at the same time with great freedom and breadth in the handling. The noble group of elms in the hedgerow on the left is already slightly tinged with brown, while the shorter trees across the lane have still their summer dress of green. Between them, in the middle distance, part of a cornfield is seen, sloping down to the greener water-meadows of the valley, with glimpses of the river, and a church tower among the trees. Several small figures are mov-

ing along the pathway through the corn, which glows like gold under the sun's rays. The lane, which twists sharply down hill on the right, is in cool shadow, though the gleaming light filters through in places. The shepherd's boy, prone on his face by the wayside, leaves his dog to look after the flock, while he quenches his thirst at a small spring, and near him a donkey and her foal are browsing under the hedge. The sky is a fine piece of painting, full of movement, with its masses of white and gray clouds, and glimpses of bright blue. There is more warm, golden colour in this picture than in most of his larger works, and the yellow brown on the one side, and the tender green and blue on the other, combine to produce a very lovely effect. It is, indeed, a brilliant proof of Constable's wisdom in selecting his subjects from that part of rural England which he knew the most intimately and loved the best.

It was thought for many years that this picture was an actual scene near the border between Suffolk and Essex, with a distant view of Dedham church, but the artist's son, in a communication to "The Art Journal" in 1869, points out its precise locality. "I would rather 'The Cornfield' had been called 'A Suffolk Lane'" he writes. "It was painted in the lane leading from East Bergholt to the pathway to Dedham across the meadows, a quarter of a mile from East Bergholt church, and one mile from Dedham church as the crow flies. The little church in the distance never existed. It is one of the

rare instances where my father availed himself of the painter's license to improve the composition. Dedham church has a much larger tower, and lies to the right hand outside the limits of this picture. The scene is greatly changed now. All the large trees on the left were cut down some years ago."

In one of his letters to his wife, written in 1823 during his visit to Sir George Beaumont at Coleorton Hall, Leicestershire, Constable says: "In the dark recesses of the gardens, and at the end of one of the walks, is a cenotaph erected to the memory of Sir Joshua Reynolds, and on it some beautiful lines by Wordsworth." In this he saw the possibilities of a fine picture, and made a small pencil drawing of the subject, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, No. 835, but he allowed ten years to elapse before attempting it on a large scale. He began to paint it in 1832, or early in 1833, but laid it aside again, being determined, as he wrote to Leslie, "not to harass my mind and health by scrambling over my canvas as I have too often done. Why should I? I have little to lose and nothing to gain. I ought to respect myself for my friends' sake, and my children's."

The picture of *The Cenotaph*, now in the National Gallery, No. 1272, was finished in 1836, and exhibited in the Royal Academy of that year—"a tolerably good picture," he himself called it. He found he could not finish both it and the *Arundel Mill* in time, and so preferred



“to see Sir Joshua Reynolds’ name and Sir George Beaumont’s once more in the catalogue for the last time at the old house.” “It might seem,” says Leslie, “as if Constable had consulted the taste of his late friend in choosing the autumnal tints for the foliage of a scene taken from Sir George’s grounds, but his doing so arose naturally from his having made his studies from it late in the autumn.” (The pencil sketch was done on November 28th.)

“In this fine picture, every way worthy of so interesting a subject, Constable introduced nothing living, except a deer in the foreground and a robin redbreast perched on one of the angles of the monument. In describing *The Cenotaph* in the catalogue, he quoted the lines on it written by Wordsworth at Sir George Beaumont’s request,” the lines beginning—

“Ye lime trees ranged before this halo’d urn.”

This splendid picture, in which the restless, “glittering” manner of his last years is to be seen carried to its furthest lengths, has a solemnity well suited to the subject and the time of year which it represents. The stillness of an afternoon in November, unbroken by the sound of human footstep, while the tall, almost leafless trees stand like sentinels round this monument to a great painter erected by a lover of fine art, has been expressed with great power and nobility. In the painting of the trees he has shown how intimate was his knowledge of their anatomy. Busts of Michael Angelo and Raphael stand on pedestals

on either side, while in the centre a fine stag with large antlers lifts up its head from the small pool at which it has been drinking. The colour scheme is one of rich browns and dark olive green, while a bright sunny sky of blue and white is seen between the interlacing branches. Low down upon the right there is a glimpse of sky line and open country on the horizon, forming a rich spot of colour. The scene is most impressive in its solitude, and displays a depth of feeling on the part of the artist which he did not often surpass.

