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CROME AND COTMAN





Library of the University of Michigan
The Coyt^h Collection.

Miss Jean L^l Coyt
of Detroit

in memory of her brother
Col. William Henry Coyt
1894.



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Jérôme Pinais

From the reproduction published by the Autotype Company

W. A. Bell & Co.

U O P N The Doringland Oak.

JOHN CROME
AND
JOHN SELL COTMAN

By

LAURENCE BINYON

Of the Department of Prints and Drawings, British Museum.



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P R E F A C E

CROME and Cotman are the glories of the Norwich School. Unlike in temperament, in character, in the scope and aim of their art, and in the circumstances of their lives, they are alike in possessing genius. Norwich has bred a great number of excellent painters, but these two stand high above the rest.

What is meant by the Norwich School? The word "school" has been used in several senses. It meant, first of all, the body of painters produced by a certain country, a certain province, or a certain town. In the earliest times of painting there were few migrations; and a painter's work generally savoured of the soil where he was born and bred. But then came freer communication and interaction: Leonardo, for example, coming to Milan from Florence, impressed all the Milanese painters with his influence; he founded a school, the characteristics of which are derived from his dominant personality; and Raphael did the like at Rome, which of itself has scarcely produced a painter. Again, in modern times, we have seen "schools" which had their sole unity in holding certain theories in common, such as the English Pre-Raphaelites.

It is in the primary sense that we talk of the Norwich School. Impute it to what cause we will, there is no doubt that the Eastern Counties have been far more prolific of painters than the rest of England. The average excellence and number of their artists remind one of Holland, which in actual physical features they of course so much resemble. The Norwich School had no common bond of theory; it is their Norwich birth and training which constitute them a distinct body. And if we are to group painters into schools at all, this is the most reasonable principle to build on. Race counts for much in artistic as in all kinds of production; and though it is easier to be fanciful than to be just in discriminating between the various schools of a country, one would certainly expect to find great differences resulting from so great a variety of race as exists in England. These are probably more apparent to foreigners than to ourselves. Of course there has always been the counter-acting influence of an almost all-powerful centre in London; and Norwich

is the only place which possessed artists of sufficient strength to create a rival centre. Nor would this have been possible had Crome, their chief, left his native city for London, like nearly every other genius of the provinces.

This is a subject which has been little worked at; and it is not intended to pursue it here. But as there has been some tendency of late to discount the claims of Norwich to include Cotman in her school, on the ground that he was chiefly trained in London, where also he worked for the last years of his life, it is well to make plain the reasonable grounds of his inclusion. Cotman himself, whose heart was always with Norwich and with Norfolk, would assuredly not have wished to be dissociated from them.

On the other hand, it is right to recognise that Crome and Cotman are far more than local glories: Norwich claims them by right of birth, England by right of genius. Both of these painters, Cotman especially, have suffered misconception, since much of their best work, indeed all Cotman's best work, is in private hands and unknown to the general public; and both have been too often judged by imitations of their pictures. Crome's work in particular has been confused with that of his pupils, besides being most extensively imitated. On this account the writer has preferred to treat as far as possible with pictures and drawings that are not only authentic but attested. For help in this matter, as on every other point connected with the subject, he offers the most cordial thanks to Mr. James Reeve, Curator of the Castle Museum at Norwich, who, with generous kindness, placed his unique collection of original documents relating to the Norwich School at the writer's disposal. Mr. Reeve's authority on the subject, which he has made his life-long study, is acknowledged to be unequalled; and whatever merit this monograph may have as a record of facts, is due to him.

The writer has also to acknowledge help of various kinds from Mr. Frederick Wedmore, Mr. Cosmo Monkhouse, Sir Reginald Palgrave, K.C.B., Dr. Cotman, Mr. J. L. Roget (whose *History of the Old Water-colour Society* has so valuable a notice of Cotman), Messrs. Dowdeswells, and others; and would especially thank those who have permitted pictures in their possession to be reproduced in these pages.

These illustrations will give a more adequate suggestion of Crome's and of Cotman's work than has been hitherto generally obtainable in London; they have been made from the excellent reproductions which, with a number of others, the Autotype Company are about to issue in a portfolio illustrative of the Norwich School.

JOHN CROME

I. *Early Years and Apprenticeship*

JOHN WODDERSPOON, writing a memoir of Crome in 1858, lamented his difficulties in finding the truth, although it was not forty years since Crome had died, and many who knew him were still alive. It is not easy, in 1897, to unravel the tangle of anecdote and tradition; but the amount of our information has certainly increased.

When a man writes of the lately dead, he naturally applies to the dead man's friends and acquaintance; and these out of their abundant recollections furnish him with stores of matter. This is often excellent stuff for forming an impression of a man's mind and character. But on questions of actual fact, niceties of chronology, such as must, after all, make the anatomy of a memoir, the information thus procured is apt to be uncertain, contradictory, and indefinite.

The notices of Crome's life by Dawson Turner and Wodderspoon are profuse of generalities, but shun dates. Dates seemed perhaps trivial then, now they are precious; and for most of the few events in Crome's life we have to turn to the unconscious memory of parish registers, of diaries preserved for other reasons, of newspaper advertisements, and catalogues.

Long accepted without inquiry, on Dawson Turner's authority, the date of Crome's birth has been given, and is still given, in nearly all books of reference, as December 21, 1769. But researches made in the registers of St. George's Tombland at Norwich, some years ago, proved that he was born on December 22, 1768.

His father was a journeyman weaver, who either kept or was a

lodger in a little public-house in the least reputable quarter of Norwich, the Castle Meadow on the hill beneath the castle, a part then known as the Castle Ditches.

Whatever education Crome received was of the simplest sort. It was an ancient custom, prolonged to days within living memory, for the boys and girls of the city who sought a place in service, to assemble at early morning on the site of the old Ducal Palace, there to await the chance of an employer. The boy Crome, when he had reached the age of twelve, "went" like others "on the palace," in the phrase of the Norwich lads; and attracted the notice of Dr. Rigby, who took him into his service as errand-boy. In Dr. Rigby's house he remained two years or more, playing many a prank, according to his own tales in after-times, and once ambitiously bleeding a patient almost to death. But the doctor was pleased with him. At any rate, he lent him help in getting himself apprenticed.

The apprenticeship began on the first day of August 1783, and was for seven years. Crome's new master was Mr. Francis Whisler, "a Coach, House, and Sign Painter," of 41 Bethel Street.

It is impossible not to think that this trade was the boy's own choice. Born painters are never slow in manifesting their predilection. Doubtless, to be with colours—for at first it was Crome's business only to grind them—was delight; and later on, to handle brushes and to use them, if only on coaches and wall-panels, was a fine ambition.

The extraordinary breadth of touch in Crome's early pictures is due to this training. Paint upon sign-boards and coaches has to make its effect at some distance; and the result is no less manifest in Crome's pictures than, say, the sculptor's training in Verrocchio's.

The seven years passed, bringing to the young apprentice a certain amount of familiarity with paints and brushes, and about the end of his time more particular gifts of fortune. The first of these was a friend.

Robert Ladbrooke, of the same age as Crome, had been apprenticed to a printer. The two met, and became close companions. They had a passion in common; both were determined to be painters. According to Dawson Turner, the two entered into a sort of partnership for a time. They hired a garret, and clubbed together in buying prints to copy. It was in these youthful enthusiastic days that Crome would

wander off into the fields and sketch on a piece of pasteboard, with his colours in an oyster-shell. His first sketch in oils, we know from the catalogue of the exhibition of 1821, was made in 1790, the year in which his apprenticeship expired.



*Carrow Abbey. By J. Crome. Collection of J. J. Colman, Esq.
From the reproduction published by the Autotype Company.*

Having served his term, he still, it seems, continued to work as a journeyman painter for Whisler. He is known to have painted several signs, and one at least is still preserved at Norwich, in the Pockthorpe Brewery. It is the sign of the Sawyers, painted on both

sides, the sawyer standing astride of the pit, and the figure boldly and broadly put in, with vigorous touches.

With such jobs as these Crome managed to save enough, we may suppose, to enable him to occupy his spare time with drawing and painting for his own pleasure, in Ladbroke's company; and before long the pair seem to have been able to get some money for their work. Smith and Jagers, the Norwich print-sellers, from whom they bought prints when they could afford it, noticed the young enthusiasts and bought some of their drawings.

It was probably through the print-sellers that Crome and his sketches became known to an amateur and collector of the neighbourhood, Thomas Harvey of Catton. He proved a most valuable friend. Harvey could give him instruction in painting: there were several of Harvey's pictures in Crome's collection when he died. And more, he had a choice collection himself, which Crome was now at liberty to study and to copy. Here was an inestimable privilege. Mr. Harvey's collection has been long dispersed, and we do not know what pictures it contained, except the beautiful and celebrated *Cottage Door* of Gainsborough; and this we know Crome copied. We may also confidently conjecture that there were pictures by Richard Wilson; and through a connection with Holland—he had married the daughter of a Rotterdam merchant—Mr. Harvey had collected some Dutch pictures, among them a Hobbema.

Crome had no reason to complain of fortune. In finding one friend, he also found others. One of those to whom Harvey introduced him was William Beechey.

It was while Crome was still a child, and before he had begun life as the doctor's errand-boy, that William Beechey, after painting and exhibiting portraits with some success in London, saw an opening at Norwich and came down there to live. According to one account, indeed, Beechey himself had begun as a house-painter in Norwich; but this is probably a legend. The accepted story is that he was born in Oxfordshire and articted to a solicitor. But that he came to Norwich in 1781 is certain; and there, too, he found a wife, Miss Jessup, who was herself a painter of miniatures. After working in Norwich for four or five years, Beechey returned to London, and was soon on the

road to prosperity, sunned by royal favour. He did not, however, lose touch with Norwich and his Norwich friends; and Harvey of Catton was one of these. According to Beechey's account, Crome was about twenty when they first met. This would imply that it was in 1789. Probably it was a year or two later.¹ In Beechey's description we come for the first time near to the man himself.



*The Cize Tower. By J. Crome. Collection of J. J. Colman, Esq.
From the reproduction published by the Autotype Company.*

“Crome, when first I knew him, must have been about twenty years old, and was a very awkward, uninformed, country lad, but extremely shrewd in all his remarks upon art; though he wanted words and terms to express his meaning. As often as he came to town, he never failed to call upon me, and to get what information I was able to give him upon the subject of that particular branch of art which he had made his

¹ Crome was young-looking. In the portrait sketch by Cotman he does not look forty years old. Yet it was made in 1809.

study. His visits were frequent ; and all his time was spent in my painting-room when I was not particularly engaged. He improved so rapidly that he delighted and astonished me. He always dined and spent his evenings with me."

It is evident that Crome was one of those men whose gifts are entirely concentrated on a single mode of expression. His genius was graphic, and had no need of literary acquirement and cultivation. In this he was like Rembrandt and like Gainsborough ; and his art gained rather than lost by his not having "a refined and cultivated personality." Yet there is abundant testimony that his manners were winning and his talk attractive. Homely in appearance, he had native wit and the charm of simplicity, and a droll and ready tongue.

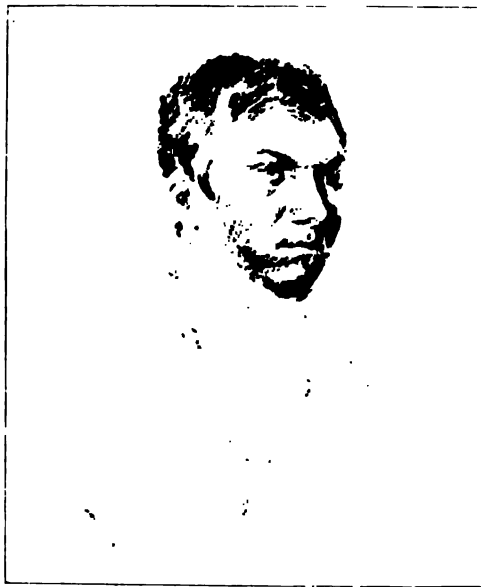
II. *Visits to London—Marriage—First Works*

From Beechey's account it would appear that Crome paid not infrequent visits to London. Probably Sir William, when writing, had a period of many years in his mind ; but it is reasonable to infer that his first visits were made while he was still a learner, anxious to gain all he could from the hints and practice of the older painter.

At Beechey's studio he would learn the general method of painters in vogue, and could add the precepts of the schools to what Mr. Harvey had already taught him. The method of painting which we find in Crome's pictures is substantially the same that we find in Hogarth ; a method founded on the general tradition of the Dutchmen. Hogarth's pictures are especially good examples of this method, because his touch is so decisive and direct, abhorring tentative experiment. His practice was to cover his canvas with a tone of warm gray, choosing the precise character of the tone with the subject and the lighting of the particular picture always in view ; and on this he painted lightly and firmly, making use of the ground for shadows, and often leaving it in such places entirely untouched. The unfinished *Shrimp Girl* in the National Gallery shows this method perfectly.

If we turn now to *Mousehold Heath* or *The Windmill* we find the

same process employed. In the foreground the warm under-painting is largely utilised ; and in the sky of *Mousehold Heath* the beautiful transparency of the clouds is got by the under-painting showing through the cool and pearly colour laid above it. Of course, it is not to be assumed that the precise method is the same in every picture ; but the general principle is that described. To paint thus requires absolute decision. Fumbling is ruinous. And Crome's gift was such as to develop the advantages of this method to the full. He seems rarely to have made experiments.



*Portrait of J. Crome.
From a Drawing by J. S. Cotman, British Museum.*

In London the young Norwich artist had more opportunities for seeing the art of his contemporaries than in his native town, although there were portraits there by Gainsborough, Hoppner, and Opie in St. Andrew's Hall ; and Norfolk was richer than most counties in fine collections of pictures.

In the landscape painting of this time there was little that was original or stimulating. Wilson had died in 1782, Gainsborough in 1788. The landscapes of De Louthembourg are typical of the period. Nor was any bright star yet above the horizon. Barker of Bath, born

a year after Crome, was just beginning his successful career; he first exhibited in 1791. But the most fashionable painters of the day were painters of portrait or allegory.

Many of these artists had been, like Crome, born and bred in distant country towns or villages. But sooner or later they were drawn to London; the attraction was irresistible. Even Gainsborough, whose heart was in the lanes of Suffolk, had made London his home at last. But Crome, in whose nature there was a curious stubbornness, an independence which, without asserting itself in violence or rebellion, took its own way and followed no false ambition, seems never to have contemplated leaving his beloved country. He was poor, but he was able to live, and by continuing to paint signs was able to indulge in landscapes. His days were laborious, but he was not in actual want. Too much has been made of Crome's poverty; and too much importance attached to the stories told by Dawson Turner of the strange shifts to which he was put for brushes and canvas.

Crome, doubtless, refused no job that brought him help; he had no nice scruples about "debasing his Art," and took gladly what came, even after he had taken to teaching and was on the way to prosperity.

This is proved by a bill, settled May 27, 1803, for painting a sign, and for gilding and lettering, for which Crome charged £2 : 14s. It is improbable that the work was done much before the day on which it was settled.

But there is no evidence that Crome was ever in severe poverty; and in 1792, at twenty-three, he was able to marry. His wife was a girl named Phœbe Berney—Pheby Bearney, it is spelt in the register—and the wedding took place at St. Mary's Coslany, on the 2nd October. There were reasons for hastening it. The first child, a daughter, was born on the 30th of the same month.

Ladbroke married a sister, Mary Berney, in October of the year following.

Crome's days were now to become more strenuous than before. The first child was followed by many others; among them, John Berney, distinguished afterwards as a painter, who was born in 1794.

In 1793 Crome was ill in the Norwich Hospital, once in the spring,

and again in the autumn. Beyond this there is nothing to record except the births of successive children, till we reach the end of the century.

With a young family rising fast around him, Crome had a hard struggle. But he had will and courage, and while supporting himself and his children, was gradually acquiring mastery in painting. He was



*Dawn. By J. Crome. Collection of J. J. Colman, Esq.
From the reproduction published by the Autotype Company.*

also beginning to give lessons. Some of the pictures of these first years were "compositions in the style of Richard Wilson"; for two pictures, so described, painted in 1796 and 1798, were in the exhibition of Crome's works held after his death in 1821. Where are these pictures now? Probably most pass under Wilson's name. At any rate, they are not often met with. There is, however, at the British Museum a drawing by Crome which must date from this or a still earlier period. It is an

Italian scene, with a low waterfall in the middle distance, mountains beyond, and figures under trees in the foreground. It is in black chalk on gray paper, and so much in Wilson's manner that it must often be attributed, by those who see it, to Wilson himself. But the drawing was presented by Mr. Carpenter, once Keeper of the Prints and Drawings; and not only was he a connoisseur of wide knowledge, but he was acquainted with George Vincent, Crome's pupil, and indeed gave Vincent the commission for his masterpiece, Greenwich Hospital. It is certain, therefore, that there were reasons for attributing the drawing to Crome; it may be that it came from Crome himself. And with all its general likeness to Wilson, the drawing shows the trace of a robuster handling, of a hand not quite at home in the artificiality of the scene. We shall be safe, I think, in assuming this to be a very early drawing of Crome's after Wilson.

It seems clear, in any case, that Richard Wilson was the master and model of Crome's youth. We shall see, later on, how this influence persisted to his maturity.

III. *Crome begins Teaching—The Norwich Society founded*

The Norwich Directory for 1801 gives the address of 17 Gildengate Street as that of "John Crome, drawing master."

This is not, however, the first evidence we have that Crome had begun to make teaching a profession. Among the families in the neighbourhood of Norwich to which Mr. Harvey had introduced Crome, was that of the Gurneys of Earlham. It was Harvey, no doubt, who suggested to Crome that he should better his position by teaching, and John Gurney was apparently the first to engage his services. In the diary of Richenda Gurney¹ there occurs the following entry:—

"Jan. 17, 1798.—I had a good drawing morning, but in the course of it gave way to passion with both Crome and Betsy—Crome because he

¹ This and the following extracts are from *The Gurneys of Earlham*, by Augustus J. C. Hare.

would attend to Betsy and not to me, and Betsy because she was so provoking."

In the summer of 1802 John Gurney took his six unmarried daughters, his son Samuel, and a friend, Fowell Buxton, on a tour to the Lakes, and Crome accompanied them. The party went by way of Matlock; and there Crome made sketches from which he afterwards painted pictures. From Ambleside Hannah Gurney wrote to Elizabeth Fry:—

"*Ambleside*, 1802.—To-day we could not get out till rather late on account of the weather, which none of us minded, as we were all busily employed in drawing, Kitty reading to us. Chenda, Cilla, and Mr. Crome were comfortably seated in a romantic little summer-house, painting a beautiful waterfall."

Towards the end of August, Crome left for home; the Gurneys returning later in a leisurely tour. He made himself a pleasant companion. "We were very sorry to part with Mr. Crome," writes Rachel Gurney in her diary at Patterdale, under the date of August 28.

This pleasant excursion was the first of several, which enabled Crome to see a good deal of England. Before 1805 he was on the Wye, where he painted Goodrich Castle, and Chepstow, and Tintern Abbey. And before 1806 he was at Weymouth.

In the summer of 1806 he was again with the Gurneys at Ambleside. But before this, in 1803, an important event took place. The Norwich Society of Artists was founded.

Crome by this time had become something of a personage in the city, and with Ladbrooke formed the centre of a little knot of artists. As the friend of Beechey and of Opie, whose acquaintance he had made in 1798, he was to some extent in touch with what was going on in London, but had never exhibited a picture there. Lovers of art seemed to be plentiful at Norwich, and Crome and his friends set to work to make the city an independent centre. Thus was founded the first provincial school which had sprung up in England, and, until recent years, the only one. The Society had a very magnificent title. It called itself "The Norwich Society for the purpose of an inquiry into the rise, progress, and present state of Painting, Architecture, and Sculpture, with a view to point out the best methods of study, and to attain to greater perfection in these arts." Members were elected by ballot, and had to subscribe

toward the general fund. The Society met once a fortnight at seven in the evening, and studied prints and drawings together for an hour and a half. After this there was a discussion on a paper read by one of the members, who took it in turns to provide a supper of bread and cheese. The first meeting was held in February 1803 "in a dingy building in a dingy locality called the Hole in the Wall in St. Andrew's, Norwich."¹ W. C. Leeds was the first president; Crome did not hold that office till 1808.

After two years the Society, not satisfied with academic discussion, or perhaps having exhausted all its theories, decided to display the fruits of practice in an exhibition. This was held in the large room of Sir Benjamin Wrench's Court, a quadrangle afterwards destroyed in 1828, to make room for the present Corn Hall.

To this first exhibition, consisting of 223 works, Crome contributed over twenty pictures and drawings. *Carrow Abbey*, which is reproduced at p. 9, was one of these; it is now the property of Mr. Colman, of Carrow, near Norwich. It is a picture of large size, and very important as showing what Crome's style at this early period was. Here, as in his later maturity, he seizes the essential forms, he eschews accident and triviality. All that remains of the ancient abbey—the great gable end—rises against the sky. In the broken ground before it is a hollow filled with water, and two figures are beside the pool. The severe ascending lines of the building, the disposition of the clouds, and the upright form of the composition, are all made to conspire towards the dignity of the whole. The painter has seized on everything in the colour as in the lines of his subject which deepens the sense of venerableness and antiquity surviving in majestic solitude.

Another picture exhibited in this year was called *Scene in Cumberland*. Can this be the so-called *Slate-Quarries* of the National Gallery? It is possible. At any rate this latter picture must be referred to the same period. There is, I believe, only internal evidence surviving for its authorship; and good judges have expressed a doubt about it. But it seems impossible to suppose that it was not painted by Crome. The way in which the water in the hollows is painted, to take a characteristic detail, is exactly like the painting of the pool in *Carrow Abbey*; and not

¹ Mr. Cosmo Monkhouse in the *Dictionary of National Biography*.

less so, the painting of the broken ground. Moreover, the composition and the sentiment of the picture are precisely what one would expect from a man of Crome's individual temper working under the influence of



*The Windmill. By J. Crome. National Gallery.
From the reproduction published by the Autotype Company.*

Wilson. It is not quite the real Crome yet, it is not the mature and perfectly developed Crome, but it is the work of a master. Some eyes will find in it a certain baldness; but we may say of it what Matthew

Arnold said of some of Wordsworth's poetry: "It is bald, as the mountain-tops are bald, with a baldness that is full of grandeur."

The same manner of painting, and just the same coarse canvas, appear in a picture painted probably in this year, 1805, and exhibited in 1806. Like *Carrow Abbey*, it is in Mr. Colman's collection. This is the *Cow Tower on the Swannery Meadow*, an old tower on the Yare, still standing. The composition will be seen from the reproduction (p. 11); but otherwise an inadequate impression of the painting is conveyed. The colouring is a sober harmony, and in the painting of the old, discoloured bricks of the tower itself there is delightful work. But the whole impression is decidedly an impression of austerity. Here, even more than in *Carrow Abbey*, we get the essential Crome of this earlier period. It is absolutely original. In certain passages, especially the sandy road and slope at the right, something akin to the manner of Velazquez seems suggested. But one can think of no one else as inspiring any portion of it. Again we notice the same lightness of handling, the same extraordinary combination of breadth and precision, which throughout distinguishes Crome's work, and from which one derives a pleasure similar to that given by pregnant and happy epithets in a writer. All is sane, large, simple.

Crome had already found himself. Yet he still continued at times to exercise his brush in the manner of his favourites, Gainsborough and Wilson. Probably such exercises were more profitable than pictures like the *Cow Tower*, which one could never imagine to be popular.

A *Composition in the style of Wilson* was painted in 1809; and a *Temple of Venus, after a sketch by Wilson*, was exhibited in 1811. But just now Crome seems to have had Gainsborough chiefly in his thoughts. With the *Cow Tower* in 1806 was exhibited *A sketch in Gainsborough's manner*. And Gainsborough's influence is perceptible in a large picture, of 1807 presumably, which was one of Crome's early contributions to the Royal Academy exhibitions in 1808. He had first appeared at Somerset House two years before, when his name appears, once as "Crome" and again as "Croom," with two *Landscapes from Nature*. He exhibited also in 1807, 1809, 1811, 1812, 1816, and 1818; but the *Blacksmith's Shop* of 1808 was probably the most important of his contributions to the Royal Academy.