The boldness of many of Constable's oil-sketches is very great, as well as the vividness of the personal expression in them; and they are of the utmost interest in the study of his art as a whole. Even in the most hasty of them one is struck by his attempt to get light and air. He had several modes of work. "One day he would paint on the clean canvas," says Mr. Orrock, "but always laid in a ground of burnt umber, tempered with richer or cooler colours. He would paint at another time on a deep, rich red ground, for here and there the preparation is plainly visible. Even through the blues and grays of his skies the rich ground is to be distinctly traced. Sometimes, for *texture*, he would cover his canvases, chiefly small, with a cream-coloured impasto, which he would paint with a rough hog-hair brush, and leave it with its markings to dry hard." This latter is the method adopted in the *Brighton Beach with Colliers*, No. 59 in the Vic-

toria and Albert Museum, dated July 19th, 1824, in which year Constable spent some months at Brighton with his family. It is one of the most brilliant of his impressions, and though only some seven inches by four in size, has been dashed in with great largeness of manner, and suggests a wide expanse of sea and sky. Every brush mark stands out boldly. The dark blue, almost opaque, of the water flecked with a little foam, the azure sky through which one or two small fleecy clouds come sailing before the fresh breeze, the sparkle of the white sails of the distant boats, the yellow sandy beach, and the blackness of the hull and masts of the colliers, together with the almost formless mass of houses on the left, combine to produce an effect of the greatest vividness, and a colour impression almost gem-like in its quality, so much has the artist expressed in the space of a hand-breadth. There are several other Brighton sketches at South Kensington which have very similar qualities, but none of them quite equal the glow and movement of this one, which shows Constable at his finest as a sketcher.

Constable's work as a portrait painter is now almost entirely forgotten. His parents were very anxious that he should devote himself to this more remunerative branch of art, but he had not the gift to combine, as Gainsborough did, both landscape and portraiture in equal perfection. "He painted the latter indeed, occasionally, all his life," says Leslie, "but with very unequal success; and his best works of this kind, though

always agreeable in colour and breadth, were surpassed in more common qualities by men inferior to him in genius."

In 1812 he painted portraits of his maternal uncle, Mr. David Pike Watts, and of Dr. Fisher, Bishop of Salisbury, which appear to have given great satisfaction, so that his mother wrote to him: "Fortune seems now to place the ball at your foot, and I trust you will not kick it from you. You now so greatly excel in portraits that I hope you will pursue a path the most likely to bring you fame and wealth, by which you can alone expect to obtain the object of your fondest wishes"—which was his marriage with Miss Bicknell. At this time his price for a head was fifteen guineas. He also painted, among others, portraits of General and Mrs. Rebow and their daughter, Sir Thomas and Lady Lennard, the Rev. George Bridgman, brother of Lord Bradford, and the grandchildren of Mr. Lambert of Woodmanstone.

The portrait of *Mr. James Lloyd* was painted in December, 1806, in the artist's thirty-first year. It was originally a square which at some later date has been cut down to an oval, with the result that the hands have disappeared, as well part of the artist's signature. The sitter, who was a member of the well-known Birmingham family of bankers, is dressed in a white stock and a black high-waisted coat, which is buttoned over a buff vest. He has light curly hair and small side whiskers. There is great animation in his dark blue eyes and much expression in the mouth.

The handling is loose and free, and though it lacks all positive colour, the result is harmonious, and the portrait, as a whole, an attractive one. In its method it is largely based upon the portrait painters who immediately preceded him. Although it loses much through its want of colour it shows decided power in the rendering of character, and gives the impression that the artist had the gift of putting himself into sympathetic relationship with his sitters, and of thus producing a faithful likeness.

THE  
CHIEF WORKS OF CONSTABLE  
IN PUBLIC GALLERIES

NATIONAL GALLERY.

The Corn Field, or Country Lane, 1826 (130). Engraved by D. Lucas. See frontispiece and page 59. 4 ft. 8 in. high by 4 ft. wide.