It is interesting to note that John Berney Crome appears with his father in the Academy catalogue of 1811. This was the son's first appearance in London, where he was to exhibit much, chiefly at Suffolk Street and the British Institution, before his death. Born in 1794, he was only about seventeen at this first appearance in London. He soon developed into a prolific and skilful painter; and several of his pictures have been sold and greatly admired as the work of his father. But he was extravagant, and grew careless in his later years, producing a great number of pictures, nearly all of them moonlight subjects. He would meet any emergency with one of these rapid and facile productions, which, as may be imagined, are worth little as works of art.¹ At the present time, however, John Berney was a skilful pupil of his father's and ably seconded him at the exhibitions.

The Blacksmith's Shop, which was exhibited at Messrs. Agnew's last year, is a large and important picture, containing seven figures; but it is not a very characteristic or significant work. It is the outside of the shop (not the inside, as some writers have assumed from the title), a gabled building with thatched roof, the timbers warped with age and the lines of its structure uneven. A man is sharpening a tool at a grindstone in the foreground, across which is spread a triangle of shadow, in the old conventional way; other figures are at the door and within. Something too abruptly angular and intractable in the main lines of the composition mars the general effect; but the quality of the actual painting is delightful; the luminous play about the uneven smoothness of the gable wall, the bloom upon the rusted thatch, are painted as only Crome could paint such things. It is in the handling of the trees especially, which thrust their branches up behind the roof, that one feels a reminiscence of Gainsborough.

¹ One of these moonlight scenes is in the Picture Gallery at Brussels.

IV. *Influence of Hobbema—The Sale of 1812—Pupils*

So far, we can find no trace whatever of the influence of Hobbema, on whom it has often been presumed that Crome's art was founded. Nor is there a trace, so far, of any other Dutchman's influence.

Hobbema was, however, one of Crome's idols during the latter part of his career. When did he begin to admire him? There was a Hobbema at Mr. Harvey's, but it does not appear to have been particularly studied by Crome in his youth. But Hobbema and Ruysdael must assuredly have been in his mind when doing the etchings, which date from 1812 and 1813. It is said that while riding about Norfolk on his daily visits to pupils, Crome used often to pass the fine oaks in Kimberley Park. It must have been also on these visits that he became acquainted with Hobbema in collectors' houses. It seems not unreasonable to conjecture that, being fascinated with the oak-trees as a subject for painting, and seeing how finely Hobbema had painted such subjects, he was seized with a desire to emulate the Dutch master. If so, it was with no ignoble envy; for Hobbema was always "his dear Hobbema," whose name was to be upon his dying lips. But it is evident that, for the Norfolk gentry and amateurs, Crome was not looked upon as much more than the Norwich drawing-master. Even Dawson Turner, who bought his pictures and admired them, thought he was honouring Crome by recording that one of his pictures had been mistaken for a Van der Neer. So it was but natural that Crome's ambition should be touched and his pride stirred. He, too, would show that his oaks were worthy of being treasured with those of Hobbema, and his moonrises with those of Van der Neer.

The oaks in Kimberley Park furnished Crome with a large picture, once in the Fuller-Maitland collection at Stansted, now in Mr. Orrock's possession. The oaks are noble trees, painted with rather less definition than in later years; and everything in the composition is made use of, to enhance the erectness and massive strength of the sturdy trunks.

Crome was now prospering well. His teaching brought him a fair income, and he was able to live in comfort and to indulge his whims. He had an inconvenient habit of attending auction rooms, and buying

odd lots that took his fancy. Sometimes, as when a cartload of headstones which he had bought appeared at his house, there was some difficulty in finding room for his purchases, and the family protested. It seems that these accumulations became embarrassing, and Crome determined on a sale. The sale was advertised in the *Norfolk Chronicle* to take place in Mr. Noverre's Room at Yarmouth, Wednesday, September 23, and two following days, 1812. But what is remarkable is, that neither in the advertisement nor on the catalogue is any auctioneer's name mentioned. The inference is, that Crome played auctioneer himself.

If this is so, we may find a trace of the fact in a story told by Allan Cunningham,¹ who says that Dawson Turner suggested to Crome to have a sale of his pictures, and the auctioneer professing himself unable to describe them, Crome undertook the office himself. This unlikely tale is probably founded on a hearsay account of the sale of 1812. It was not, however, a sale of Crome's works: there is no picture of his in the catalogue.

This catalogue of eighteen pages, well printed on fine paper, affords abundant evidence that Crome was a man of some means, and had taste and knowledge of art. "Prints, Etchings, and Original Drawings . . . together with curious books of prints" made up the contents of the "splendid collection."

It is interesting to note what masters figured in Crome's portfolios. Among the drawings Raphael, Rembrandt, Murillo, Poussin, Gainsborough, Rowlandson, Lucas van Leyden, Goltzius, de Vlieger, van Goyen, Salvator Rosa, and Bassano are said to be represented; among the etchings Rembrandt, Waterloo, and Canaletti; among the painters, after whom Crome had engravings, were Titian, Giorgione, Rubens, Raphael, Andrea del Sarto, Claude, Reynolds, Morland, Gainsborough, Stothard, Hogarth, Teniers, Eeckhout, and Vernet.

With the pictures of many of these masters Crome had probably become acquainted in the various collections existing in Norfolk, at places where he visited as a teacher.

It was in the year before the sale, in 1811, that his most celebrated pupil, James Stark, was articled to him for three years. Stark was then

¹ The Cabinet Gallery of Pictures, 1833.

seventeen. When the three years were up he went to London and entered the Academy schools.

A man of finer gift, George Vincent, who was two years younger than Stark, became Crome's pupil about the same time. He exhibited some early efforts at the Norwich exhibition in 1811 and 1812, some of which were described as "after Crome."

These and other pupils were affectionately attached to their master, and he never ceased to take the liveliest interest in their work. A letter of his to Stark in 1816 shows how cordial a friend he was, and how unpretending in his counsels; it is as if he were writing to a companion of equal age and gift: he writes as a man who is still learning, still aspiring.

V. Etchings—Water-colours

Crome was one of the earliest men to revive original etching in England. The art which had flourished so abundantly in the seventeenth century, made illustrious by Callot, Rembrandt, and Claude, had degenerated in the eighteenth into a mere fashion of reproducing and multiplying designs.

Turner's *Liber Studiorum* was published before any of Crome's etchings were made; but wonderful as are the preliminary etchings of the *Liber* in their powerful economy of means and seizure of essentials, they were not intended to be looked upon as complete in themselves, without the superadded mezzotint, nor are they true etcher's work. On the other hand, Crome preceded Wilkie and Geddes.

The first date on any of Crome's etchings is 1809. It is a soft-ground etching, of the kind so fashionable at one time for reproducing, almost in facsimile, sketches in soft black pencil, till lithography drove the more uncertain and laborious method out of the field. Crome's soft-ground etchings, of which the illustration is a fair example, are more successful than the ordinary hard-ground etchings, which are, almost without exception, ill-bitten and ill-printed. They are lighter too in touch, more successful in rendering atmosphere, and show, some of them, a sense of wind and freshness not generally associated with Crome.

Except two of churches, one of a dog, and another of cattle, these are all landscapes; one, a road passing through a farm, with trees and scattered buildings; another a pool with dark straight firs contrasted with the knotted foliage of the oak; another fallen trees across a hollow way.

The hard-ground etchings seem to betray a different aim. They are,



Study of a Tree. Soft-ground etching by J. Crome.

for the most part, minute and intricate studies of the growth and foliage of trees, chiefly oaks. Many are dated; but there is no date on any, other than 1812 or 1813. One may conjecture that they were done after the soft-ground etchings; and from a story of Dawson Turner's it seems that Crome had Ruysdael's etchings—which are all of the same kind of subject—in his mind as models. As far as the anatomy of trees

is concerned, the thrust and curve of trunk and stubborn branch, Crome's etchings are extraordinary in their grasp. But his style seems almost to have deserted him; and there is scarcely an attempt to counterfeit the softness of atmosphere.

The little piece we have chosen as an example is better bitten than most of Crome's plates. Otherwise it has not the delicate work of the small *At Hingham*, a scene on the river with trees and sheds and boats, like Mr. Barwell's beautiful study (p. 31). This, had the acid succeeded, would have been a charming thing. Another plate that is admirable in its Dutch way, is the *Bawburgh*, with its pool and willow. But the most Crome-like of the etchings and the finest, is the *Mousehold Heath*, the magnificent sky of which, with its great rolling clouds, was to



At Scoulton. From the etching by J. Crome.

be destroyed by Dawson Turner and Berney Crome, quite unaccountably, for the sake of a miserable phantasm of its former self, defaced with ruled lines and almost obliterated.

Crome himself was not satisfied with his etchings and would not publish them, although, according to Dawson Turner, he issued a prospectus in 1812 and got a number of subscribers. Nor does he seem to have done any more plates after 1813.

A set of thirty-one etchings was published at Norwich in 1834. The volume was called *Norfolk Picturesque Scenery*. Four years later seventeen of these plates were issued with a memoir by Dawson Turner, and a portrait, engraved, after a picture by Murphy, under the title of *Etchings in Norfolk*. There have been two issues since, but these later impressions are worth little. It is unfair to judge Crome by his etching,

which was with him a quite secondary pursuit, like his water-colours. These, which may be conveniently mentioned here, are not often met with, though there have been a good many imitations of them. Mr. Reeve has one, a woody heath, of great delicacy and beauty. A large and rather damaged sketch of a hollow road with a cart, and oaks upon a bank beside it, is in the British Museum Print Room. It is broadly washed with a few colours in a large and sober style. There are one or two others at South Kensington; two in Sir Charles Robinson's collection, lately at the Guildhall, are Hobbema-like sepia studies of wood and common. Mr. J. L. Roget has a very spirited and delightful little sketch of a crowd of ships at sea. Of finer excellence, perhaps, than any of these is the delicate and finished *Yarmouth Beach*, belonging to Sir Reginald Palgrave, a beautiful drawing full of air and sun, with many figures charmingly grouped. But the water-colours commonly seen are drawing copies of little interest or importance.

VI. *Visit to France*

While we have been following the obscure career of a painter in a corner of England, Europe has been convulsed with war and change.

In 1814 Napoleon, born within a few months of Crome, was at last dethroned and a prisoner in Elba. The world breathed freely again; in England especially there was extravagant rejoicing; and from all parts of Europe people flocked to Paris. Grimaldi was singing every night in the pantomime his famous song—

London now is out of town;
Who in England tarries?
Who can bear to linger there
When all the world's in Paris?

Artists especially were thronging thither, for in the Louvre was gathered together that incomparable collection of masterpieces, the richest spoils of foreign galleries, which Napoleon had brought home from his victorious campaigns.

Like hundreds of other Englishmen, Crome determined not to neglect this marvellous opportunity; and in the early autumn, with two

Norwich friends, Mr. Coppin and Mr. Freeman, he crossed the Channel and landed at Calais.

Stories are told of the difficulty the three found in expressing their wants; how Crome drew sketches of what he needed, and having drawn a boiled egg, received a salt-cellar; how their British stomachs mutinied at French dishes, and how they recoiled in dismay from the apparition of a French plum-pudding, made from a recipe which one of them had thoughtfully brought with him.

In a letter from Paris, dated October 10, which has been preserved,¹ Crome shows a pleasant British pride.

DEAR WIFE (he writes)—After one of the most pleasant journeys of one hundred and seventy miles over one of the most fertile countreys I ever saw we arrived in the capital of France. You may imagine how everything struck us with surprise; people of all nations going to and fro—Turks, Jews, etc. I shall not enter into y^e particulars in this my letter, but suffice it to say we are all in good health, and in good lodgings,—that in Paris is one great difficulty. We have been at St. Cloud and Versailles; I cannot describe it on letter. We have seen three palaces the most magnificent in [the] world. I shall not trouble you with a long letter this time as the post goes out in an hour [so] that time will not allow me was I so disposed. This morning I am going to see the object of my journey, that is the Thuilleries. I am told here I shall find many English artists. Glover has been painting. I believe he has not been copying, but looking, and painting one of his own compositions.² Pray let me know how you are going on, giving best respects to all friends. I believe the English may boast of having the start of these foreigners, but a happier race of people there cannot be. I shall make this journey pay. I shall be very careful how I lay out my money. I have seen some shops. They ask treble what they will take, so you may suppose what a set they are. I shall see David to-morrow, and the rest of the artists when I can find time. I write this before I know what I am going about at y^e Thuilleries as the post compels me.—I am, etc., yours till death,
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One wishes that the post could have waited; we might then have known something of Crome's impressions of the pictures. The friends

¹ It was quoted in full in the *Eastern Daily Press*, January 13, 1885.