The Valley Farm, 1835 (327). A view of the farmhouse known as "Willy Lot's House." See page 54. Engraved by J. C. Bentley. 4 ft. 9½ in. high by 4 ft. 1 in. wide.

The Hay-Wain, 1821 (1207). See illustration and page 52. 4 ft. 2¾ in. high by 6 ft. 1 in. wide.

The Cenotaph, 1836 (1272). See illustration and page 62. 4 ft. 2½ in. high by 3 ft. 6½ in. wide.

Flatford Mill, on the River Stour, 1817 (1273). See illustration and page 49. 3 ft. 3½ in. high by 4 ft. 2 in. wide.

The Glebe Farm (1274). See page 17. 2 ft. 1 in. high by 3 ft. 1½ in. wide.

- A Cornfield, with Figures (1065). A Sketch.  $9\frac{1}{2}$  in. high by  $15\frac{1}{2}$  in. wide.
- On Barnes Common (1066).  $9\frac{1}{2}$  in. high by  $13\frac{1}{2}$  in. wide.
- A House at Hampstead (1246). Sketch,  $13\frac{3}{4}$  in. high by  $11\frac{1}{2}$  in. wide.
- View at Hampstead (1275). 1 ft.  $7\frac{1}{2}$  in. high by 2 ft.  $5\frac{1}{2}$  in. wide.
- View on Hampstead Heath (1813). A different treatment of the same subject as that of No. 1275. 13 in. high by  $19\frac{1}{2}$  in. wide.
- Salisbury Cathedral (1814). A sketch for the picture of "Salisbury Cathedral from the Bishop's Garden" in the Victoria and Albert Museum. See page 56. 1 ft. 2 in. high by 1 ft. 8 in. wide.
- Summer Afternoon after a Shower (1815). Sketch of an effect seen by Constable at Redhill on a journey from Brighton. Engraved by Lucas in "English Landscape."  $13\frac{1}{2}$  in. high by 17 in. wide.
- The Mill Stream (1816). One of the studies for "The Hay-Wain." 8 in. by  $11\frac{1}{4}$  in. wide.
- The Gleaners (1817). A sketch near Brighton, August 20th, 1824.  $6\frac{1}{2}$  in. high by 12 in. wide.
- View at Epsom (1818). A sketch. 11 in. high by  $13\frac{1}{2}$  in. wide.
- Stoke-by-Nayland, Suffolk (1819). A very rapid, powerful sketch. See page 44. 7 in. high by 10 in. wide.
- Dedham (1820). Another powerful sketch. See page 44.  $6\frac{1}{2}$  in. high by 10 in. wide.

A Country Lane (1821). Probably a sketch for "The Cornfield."  $7\frac{1}{2}$  in. high by  $11\frac{1}{2}$  in. wide.

Dedham Vale (1822). Another forcible sketch of fine colour.  $9\frac{1}{2}$  in. high by  $11\frac{1}{2}$  in. wide.

The Glebe Farm (1823). Similar in subject to No. 1274, but with a different effect of light and sky. 1 ft. 11 in. high by 2 ft. 7 in. wide.

Sketch of a Landscape (1824).  $4\frac{1}{4}$  in. high by 9 in. wide.

#### NATIONAL GALLERY OF BRITISH ART.

View of the House in which the Artist was born (1235). A rapid sketch.  $8\frac{1}{2}$  in. high by  $26\frac{1}{2}$  in. wide.

"The Salt Box," Hampstead Heath (1236). 1 ft.  $3\frac{1}{2}$  in. high by 2 ft. 2 in. wide.

View on Hampstead Heath (1237).  $6\frac{1}{2}$  in. high by  $12\frac{1}{4}$  in. wide.

The Bridge at Gillingham (1244). 1 ft. high by 1 ft. 8 in. wide.

Church Porch, Bergholt, Suffolk (1245). 1 ft.  $5\frac{1}{4}$  in. high by 1 ft. 2 in. wide.

Harwich: Sea and Lighthouse (1276).  $12\frac{1}{4}$  in. high by  $19\frac{1}{2}$  in. wide.

#### VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM.

Salisbury Cathedral from the Bishop's Garden, 1823 (33). See illustration and page 56. 2 ft. 10 in. high by 3 ft. 6 in. wide.