² This picture of Glover's was a composition in which he tried to combine the excellences of all great masters, wandering like a bee from picture to picture and sucking something from each. The result, which he christened *The Bay of Naples*, so pleased Louis XVIII. that he ordered a medal to be struck in its honour. This was prevented by the return of Napoleon, who, however, also admired the picture and sent it with a medal to England, whither Glover had already fled.



J. P. Jones

From the reproduction published by the Antarctic Company

Moosehold Heath near Norwich.



© 1910 J.P. Jones

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J. H. M. S. 1914

From the reproduction published by the Antiquary Company.

Moushold Heath near Norwich.



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J. H. M. S. 1891

From the reproduction published by the H. M. S. Company

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Mousehold Heath near Norwich.

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returned by way of Belgium, where Crome made the sketch for a picture of the Ostend river at Bruges.

VII. *Pictures of 1814-1816*

From this period till his death is the most fruitful part of Crome's career. The record of these years, 1814-21, is little more than the enumeration of works painted. Many of these cannot now be identified; but we know the dates of certain important pictures, and these are enough material for forming a tolerably clear conception of Crome's progress.

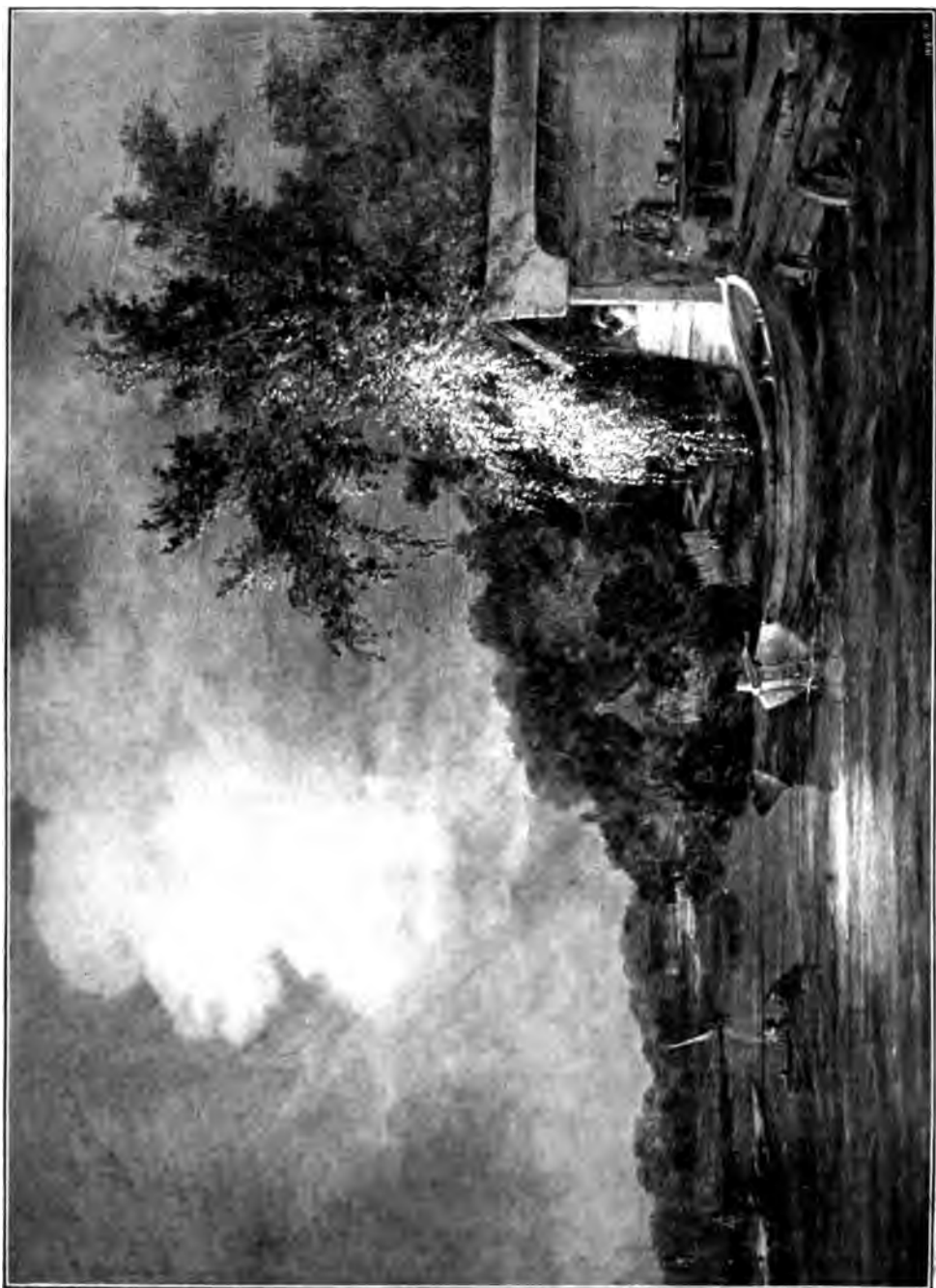
While seeing the pictures in Paris, he had not been idle with his own pencil. On returning to Norwich, he painted, in 1815, a picture from a sketch he had made of the *Boulevard des Italiens*. The picture is now at Keswick Hall, near Norwich, with its companion, the *Fish-market at Boulogne*, which was not painted till 1820, five years later. It will be convenient, however, to speak of the two together; for the two stand by themselves in Crome's work, different from anything else in it. They show the sensitiveness of the artist's style. Just as he would paint foliage in one way, when he wanted to express one aspect of its charm, its softness and cool transparency say, and in quite a different way when the stir of branches or the delicate articulation of leaves preoccupied him; so now he expressed the sensation of a different atmosphere in a characteristic way. One feels this especially in the boulevard picture. A sharpness and brightness of air, such as an English traveller is pleasantly aware of on a first arrival in Paris, the very freshness of sensation brought every moment by novel sight and sound, with the briskness of the streets, the trees rustling, the cool blue of the October sky, and little clouds hastening across it, all this is translated on to the vivid canvas. As a composition, the picture is not quite fortunate; but the whole work is full of originality; the choice of subject was itself original. And there is much of historical interest too, in this representation of a boulevard of old Paris, just at this moment, when all the nations of Europe were gathered in the city.

The *Boulogne* is equally notable with the *Boulevard des Italiens* for the number of figures, excellently put in, which it contains. When Crome could paint figures so well as this, it seems strange that he should have allowed other hands to insert them in some of his pictures. No one can doubt that in these two cases figures and landscape were painted by the same hand; the figures grow in their places, and one could not say where the landscape begins and ends. In both of these pictures Crome allowed himself more variety and gaiety of colour than elsewhere; in the groups of fisher-folk at Boulogne there is light yellow, and pink and blue and red, as well as darker browns, in the varied dresses of the men and women. But the beauty of the *Boulogne* is chiefly the lovely, warm, afternoon light filling the sky and the open space of the sands with transparency, through which the line of cliff, broken by mast and sail, shows a hundred pearly shades of colour. On the land side of the cliff a hollow, with farm buildings above, catches and absorbs the peaceful glow.

As we have noted, this picture was not actually painted till 1820. Going back to 1815, we can identify another picture of that year, the *Grove Scene near Marlinsford*, engraved in the *Magazine of Art* for 1882 (p. 225). It is now in the collection of Mr. Huth.

A work of somewhat similar subject, the *Lane Scene at Catton*, in the possession of Mrs. Gunn, belongs in all probability to the following year. This is a beautiful and admirable example of a certain type of Crome, characteristic of this mature period and of a sober strength and masterly style.

Of the same period, about 1816, or later, is the picture by which Crome is best known, the great *Mousehold Heath* of the National Gallery. It was done, not as a commission, but for the painter's own pleasure "for air and space"; and it remained in his studio till after his death, when it was bought by Joseph Stannard for £1 unframed. It had been painted on two pieces of canvas, so ill-joined, that they soon came apart—a fact from which arose a well-known story of its having been cut in two by a dealer to fetch more money. After a time the canvas was mended; and the picture passed into the hands of William Yetts, who exhibited it at the International Exhibition of 1862, whence it was bought for the nation for £400.



*On the Yare at Thorpe. By J. Crome. Collection of H. G. Barwell, Esq.
From the reproduction published by the Autotype Company.*

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The cattle in the picture were inserted after Crome's death. Crome painted nothing more noble than *Mousehold Heath*. It is daring in its simplicity. But how subtly expressed is the dewy atmosphere rounding off the undulations of the heath; how luminous the clouds! Constable's clouds in the pictures on the next wall seem heavy and material beside them. These are of nothing but vapour, air-born, intangible, steeped in the soft light, and solemnising with their peaceful presence the wide aerial evening.

Less wonderful, but of exceeding charm, is the little *Mousehold Heath* at South Kensington. It may well be identical with the picture called *Boy keeping Sheep; Morning*, painted in 1815. The composition here has sweeter lines than is usual with Crome; it is painted with absolute directness; and there is a sense in it of refreshing stillness and soft early light, which makes it haunt the mind.

The even course of Norwich art was disturbed for a time in 1816. Ladbroke headed a secession from the original society; and for three years, 1816-18, a rival exhibition was held in rooms in the Shakespeare Tavern on Theatre Plain. The dispute arose over the modification of the rules of the society. Ladbroke was joined by Stannard and by Thirtle, Cotman's brother-in-law; but the seceders could not compete with Crome and his following; the movement languished and the exhibitions died.

A fine example of Ladbroke's painting has lately been acquired for the National Gallery—a view of Oxford. The influence of Crome is seen in the foreground, where Ladbroke has inserted teazles, but these are not as Crome would have painted them. There are many artificialities in the composition, but it is, nevertheless, a beautiful picture.

VIII. *Last Pictures*

The year 1818 brings us to the probable date of one of the greatest of Crome's creations, *The Poringland Oak*. But let us first notice another picture, known to date from this year, the *Ostend River near Bruges*. The sketch for this had been made in 1814, as we saw. The

picture may be taken as the type of Crome's paintings of moonlight, in which he seems to have set out to surpass Aart van der Neer, as in his forest scenes Hobbema and Ruysdael. The moon rises bright and immense from the horizon, touching with delicate illumination the low banks of the river, the boats and buildings, while on the farther shore a grove of great trees fills half the picture with contrasted darkness; not a black gloom, but a subtle darkness of many shades and soft recesses.

A *Scene at Poringland*, painted in 1818, occurs in the catalogue of the Crome exhibition of 1821. Is this the picture now in Mr. Steward's possession? Probably it is. Mr. Steward's picture was exhibited at the British Institution in 1824, and there bore the title, *Study from Nature: Poringland, Norfolk*, which brings us nearer to the former title.

But we have other means of arriving at a date. In the pool in the foreground of *The Poringland Oak* are four figures of boys bathing. Three of the boys are Crome's sons, and the figures were painted in by Michael Sharp. Now Michael Sharp Crome, the youngest of the boys here represented, was born in 1813, when Michael Sharp, after whom he was named, was staying in Crome's house; and looking at the picture one would say that the youngest boy was about four or five years old. Hence we should arrive at the same date as that of the picture exhibited in 1821, and may reasonably conclude that *The Poringland Oak* is that picture, and was therefore painted in this precise year 1818. Assuredly, this is one of Crome's masterpieces. The oak, to begin with, though young, is a tree of nobler growth than the Dutchmen ever painted; and it is portrayed with a keen sense of its majestic beauty. And behind it, coming through its branches and enkindling clear reflections from leaf and bark, and mirrored in the solemn pool beneath, how beautiful a light! How richly the light clouds above catch on their soft edges the glory that makes luminous the serene evening sky! To have seized the light so intimately, and at the same time to have painted the tree so firmly, with such precise apprehension of its growth, yet with so broad a style, and with no confusion of the delicate intercepted lights, is a triumph of the rarest kind. Lesser men would have been content to grapple with one problem only, and would perhaps have had less success in that than Crome in both.