Dedham Mill, 1820 (34). See illustration



and page 51. 1 ft.  $9\frac{1}{4}$  in. high by 2 ft. 6 in. wide.

Hampstead Heath, 1830 (35). 2 ft. high by 2 ft. 7 in. wide.

Hampstead Heath, 1827 (36). 1 ft. 2 in. high by 2 ft. 6 in. wide.

Boat-building near Flatford Mill (37). See page 10. 1 ft.  $8\frac{1}{4}$  in. high by 2 ft. wide.

Water Meadows, near Salisbury (38). 1 ft. 6 in. high by 1 ft.  $9\frac{1}{4}$  in. wide.

Trees at Hampstead (1630), also known as The Path to the Church. 3 ft. high by 2 ft.  $4\frac{1}{2}$  in. wide.

The Cottage in the Cornfield (1631). 2 ft. high by 1 ft. 8 in. wide.

Gillingham Mill, Suffolk (1632). 2 ft. 1 in. high by 1 ft.  $8\frac{3}{4}$  in. wide.

The Hay-Wain (987). Full-size study for the picture in the National Gallery. See page 52.

Dedham Lock, or the Leaping Horse (988). Full-size study for the picture in the Diploma Gallery of the Royal Academy. See page 16.

Farm House with Water Wheel (516). 2 ft. high by 1 ft. 8 in. wide. *In circulation.*

Stacking Hay (1417).  $4\frac{1}{2}$  in. high by  $6\frac{1}{2}$  in. wide.

The Museum possesses ninety-five sketches and studies in oil, given by Miss Isabel Constable in 1888. It is quite impossible to print even a list of the titles here, but they are chiefly landscape sketches made in Essex, Middlesex, Suffolk, Sus-

sex, Wiltshire, and elsewhere, as well as studies of trees, skies, cottages, flowers, horses, etc. Among the finest are *Brighton Beach with Colliers* (591), (see illustration and page 64); study for *The Valley Farm* (141); *Study of Tree Stems* (323); *View on the Stour* (135); *Spring* (144); *Coast Scene with Fishing Boats* (129); *On the Stour near Dedham* (325); *Coast Scene, with Shipping in the distance* (120); *Trees and Cottages* (324); *A Mill near Brighton* (588), (see page 43); *Old Sarum* (163); *Landscape with Cottage* (136); and the *Opening of Waterloo Bridge* (322). There are many others equally fine, and well worth careful study.

The Museum also possesses 286 sketches in water-colours, india ink, chalk and pencil, given by Miss Constable; as well as two large drawings of *Old Sarum* (1628) and *Stonehenge* (1629), of very fine quality, a few studies from the nude, and some pencil drawings of trees, of which latter the *Trees at East Bergholt* (320), a splendid drawing of the greatest fidelity, and *Fir Trees at Hampstead* (251), are two of the best. Some carefully finished pencil studies of stone corbels and brackets in Solihull Church, Warwickshire, are of interest, not only for their fine drawing, but as unusual subjects for Constable to undertake.

#### BRITISH MUSEUM.

The British Museum contains seventy-two sketches and studies in water-colours, sepia, pen-and-ink, pencil, etc., including many landscapes, and a number of figure, tree, and

cloud studies. Among them are two for *The Leaping Horse*, two of *Stoke Pogis Church*, designs for *Gray's Elegy*, a design called *The Melancholy Jacques*, and an oval landscape copied from a rare etching by Herman Swanevelt.

#### NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY.

A Portrait of Constable, drawn by himself, in lead pencil, tinted. To the waist, facing the spectator. 10 in. by  $7\frac{3}{4}$  in.

#### DIPLOMA GALLERY, ROYAL ACADEMY OF ARTS.

Dedham Lock, or *The Leaping Horse* (1825). See page 16. 4 ft. 6 in. high by 5 ft. 11 in. wide.

*The Lock*. See page 14. 3 ft.  $4\frac{1}{2}$  in. high by 4 ft. 2 in. wide.

There are also sixteen small studies in oil, which need not be specified in detail.

#### CORPORATION OF LONDON ART GALLERY, GUILDHALL.

*Fording the River, Showery Weather* (649). Almost exactly similar to the "Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows," but without the rainbow, and with a castle in place of the cathedral. Formerly in the James Price Collection, and bequeathed by Mr. Charles Gassiot in 1903 with the two following pictures

*Near East Bergholt, Suffolk* (650).