With *The Poringland Oak* is usually associated another magnificent



*Yarmouth Beach. By J. Crome. Collection of J. J. Colman, Esq.
From the reproduction published by the Autotype Company.*

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portrait of a tree, *The Willow*, till lately belonging to Mr. Holmes, and now in America.

It has been described as looking "as if commenced and finished in a moment of inspiration," the workmanship "light and delicate" as in a Gainsborough. Those who have seen it say it is almost Crome's masterpiece.

In the absence of this famous picture, we may turn to Mr. Barwell's *On the Yare at Thorpe*, to see how beautifully Crome could express the willow's slender waving foliage. The picture is a sketch, painted with the utmost lightness but also with extraordinary firmness.

Among the pictures of 1819 the *Yarmouth Beach* belonging to Mr. Colman may conjecturally be numbered: certainly a *Yarmouth Beach* was painted in this year. The reproduction (p. 35) will give a fair idea of this fine and typical but not especially notable picture.

Of the *Boulogne* of 1820 I have already spoken; but there is another picture of this year to be noted, the surprising *Grove Scene*, also in Mr. Colman's collection. Surprising, because here at last we come upon a picture which recalls Hobbema throughout. It is said that Crome painted it to please his wife. One can certainly believe that he painted it to please some one, not himself. It is full of intricate, precise detail; not in the least dry or tedious, but careful as Hobbema is careful, and with just that degree of breadth that Hobbema has. Or we might say with equal truth that it resembles a fine Stark; for Stark, who was Crome's pupil, is far more faithful to Hobbema than Crome was. The picture is a vagary, and lies outside the line of Crome's individual development. But it is interesting, and, from the lateness of its date, extremely remarkable.

IX. *Crome as a Teacher—Death*

The last five years had been a busy time with Crome, for we must remember that, while producing these pictures, he was still practising as a teacher. He kept two horses and drove round the country to all the chief houses of the neighbourhood to give his lessons. In the evening

he would retire to his favourite tavern, where he had his arm-chair and presided in a company of his friends and gossips. Naturally, therefore, his time for painting was limited. He worked on Sundays and in his holidays. The number of pictures attributed to him, which is very great, must be some multiple of the number of those which he actually painted. In the year of his death an exhibition of all his finest works was held at Norwich. At that time few, if any, had gone out of Norfolk. But the number exhibited was little over a hundred.

Of Crome as a teacher we get an interesting glimpse in the life of one of his pupils, Rajah Brooke of Sarawak.

"In later life," says Dr. Jessopp,¹ "Brooke seems to have been a fair draughtsman. 'Old Crome' was the drawing-master during his time at Norwich, and a great favourite with the boys. As a teacher he was, according to the tradition of the school, simply useless, and his pupils took a delight in decoying the old gentleman into 'finishing' their drawings for them, which usually meant beginning a sketch and ending it at a sitting, for Crome, when once he took a pencil or brush into his hand, never could be induced to drop it, and he would work away with extraordinary rapidity, quite forgetting how time was passing. The Rev. Jonathan Matchett, now resident in Norwich, still possesses one of these 'school exercises.' It is a small landscape in oils, which Crome actually painted during his lesson at the school, with the boys looking on at him, admiring his artistic skill." This identical sketch, an old cottage, is now in Mr. Reeve's collection.

Another characteristic anecdote is recounted in Wodderspoon's memoir. A brother painter met Crome "in a remote spot of healthy verdure, with a troop of young persons." He expressed surprise at seeing him, as he thought he had left him in Norwich, engaged with his school. "I am in my school," replied Crome, "and teaching my scholars from the only true examples. Do you think," pointing to a lovely distance, "you or I can do better than that?"

A similar story is told by John Burnet, Wilkie's friend and engraver. He speaks of Crome as his "old and esteemed friend."

There were many others to whom Crome was an esteemed friend.

¹ Quoted in *The Raja of Sarawak*, by Gertrude L. Jacob. Macmillan and Co., 1876.



*Grove Scene. By J. Crome. Collection of J. J. Colman, Esq.
From the reproduction published by the Autotype Company.*

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Among these must be mentioned Samuel Paget, father of Sir James Paget, at whose house at Yarmouth Crome was always welcomed, and whose children he would amuse with fantastic sketches. Yarmouth was also the home of Dawson Turner, the antiquary, who had eleven pictures by Crome in his collection, some of which were lithographed for his privately printed book, *Outlines in Lithography*.

Dawson Turner, who is still better known through his friendship and collaboration with Cotman, had been acquainted with Crome for some years. Some of the etchings had been made in his house. He had not known Crome during his youth and early struggles, and consequently what he says of that time in his memoir is not very accurate. But on this later period his authority may be trusted. On one of his Cromes he makes this note: "He painted it for me but a year or two before his death, immediately on his return from his midsummer journey to London,¹ with his whole soul full of admiration at the effects of light and shade, and brilliant colour, and poetical feeling, and grandeur of conception, displayed in Turner's landscapes in the Exhibition. His object in this small piece was to embody upon the canvas a portion of what was impressed upon his mind." This admiration for Turner shows how alive Crome was to new influences. What were the pictures which had so impressed him? Probably the *Entrance of the Meuse* and *Richmond Hill*, exhibited in 1819, and now in the National Gallery, or perhaps the *Rome from the Vatican* of 1820. This fresh stimulus might have had interesting results, but it was destined that Crome should paint no more. In the midst of this full and happy existence, in the height of his maturity, the end came quite suddenly. Crome had been working hard, this spring of 1821, for three days. He had stretched a canvas six feet long for a picture of Wroxham Water Frolic, which he said was to be his masterpiece, but it was never finished. The next day he was seized with inflammation. On April 21 he was dying.

"My father's disorder has so much gained ground," wrote Fred Crome on that day to Dawson Turner, "that there is not the least hope of him; indeed, I think he is now breathing his last. At the same time, he is not aware of his situation; we, of course, are obliged to appear the reverse of our feelings. . . . It is killing to me. He is seldom easy

¹ It is noticeable that an annual journey seems to be implied.

unless I am by his side, holding his hand, or supporting his head. All are in tears about me." On the 22nd Crome was dead.

The affection which those about him felt for him, visible enough in his son's letter, was equally manifest at his funeral. Carriages thronged the street. "Mr. Sharp and Mr. Vincent," says the *Norwich Mercury*, "came from town on purpose, and Mr. Stark was also present. An immense concourse of people bore grateful testimony to the estimation in which his character was generally held."

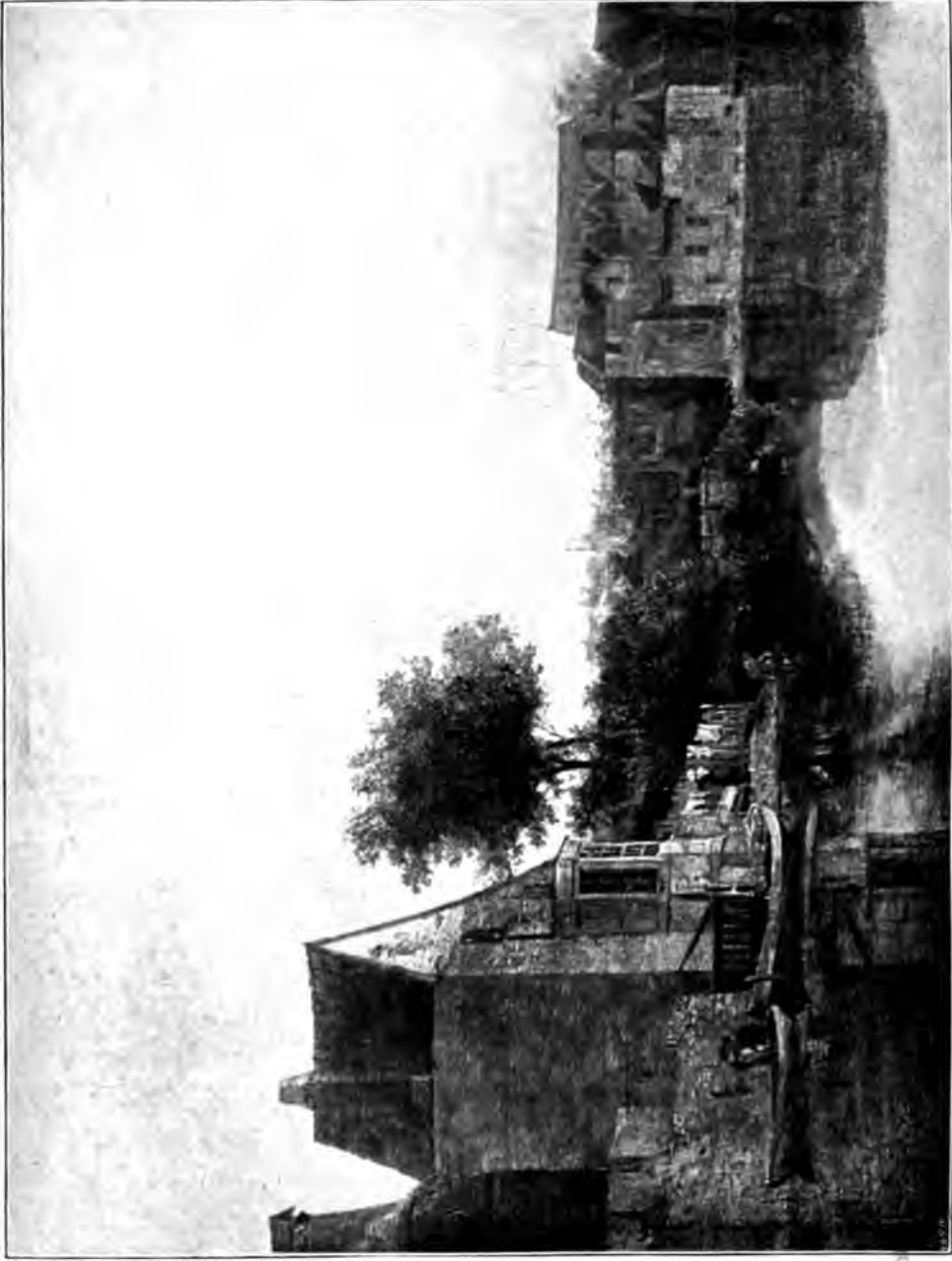
In September of the same year there was a five days' sale of the painter's prints, books, and pictures, but none of his own works were included. A hundred and eleven of these, however, lent by owners in Norwich and the neighbourhood, were exhibited in the autumn—an exhibition which included nearly all his important works.

X. *Crome's Place in the History of Art*

Dr. Richard Muther, in the one work at present existing which attempts to deal with modern painting as a whole, says of Crome that "he lived absolutely apart from the England of his time." "Norwich was his birthplace and his life-long residence. He did not know the name of Turner, he knew nothing of Wilson, he had perhaps never heard Gainsborough's name. His pictures are influenced neither by his contemporaries nor his English forerunners. . . . Hobbema is his model, the art of the Netherlands his ideal."

Even a German professor cannot be expected to know everything, and Dr. Muther's book is an astonishing achievement. When one considers the immense scope of its design, and the difficulties of procuring accurate knowledge, it would be very singular if errors were absent.

Still, while recognising the intelligence of conception displayed in this history, we may be permitted to deplore that almost all of the statements quoted from Dr. Muther about Crome are the reverse of true. It is worth while drawing attention to this, because the book is now a standard work of reference, and because the view taken of Crome is based on English writers, and is the prevalent view of him at this day in England.



*At the Back of the New Mills. By J. Crome. Collection of J. J. Colman, Esq.
From the reproduction published by the Autotype Company.*

It will be evident from the foregoing pages that this conception of Crome's art, as continuing with modifications that of Hobbema and the Dutchmen, has only ingredients of truth. Richard Wilson and Gainsborough, there can be no doubt about it, were Crome's first loves in art. He carries on the English tradition of landscape, bequeathed by them, with the infusion of a more vigorous realism of his own. It was this inborn tendency to realism which attracted him later to the Dutch masters. Crome's was not a nature to rest satisfied with the Italian tradition in the representation of trees, for example, handed down through Claude and Wilson, nor with the mannered facility of Gainsborough's later style. In the grave and self-suppressing art of Hobbema he recognised a spirit akin to his own. But in emulating the Dutch master he brought his already formed style to the work, and in *The Poringland Oak* was able to produce a picture which is more than equal to anything of Hobbema's or Ruysdael's in grasp of vital truth, while in the glow of inspiration it by far excels them.