*A Landscape* (651).

## ROYAL HOLLOWAY COLLEGE, EGHAM.

A View on the Stour (48).

A church tower in the distance, boats and figures, and children angling. 4 ft. 3 in. high by 6 ft. 1 in. wide. Purchased in 1883 for £1,249 10s. from the Dunlop Collection.

## NATIONAL GALLERY OF IRELAND.

Landscape, probably near Salisbury (376).

11½ in. high by 15 in. wide.

Dedham Vale (2056). A water-colour sketch.

Flatford, Dedham Vale (2057). Pencil sketch, dated 1827.

Landscape (2058). Pencil sketch.

## COUNTY BOROUGH OF BURY ART GALLERY.

Hampstead Heath (11).

Wrigley Bequest. Formerly in the Webster Collection. 17½ in. high by 24 in. wide.

## CORPORATION GALLERIES OF ART, GLASGOW.

Hampstead Heath (180). 2 ft. 1 in. high by 3 ft. 2 in. wide.

A very fine example. Given by the sons of Mr. James Reid, of Auchterarder. Engraved by T. S. Bayley, *Magazine of Art*, April, 1896.

## WALKER ART GALLERY, LIVERPOOL.

A Summer Storm (448). 4 ft. 1 in. high by 5 ft. 7 in. wide.

A Rainy Landscape (449). 3 ft. 2 in. high by 5 ft. wide.

Kenilworth Castle (572). 2 ft. 4 in. high by 3 ft. wide.

A Dull Day (43). 12 in. high by 14 in. wide.

An English River (48). 12 in. high by 15 in. wide.

#### WHITWORTH INSTITUTE, MANCHESTER.

Feering Church, Kelvedon, Essex. Water-colour drawing.  $10\frac{1}{4}$  in. high by  $14\frac{1}{4}$  in. wide.

#### BOROUGH OF OLDHAM ART GALLERY.

Brighton Beach. Gray monochrome water-colour drawing, dated 1824.

Lugger and Hog Boat, Brighton. Gray monochrome water-colour drawing, dated "Sept. 11th, 1824."

Stoke-by-Nayland Church, Suffolk. Charcoal sketch.

In Helmingham Park, Suffolk. Charcoal sketch.

Salisbury. Pencil sketch.

Old Sarum. Pencil sketch, dated "Sept. 14th, 1811."

Near Folkestone. A study of sky in colour.

Landscape: Cottage and Trees. Pen and ink, slightly tinted.

#### UNIVERSITY PICTURE GALLERIES, OXFORD.

Trees by a River Bank. A small sketch, about 12 in. by 16 in.

## MAPPIN ART GALLERY, SHEFFIELD.

The Cornfield, or Country Lane (91). 3 ft. 4 in. high by 2 ft. 7 in. wide. A small replica of the picture in the National Gallery.

Landscape (92). 2 ft. 6 in. high by 2 ft. 1 in. wide.

Salisbury Cathedral (146). 4 ft. 2 in. high by 3 ft. 4 in. wide.

## THE LOUVRE, PARIS.

The Cottage, 1818 (1806). Engraved by Lucas and Brunet-Debaines. H. 0.52; L. 0.42.

Weymouth Bay, 1827. (1808) Engraved by Lucas. Presented by Mr. John Wilson. H. 0.88; L. 1.12.

The Rainbow (1807). Salisbury spire seen in the distance. Presented by Mr. John Wilson. H. 0.50; L. 0.60.

Hampstead Heath (1809). A sketch presented by Mr. Lionel B. Constable. H. 0.26; L. 0.36.

The Glebe Farm (1810). Engraved by David Lucas. Presented by the Journal "L'Art." H. 0.64; L. 0.89.

NOTE.—The writer has not seen the whole of Constable's pictures in the various provincial galleries. The list has been compiled from the published catalogues, and from information supplied through the courtesy of the Directors.

## SOME OF THE CHIEF BOOKS ON CONSTABLE

BROCK-ARNOLD, M.A., George M. 'Gainsborough and Constable' ("Illustrated Biographies of Great Artists"), 1881. Pages 50; 8 illustrations.

CHESNEAU, ERNEST. "La Peinture Anglaise," English translation by Lucy N. Etherington, and a preface by John Ruskin. Third edition, 1887. Page 136 to page 145; 2 woodcut illustrations.

HOLMES, C. J. "Constable" ("The Artists' Library"), 1901. Pages xv and 35; 24 illustrations.

A very admirable essay on Constable's position in the history of landscape painting.

HOLMES C. J. "Constable and his Influence on Landscape Painting," 1902. Folio, pages 268; 77 photogravure plates.

The most important book on Constable's art.

LESLIE, R.A., R. C. "Life and Letters of John Constable, R.A." Third edition, 1896, with further notes and introduction by Robert C. Leslie.

The only adequate biography of the artist,

largely based upon his letters to his wife, Fisher, Leslie and other friends.

LESLIE, R.A., G.D. and EATON, FRED. A. "John Constable, R.A." "The Art Journal," 1903. 11 illustrations.

MONKHOUSE, COSMO. "Dictionary of National Biography."

MUTHER, RICHARD. "The History of Modern Painting," 1896. Vol. II.

ORROCK, JAMES. "Constable," "The Art Journal," 1895. 3 illustrations.

REDGRAVE, R.A., RICHARD, and REDGRAVE SAMUEL. "A Century of Painters of the English School." Abridged edition, 1890.

RUSKIN, JOHN. "Modern Painters."

WEDMORE, FREDERICK. "Studies in English Art," second series, 1880.

Articles in "The Portfolio," vol. iv., pp. 93, 108, 117; vol. xxi., p. 162; "The Magazine of Art," vol. vi., p. 334; vol. xiv., p. 282; "English Illustrated Magazine," vol. x., p. 884; "Leisure Hour," vol. xxx., p. 406; "The Art Journal," vol. xxxiii., p. 150; "Edinburgh Review," vol. lxxxvii., p. 472; "Blackwood," vol. lviii., p. 257; "Revue Universelle des Arts," vol. iv., p. 289. Also various papers in "The Art Journal" and "The Magazine of Art," describing collections of pictures in private possession, in some of which illustrations are given of Constable's paintings.





## CHRONOLOGY OF THE ARTIST'S LIFE

1776. Born at East Bergholt, Suffolk, on June 11th.
1792. Began to work as a miller.
1794. Made the acquaintance of Sir George Beaumont.
1795. First visit to London to study art.
1797. Again at work in his father's mills.
1799. Entered the Royal Academy Schools, Feb. 4th.
1802. First exhibited at the R.A.—a small *Landscape*.
1803. Voyage from London to Deal on an East Indiaman.
1804. Painted an altarpiece for Brantham Church.
1806. Visited the English Lakes.
1809. Painted an altarpiece for Nayland Church.
1814. Painted *Boat Building*.
1816. Married, on October 2nd, to Miss Maria Bicknell.
1819. Exhibited *Scene on the River Stour (The White Horse)*. Elected A.R.A. in November.
1820. Took a house on Hampstead Heath.
1821. Exhibited *The Hay-Wain*.

1822. Exhibited *Salisbury Cathedral from the Bishop's Garden*.
1823. Visited Sir George Beaumont in Leicestershire.
1824. *The Hay-Wain* and two other pictures exhibited in Paris.
1825. *The White Horse* exhibited at Lille.
1826. Exhibited *The Cornfield* and *The Glebe Farm*.
1828. Death of his wife, on November 23rd.
1829. Elected R.A., February 10th. Made a start upon his *English Landscape*, finally completed in 1833.
1830. Exhibited *A Dell in Helmingham Park and Hampstead Heath*.
1831. *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows*. (*The Rainbow*.)
1832. *The Opening of Waterloo Bridge*. Death of Archdeacon Fisher.
1833. Lecture on "An Outline of the History of Landscape Painting" at Hampstead.
1834. Visited Arundel and Petworth.
1835. *The Valley Farm*.
1836. *The Cenotaph and Stonehenge*. Delivered four lectures at the Royal Institution.
1837. Sudden death during the night of March 31st. Burial at Hampstead. His unfinished *Arundel Mill* exhibited at the R.A. *The Cornfield* presented to the National Gallery by a number of his admirers.





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