Crome, then, stands at the meeting of two traditions in landscape ; and it is not too much to say, that his name is greater than any which had made either illustrious ; above Claude, above Ruysdael.

Since his day, landscape art, not uninfluenced by photography, which has opened to all men's eyes what only keen observers saw before, has immensely increased its "content" ; the common stock of observed and recorded truth is vastly greater than it was. And as a natural result, there have been, and are, continual revolts against the tendency to dulness which realism threatens ; there is even a danger for some minds of going to the other extreme, and prizing art which achieves a certain style by dint of sheer inadequacy of observation.

In looking back to seek a classic, it is Crome we should fix upon rather than Constable, who, by an accident, was the means of re-creating French landscape, since so potent a force in modern painting. For Crome, with a range and knowledge not inferior to Constable, is in all imaginative qualities, as well as in actual power and ease of painting, his superior. Constable attracts us because we see him always earnestly wrestling with his material ; but he rarely masters it entirely. He was well fitted to stimulate and rouse, because he was so deliberate a reformer ; but we must beware lest admiration for moral courage lead us

into making all innovation an excellence. It is sometimes assumed to be Constable's chief praise, that he chose to paint foliage at the dullest period of the year, the heavy green of midsummer; simply because it had been avoided before his time. Constable has other claims than this. But even *The Hay-Wain*, a noble picture, has a prosaic, flat effect, when the mind is saturated with *Mousehold Heath*.

XI. *Characteristics of Crome's Art*

What was Crome's own aim in painting? We are fortunate in knowing, from a letter¹ to his friend and pupil James Stark, something of his thoughts. It was written in 1816, in the time of his maturity.

FRIEND JAMES (he writes)—I received your kind letter and feel much pleased at your approval of my picture. I fear you will see too many errors for a painter of my long practice and at my time of life; however, there are parts in it you like, I have no doubt, so I am happy. . . . In your letter you wish me to give you my opinion of your picture. I should have liked it better if you had made it more of a whole, that is, the trees stronger, the sky running from them in shadow up to the opposite corner; that might have produced what, I think, it wanted, and have made it much less a too picture effect. . . . I cannot let your sky go off without some observation. I think the character of your clouds too affected, that is, too much of some of our modern painters, who mistake some of our great masters; because they sometimes put in some of those round characters of clouds, they must do the same; but if you look at any of their skies, they either assist in the composition or make some figure in the picture, nay, sometimes play the first fiddle. . . . Breath must be attended to if you paint, but a muscle gives it breath.² Your doing the same by the sky, making parts broad and of a good shape, that they may come in with your composition, forming one grand plan of light and shade, this must always please a good eye, and keep the attention of the spectator, and give delight to every one. Trifles in nature must be overlooked that we may have our feelings raised by seeing the whole picture at a glance, not knowing how or why we are so charmed. I have written you a long rigmarole story about giving dignity to whatever you paint—I fear so long that I should be scarcely able to understand what I mean myself. You will, I hope, take the will for the deed, and at the same time forgive all faults in diction, grammar, spelling, etc.

¹ In the possession of Mr. A. J. Stark, the painter's son, and printed in the memoir prefixed to the catalogue of the sixth exhibition of the Norwich Art Circle.

² This, at first sight, rather cryptic sentence must be read *Breadth*, as the context shows.

This letter shows us that Crome did not work from a sort of unconscious instinct, but consciously pursued a chosen aim. And how excellently clear is his mind, how fine his aim!

Crome's devotion to breadth and dignity is admirably seen in certain small pictures of "still life" and of plants, made probably as studies for foregrounds. It helps him in the foregrounds of his large compositions. In *Mousehold Heath* could anything be better than the thistles, docks, and sorrel? They are painted with entire knowledge, but with superb economy of means. And it is the same with Crome's trees. The botanist is not at a loss to name them; the character of each is brought out and dwelt upon with loving care; but it is not as a map of anatomical detail that an oak or a willow appears to Crome, but as a thing of life, full of running sap, silently but ceaselessly growing and changing, and not so much adorned with foliage as sentient through a thousand leaves. In the letter to Stark we see his hatred of the placid conventions which petrify and kill; he will not tame free nature to a mere "picture effect."¹ Hence he never paints after a formula; whatever he sees is fresh to him and wonderful; he is always alert to get a new impression. Seeing a tree in sunlight, he paints its branches all defined, its leaves all touched with light; but when he paints a shady avenue, he waives all his knowledge of detail, and expresses only the broad, transparent shadow, as in the *Chapel Fields* of the National Gallery. Other painters have seen only this side of the charm of foliage, and have been content to spend their lives upon it; yet none has better rendered it than Crome in this picture, where the hidden sunshine of a gray September day makes luminous twilight in the soft green leaves, and streaks the road beneath the stems with dreamy shadows. What a pity that this composition has been marred by cattle and figures, added by another hand!

This sensitiveness, this capacity for perpetually receiving fresh impressions, is especially to be noted in Crome's treatment of light. Here he shows a subtlety of sight and a certainty of touch which are of the rarest order. In the little Rembrandt-like *Dawn* (p. 15) he paints the still, white, early glow, brightening and expanding; in *Mousehold*

¹ Perhaps, however, "too picture" should be read "two-picture"; i.e. an effect wanting unity.

Heath the evening sunshine bathes the earth and sky, and steeps the clouds in aerial clearness; and the *New Mills* (p. 43) is a type of Crome's pictures of wood and water and old buildings, in which the mirrored light plays through the shadow, exquisitely luminous, or quivers from above on the dark leaves with just that effect which Constable is often said to have first painted. *The Poringland Oak* seems to attack the most difficult problems of direct and reflected sunshine, and triumphs over all.

We have already noticed that Crome in most of his etchings seems to lose his style. The reason is that he had not found a means of representing atmosphere in black and white. And it is probable that any pitch of realism is compatible with good art, so long as there be atmosphere. The visible world never at any moment coincides with the tangible world; it is the tangible world, divested of all interposing atmosphere, whether objective or subjective, that science and "realistic" artists and novelists try to reach; but the true painter and true poet see things only as they are visible to human beings full of emotions, memories, a thousand unconsciously-stored results of experience, which again go out unconsciously to tinge and influence the seeing eye and the portraying hand. In his etchings Crome represented trees divested of part of what, to us, is their reality. In his paintings it was never so; he painted the full life of things, but clothed in luminous air.

In all art, one of the greatest difficulties is to grapple with life, and at the same time to keep one's style. To achieve style and maintain it, without coming to close quarters with reality, is by comparison easy; but to wrestle with immense, intractable nature, and mould it to one's will, yet at the same time to keep inviolable the conditions of beauty, this it is which, in a phrase of Matthew Arnold's, "tears to pieces" many artists. It is Crome's glory that he triumphed in this trial. Very few indeed are the landscape painters who have put so much matter into their pictures and risen to such a dignity of manner.

JOHN SELL COTMAN

I. *Boyhood and Early Life in London*

FAR different from the life just recorded is that of John Sell Cotman. Crome, after the first struggles, had little to disturb his peaceful industry; but Cotman rarely enjoyed peace of mind. He had to contend with perpetual difficulties, with tormenting apprehensions. Nothing is sadder than the story of his ever-renewed hopes of recognition and success, continually clouded; nothing is finer than the indefatigable effort with which he fought against fortune, in spite of inward weariness often neighbouring on despair in a nature thrice more susceptible to anxiety from the depth and tenderness of its affections. Had he failed, had he gone under, there would have been far more sentiment expended over him. But he needs no man's pity. Hampered and beset as he was, he accomplished a body of work of marvellous excellence and variety. Had his scope matched his genius, his name would stand even higher than it will.

Cotman's father was a well-to-do silk mercer and dealer in foreign lace, whose place of business was in Cockey Lane, Norwich. John Sell, his eldest son, was born in Norwich on May 16, 1782.¹ He was educated at the Grammar School, and perhaps took kindlier to his books than many artists; but drawing was his great delight. He would wander out into the country sketching. His early surroundings fostered an inborn love of architecture and all relics of antiquity, no less than an ardent delight in the changing beauty of fields and skies and streams.

¹ Redgrave, followed by other authorities, wrongly gives the date as June 11.

Few towns in England have so much of fine old architecture as Norwich, so many "various splendid remains," as Cotman himself said long afterwards, when he had seen most of the ancient cities of England; and he spoke also of its beautiful neighbourhood, "not to be equalled in its quiet way by any city in the British Empire, and beloved by me." Cotman was one of those in whom early associations strike deep root, and he never ceased to love Norwich and Norfolk.

Mr. Reeve, in his incomparable collection of Cotman drawings, illustrating every phase of the artist, has one Indian-ink sketch of *Old Houses, Mill Lane, Newmarket Road*, which, if the date on it (1794) be correct, was done in Cotman's thirteenth year. It is not remarkable in itself, but already shows a sense of style.

On leaving school the boy was intended for his father's business. But after a brief trial he rebelled; he was bent on being a painter. The father was distressed; but, anxious to do the best for his son, sought the advice of Opie, who was then at Norwich. "Let him rather black boots than follow the profession of an artist," was Opie's bitter reply. But, in spite of everything, John Sell had his way; and in 1797 or 1798 he journeyed up to try his fortunes in London.

Of his first experiences there we have a glimpse in a once famous, now almost forgotten novel, *Thaddeus of Warsaw*. The hero, a Polish noble of the house of Sobieski, exiled in London and reduced to want, finds "that his sole dependence must rest on his talents for painting. His taste easily perceived that there were many drawings exhibited for sale much inferior to those which he had executed for mere amusement." So he sets out for Great Newport Street, the great home of print-sellers, and entering a shop throws his drawings instantly upon the counter. His pride is mortified by the print-seller's disrespectful treatment of him; he flings himself out of the shop and goes home. But necessity compels him to venture forth again, and he consents to make six drawings a week for a guinea.

Sobieski's experiences are said to have been suggested by what actually happened to the young Cotman. Without accepting the tale literally, we may see in it the relations between the young artists and the print-sellers of the day, and may conjecture something of Cotman's sensitive pride, on which perhaps Jane Porter, the author of *Thaddeus*, meant

playfully to rally him. We know, at any rate, that John Thirtle, afterwards Cotman's brother-in-law, used regularly to look in Ackerman's window to see if there were any new drawings by his Norwich friend.

It was not long before Cotman's talents won him appreciation from his rivals, and from that famous connoisseur and patron of artists, Dr. Thomas Monro. Monro was now about forty years old, and had been since 1792 physician to Bridewell and Bethlehem Hospital. But his



*Portrait of J. S. Cotman.
From a Lithograph in the possession of J. Reece, Esq.*

great love was for art, of which he was an enthusiastic amateur. During the long winter evenings his house in Adelphi Terrace became a studio in which a group of young men, some of whom were already becoming famous, copied drawings under the Doctor's encouraging supervision, sharing candles and receiving a supper and half-a-crown for the evening. Working here were the founders of English water-colour painting, chief among whom were Girtin and Turner.

At this early period of his career Turner held a position secondary to that of Girtin. They were of equal age, but so far Girtin had shown

himself the bolder spirit, and had gone the farther. It was Girtin who really enfranchised water-colour art. His drawings, broadly washed with a full brush on cartridge paper, displayed a richness of colouring and a spaciousness of style hitherto unknown. In 1796 he had spent the summer in the north of England, and in his painting of moor and fell and cloud there was an imaginative apprehension of the beauty of solemn and solitary places, not less rare and noble in its way than the kindred poetry of Wordsworth.

On all the youthful painters who gathered at Adelphi Terrace in the winter evenings, or who rambled through England on sketching tours in the summer, Girtin had a profound influence. Besides Turner, De Wint, Francia, John Varley, and Joshua Cristall were fellow-workers at Adelphi Terrace.

Cotman also felt the charm and power of Girtin's art; and perhaps of all that youthful band he was nearest to Girtin in spirit. He joined Girtin's sketching club, which had been started in 1799, apparently in the first instance by Francia. There were ten members: Girtin, Francia, R. K. Porter (brother of Jane Porter, who used sometimes to set the subjects for the evening, and thus made Cotman's acquaintance), T. Underwood, G. Samuel, T. Worthington, and J. C. Denham, who were the original seven; and three later acquisitions, A. W. Callcott, P. S. Murray, and Cotman himself, probably the youngest of them all. Before 1800, when Cotman was eighteen, he had made sketching excursions in Wales and in Surrey. In the Royal Academy Exhibition of that year he had six drawings, five of Surrey subjects, in the neighbourhood of Dorking, Guildford, and Leatherhead, and one of Harlech Castle. In the same year he received for a drawing the Honorary Palette of the Society of Arts.

The summers of 1800 and 1801 were probably spent in Wales, for we find him exhibiting subjects from South and from North Wales in the Academy of the years following them, 1801 and 1802. In Mr. Reeve's collection is a drawing of Bridgnorth, in Shropshire, made on his way to Wales, or on his return, dated 1800, and signed in upright characters, *Cotman*. It is a monochrome in warm brown.

Although spending most of his time in London and in long excursions, Cotman did not neglect to spend part of each year at Norwich. In the *Norwich Mercury* of September 4, 1802, he "informs his friends that

during his stay in Norwich, which will be for three weeks or a month, he proposes giving lessons in drawing to those ladies or gentlemen who may think his sketching from Nature or style of colouring beneficial to their improvement." The terms asked were half-a-guinea an hour.

Two months after this advertisement appeared, Girtin died in London. He was only twenty-seven.

The sketching club survived him, but apparently somewhat trans-



*Landscape Composition. By J. S. Cotman.
From a Sketch in the possession of Basil Cornish, Esq.*

formed; or perhaps there were several clubs which sprang out of the original club. At any rate we know that Cotman belonged to a club which met in 1803 and onwards. As in Girtin's days, they would meet at the house of one of the members, who provided paper and colours, as well as a supper, and who kept the drawings of the evening. A few of these sets must still exist; one was sold at Dr. Percy's sale in 1890. The composition here reproduced is one of a number of sketching club designs belonging to Mr. Basil Cornish; more than one is by Cotman, whose influence seems perceptible in most of them. Others are by Hayward, Neill, Paul Sandby, Munn, John Varley, and Webster;

names also recorded on the back of a *Weird Scene—Moonlight*, in Mr. Reeve's possession, as having been present on March 23, 1803, when Cotman was president for the evening. Mr. Reeve has a number of Cotman's sketching club compositions; and *The Centaur* here reproduced is one of these. Several are of similar mythological or historical subjects, and show that figures occupied the young artist at this time almost as much as landscape.

From the Academy catalogues for the next few years we are able to trace Cotman's ramblings over the country. Besides Wales, he sketched in Shropshire, Somersetshire, and Lincolnshire, as well as in London and the neighbourhood; but his favourite haunt was Yorkshire, where he made a warm friend in Mr. Francis Cholmeley of Brandsby. He taught the young Cholmeleys drawing; and they all took the liveliest and most affectionate interest in the work of their friend "Cotty," as they named him. While with the Cholmeleys he made some pencil portraits of them and of some of their friends. These are not remarkable, but show that Cotman did not neglect portraiture, which a little later he took up in some earnest.

Cotman had always a great charm of manner, and he was good-looking. The portrait reproduced on p. 51, from a unique lithograph in Mr. Reeve's possession, shows his face as it was at this time or a little later, before anxiety had worn it, as it did so soon.

This friendship was maintained by correspondence for many years. Cholmeley had always kind and wise counsel for Cotman, and to him the young painter confided his hopes and disappointments. In one of these letters we find already that note of depression which was later so much intensified. Cotman writes full of disappointment at the ill success of his drawings, and accuses himself of extravagance; and Cholmeley writes back a long letter to console him, encourages him to hope for the future, and to remember that he has good friends, like the Turners, who, as he himself had written, "were as kind and generous as ever." Dawson Turner and his wife seem indeed to have early interested themselves in Cotman's career; it is evident that their friendship was already of some standing. In a letter to Turner of November 1805, Cotman says that his summer tour of that year has been confined to York and Durham, and that his chief study has been "colouring from Nature."

Next year he was in Lincolnshire, and while sketching there the



*The Centaur. By J. S. Cotman. Collection of J. Reeve, Esq.
From the reproduction published by the Autotype Company.*

impulse came to him to return and settle down at Norwich ; and having made up his mind, he started home.

II. *Return to Norwich, and first Residence there—Early Drawings*

On returning to his native city, Cotman found the Norwich Society in the first flush of its youthful activity. The first exhibition, as we saw, had been held in the previous year.

Indeed, we can hardly doubt that the spectacle of a young and vigorous society holding exhibitions in the place where he was known already, and numbering many friends among its members, had its influence in determining his resolution to live and work at Norwich. Full of hope and interest in his work, he began to make plans for the future, and to carry out schemes already in his mind. One of these was to paint in oils. Hitherto, he seems to have worked entirely in water-colours; but we know, by a letter from his friend Francis Cholmeley, that while in Yorkshire he had turned his thoughts to oils.

Towards the end of the same year he took a house in Lockett's Court, Wymer Street,—a pleasant old house, now pulled down,—intending to open there a school of drawing, and to hold a fortnight's exhibition of his own works. The exhibition does not seem to have been held; probably because the Norwich Society offered better opportunities. He must have joined the Norwich Society almost immediately on settling in the city. In the next year's exhibition, 1807, he had twenty works, among them six portraits and a "sketch after Vandyke," probably the sketch of a man's head now in Mr. Reeve's possession. There were also *Durham Cathedral* and *Croyland Abbey*, favourite subjects of Cotman's, both represented at the British Museum, and it may be by these very drawings. Both have done service as drawing copies and are somewhat rubbed and faded. Yet the *Durham*, here reproduced, remains a noble drawing. It has Girtin's largeness and serious simplicity, and at the same time a deeper comprehension of the grandeur of the architecture, an intenser feeling for the actual moulding and essential character of the old stone. Altogether this is a finer thing than Mr. Colman's *Durham Cathedral and Castle*, an oblong drawing, in which the wonderful situation of the cathedral is not seized to the fullest advantage, and in which the colour—which has altered a little—is less harmonious.

The British Museum *Croyland* is not quite a success. It is too large



Durham Cathedral. By J. S. Cotman. British Museum.

for the composition ; and the painting is, for Cotman, a little laboured. Nevertheless, the piled, contorted, mountainous thunder-cloud receding slowly over the fen, the ruined arches and tower of the Abbey, rising against it in cold light, even the chill of the air after the storm, these are expressed with an intensity and a grandeur that few could have surpassed. But a drawing which is finer and in better condition than these is Mr. Reeve's *Greta Bridge*. Here, and in the same owner's *Duncombe Park*, the finest qualities of Cotman's earlier art are summed up. No reproduction can convey the extraordinary charm of colour which *Greta Bridge* possesses. Sober is too tame and negative a word for the harmony that pervades it : it is quiet, it is severe ; yet full of living power in all its quietness, rich and abundant in all its severity.

Of equal and perhaps rarer charm is the exquisite *Duncombe Park*. Nowhere so perfectly has Cotman painted the grace of trees in spring. The delicate stem of the ash and its fresh leaves traced on the sky are painted firmly, with no second touches to mar their transparency, yet with what sensitive precision, what aerial lightness ! Such a drawing as this makes no loud appeal ; but when the eye has lingered upon it sufficiently for the mind to enter its atmosphere, this vision of spring woods in their solitude, "retired as noonday dew," seems indeed to have distilled the secret charm of all such places, and to contain all the beauty of one's memories, with a beauty heightened and more real.

It is odd to remember that while exhibiting drawings like this, Cotman styled himself "portrait painter." But doubtless painting portraits brought more profit than painting *Duncombe Parks*. As an example of Cotman's portraiture at this period, the reproduction of a water-colour of Crome (p. 13) done in 1809 is interesting.

In 1808 the Norwich Exhibition had a wonderful display of Cotman's work ; no less than sixty-seven productions, and among them several sketches and studies in oil, his first beginnings in this medium.

In the exhibition of this year was Mr. Reeve's delightful *Twickenham, Mid-day*, in which, though the method of painting is the same as in *Greta Bridge*, there is perceptible a certain difference in feeling, an element of fresh beauty. The sense of breeze and sunshine, the expression of physical joy in a day of idle pleasure on the river, are things which in earlier drawings Cotman seems scarcely to have aimed at,



*Duncombe Park. By J. S. Cotman. Collection of J. Reeve, Esq.
From the reproduction published by the Autotype Company.*

choosing rather solemn solitudes or noble effects of architecture. Later, we find often a great delight in the painting of pleasure-parties, scenes with gay and luxurious accessories. But rarely do we find it expressed with such happy freshness, such a feeling of youth and morning, as in this early *Twickenham*.

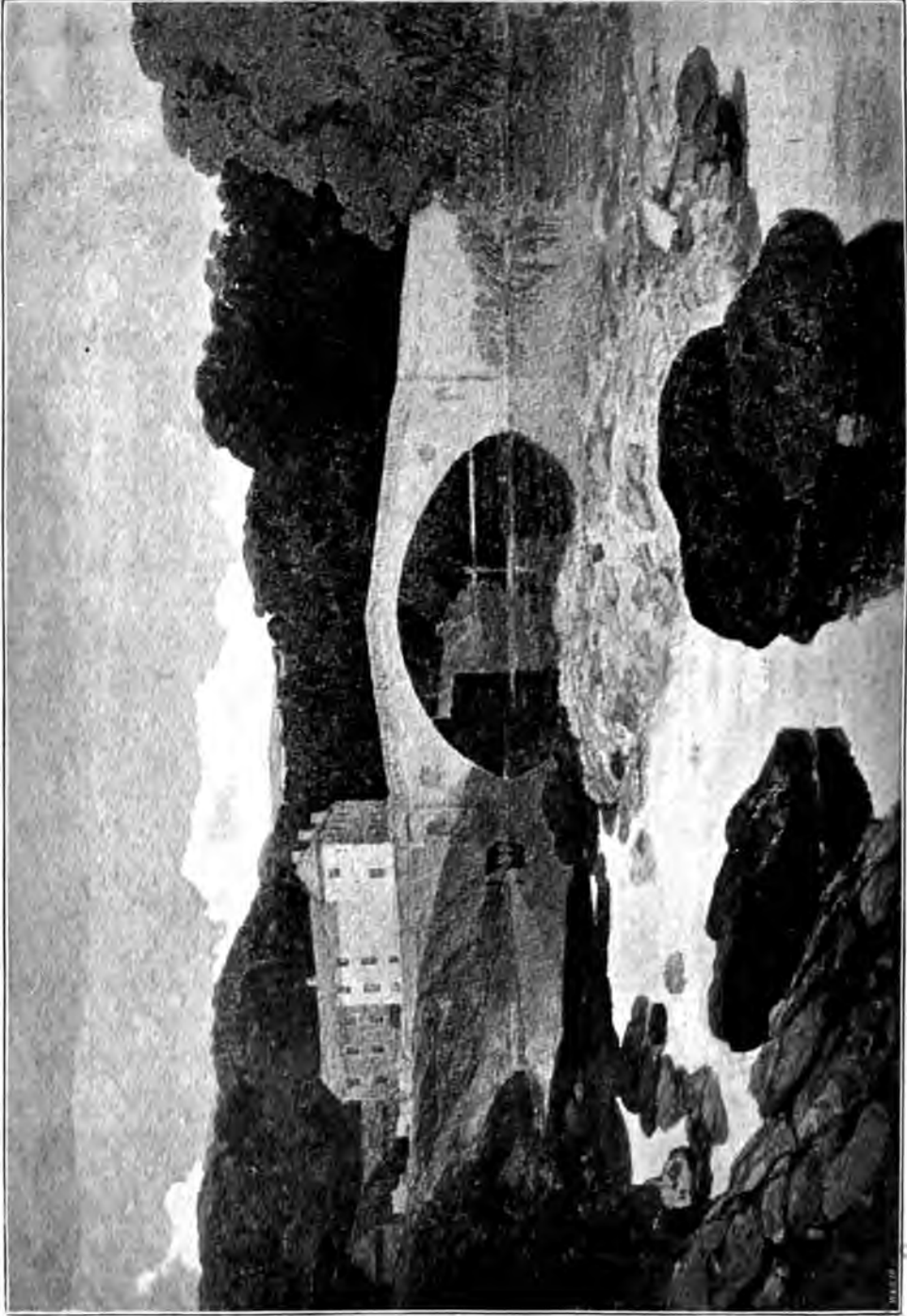
III. *Marriage—Drawings previous to 1817*

Already, as we have noticed, Cotman had suffered from fits of despondency when he felt uncertain of his future. But just now he seems to have been full of hope as of activity. He was much esteemed at Norwich, was making friends, and feeling that his powers were recognised by his fellow-artists. He had schemes for the future, and looked forward. Early in 1809 he was married.

His wife, Ann Mills, was the daughter of a farmer at Felbrigg, near Cromer, and at Felbrigg the wedding took place on January 6. Of his wife we know little, but in a pencil portrait by Cotman, possessed by their grandson, Dr. Cotman, her features and expression have a look of sweet firmness, which confirms what appears elsewhere about her character.

Cotman lost no time in settling to his work as a teacher. His plan of teaching was a peculiar one. It was the system of a circulating library. Subscribers could choose, for a quarterly subscription of a guinea, from a collection of six hundred drawings, taking home what they liked to copy. Cotman gave instructions in copying on the two days in the week when the drawings were delivered. It was his practice to number these drawings; the numbers often seen on his water-colours refer to this collection. And as there are some bearing numbers running into several thousands, the collection must have greatly increased in later years.

Besides painting and teaching, Cotman now began to turn serious attention to etching. Perhaps among his earliest attempts on copper were some of the soft-ground etchings, not published till long afterwards in the *Liber Studiorum* of 1838. But these were done for his own pleasure. It was in his thoughts now to publish a volume of etchings by subscription. But before turning to the series of etchings which were to



*Greta Bridge. By J. S. Cotman. Collection of James Reeve, Esq.
From the reproduction published by the Autotype Company.*



J. Holman del

From the reproduction published by the Phototype Company

J. Levens & Co. Lond.

Breaking the Clod

U O P N

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form so large a part of Cotman's production during the next ten years, it is necessary to note some drawings of this time.

Cotman's work cannot be split up neatly and crudely into periods. He kept so many aims before him in his work, concentrating himself, however, on each for the time being, that it would be dangerous to assert a date too precisely for many of his drawings. Still, we can indicate roughly the probable period of most of his work.

We have noticed in the *Twickenham* a certain indication of a new element in Cotman's painting. In the drawings of the years immediately following we find a distinct change. It shows itself chiefly in the direction of colour, as if Cotman were dissatisfied with the sobriety, however rich, of his early style. The warm yellows, which afterwards became so fascinating to him, begin to appear.

In the large *Trentham Church* of 1808 or 1809 there is an interesting instance of his fondness for sumptuous colour. The chief feature in the drawing is a gorgeous Moorish saddle-cloth of crimson embroidered with gold, which is hung over the pulpit, and this is evidently painted with intense enjoyment.

In the *Draining Mill, Lincolnshire*, of 1810, warm tones begin to assert themselves; and in the *Mousehold Heath* of the same year the favourite yellow is even more prominent. These two drawings, both in Mr. Reeve's collection, mark a transition, and are not quite so successful as they might have been, fine as each is in its way, on that account. From this time to about 1815 the water-colours show frequently an attempt to paint sunshine, such as is absent from the earlier work; not the hot sunshine of the years after Cotman's visits to Normandy, but a limpid wash of light.

But more remarkable than any of the water-colours of this time is a series of black and white drawings on gray paper, of which Mr. Reeve possesses beautiful examples. One of these, *The Mare and Foal*, is dated 1816. And to the same date, or perhaps a little earlier, may be assigned one of Cotman's most wonderful achievements—*Breaking the Clod*, which is here reproduced as a plate. Of this lovely drawing I hope to say something later on. Not far removed from this are some compositions in which, as in *Breaking the Clod*, the charm and mystery of foliage have been the central aim. *Dewy Eve*, with its broad and darkly branching

trees, under which two boys are fishing, and the *Shadowed Stream* (p. 77) are instances; and perhaps more beautiful than either, *Postwick Grove* (p. 79).

Here, and also in a drawing of *Cader Idris*, with a mountain pool in the foreground; into which Cotman has inserted, to break the lines, a number of stakes, a curious effect is noticeable. To gain richness and brilliance, Cotman mixed with his colour thin paste, which had been allowed to go sour; the paint, instead of being absorbed, lies on the surface, transparent in the track of the brush, and clotted at its edges. The result is a wonderful glowing effect, especially in the intense and luminous blues of *Cader Idris*.¹

All of these are in all probability anterior to Cotman's first visit to Normandy in 1817. After his Normandy tours his colouring was almost always in a far higher key.

With the drawings made in Normandy and after his return I shall deal later. Meanwhile let us come back to the etchings.

IV. Etchings—Residence at Yarmouth

A letter to Dawson Turner, dated February 1811, the original of which is now in the Print Room of the British Museum, tells us something of Cotman's aims in etching. He says: "I decidedly *follow* Piranesi, however far I may be behind him in every requisite"; and he goes on to ask his friend if he could manage to procure him a sight of a complete set of Piranesi's etchings, such as he knew Mr. Hudson Gurney to possess. Again: "It has been my aim to improve by every means in my power, even in the article of paper, which I caused to be made for me. The substance is stouter and better-coloured than most prints."

When this letter was written, Cotman had already etched his first series of plates. Most are dated 1810, several January 1811. The set was issued in parts, and published in 1811 by Boydell and by Colnaghi in London, and dedicated to Sir H. C. Englefield, Bart. With the exception of one plate, a sylvan scene in Duncombe Park, the subjects are all architectural, and the majority of these are antiquities in Yorkshire.

¹ All these drawings are in Mr. Reeve's collection.



*Draining Mill, Lincolnshire. By J. S. Cotman. Collection of James Reeve, Esq.
From the reproduction published by the Autotype Company.*

All Cotman's etchings were badly printed, in the driest possible way, and this makes his bitten lines appear more meagre and poverty-stricken than they really were. As an etcher, he cannot be compared to Piranesi. Nor, except in some of the few plates published after his death, did he work in the true etcher's spirit. These etchings are, in fact, simply records of architectural studies. It is in this light that we must view them; and so regarded, they have extraordinary merit. Few have understood architecture so well, or drawn it with such mastery.

It is not merely the seizure of a picturesque point of view, from which a ruined arch or a cathedral front conveniently helps the composition and gives interest to the landscape, nor is it the plain likeness of a building. Cotman loved architecture, and at his hands a monument of antiquity receives a loving treatment, its dignity is communicated, its features tenderly recorded. It is to him a thing of venerable life, and he draws it almost as a sentient creation, that has lived its life and gathered round it an atmosphere of its own, not so much built upon as growing out of the ground, with its own trees and hills about it, surrounding the weather-moulded walls with a kind of natural sanctity. Even the clouds are made to conspire sometimes towards the particular impression designed. In the *Byland Abbey*, for instance (a nearer view than that in Mr. Reeve's fine early drawing), the white ascending clouds carry on and upward the lines of the building, as if in the artist's mind they were raising again in a triumphant dream the soaring arch of the long-fallen roof.

In the same letter from which I have already quoted Cotman announces his intention of beginning a series of *Etchings of all Ornamented Antiquities in Norfolk*. The series thus projected was issued, like the first, in ten parts, the publication of which extended from 1812 to 1818. In this last year they were issued complete by Longmans. The plates are sixty in number.

Meanwhile Cotman had left Norwich for Southtown, Yarmouth. In making this change he was chiefly influenced by his friendship for Dawson Turner, who lived at Yarmouth, and whose antiquarian enthusiasm had found in Cotman so ready a seconder. Through Dawson Turner also Cotman gained many pupils, and he was encouraged to think that by living at Yarmouth he would benefit professionally.

At the same time he did not sever his connection with Norwich, but continued giving regular lessons there. His time was therefore passed between the two places. He was to remain in Yarmouth till 1823.

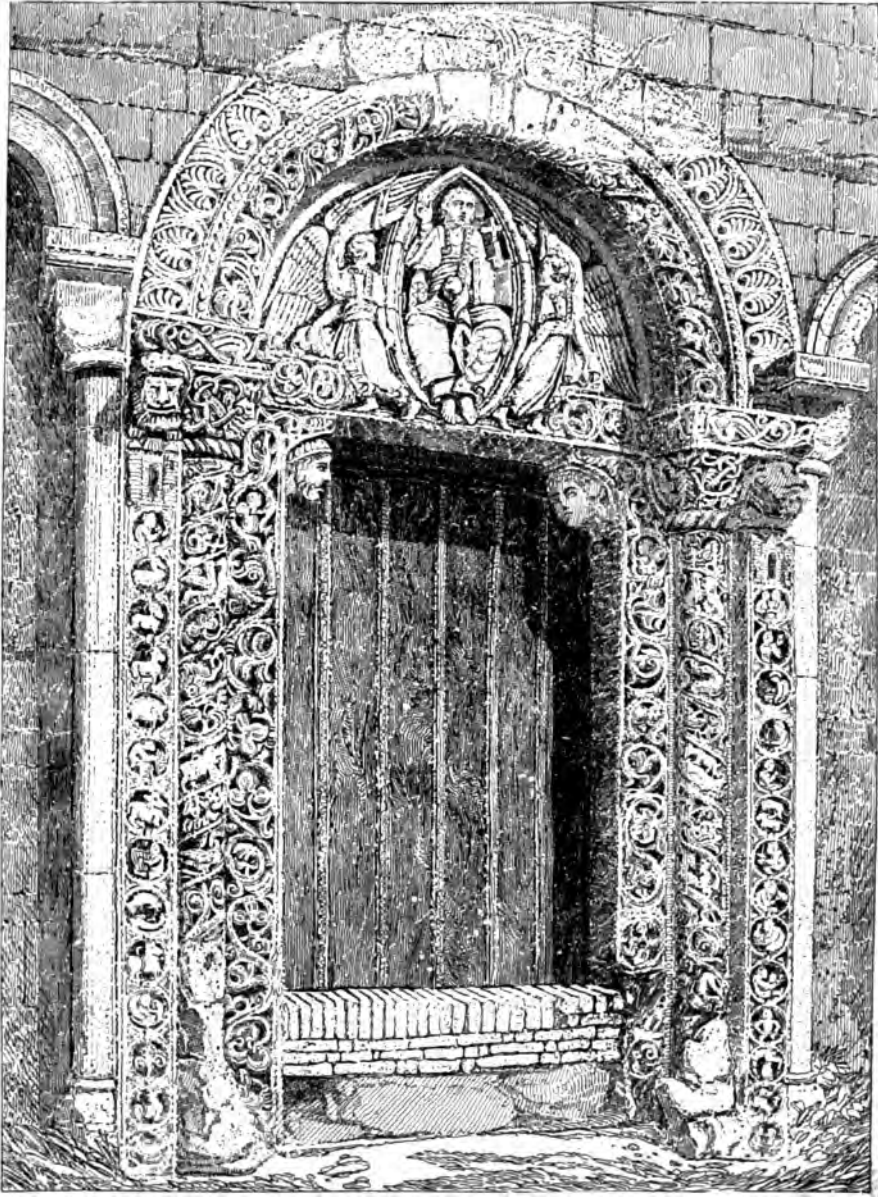
These years were principally occupied with etching. But he also devoted more attention than he had hitherto done to oil-painting. The *Waterfall*, with its beautiful composition and bold colour, dates from the earlier part of this period; and from these years also must date the earliest of Cotman's fine sea-pieces, of which the *Fishing Boats off Yarmouth* is so splendid a specimen.

The now habitual sight and companionship of the sea began to enter into Cotman's life; he studied shipping, and mastered the forms of waves. And perhaps as potent, though indirect, was the influence on his mind and art of the changeful vastness, the restless infinity of the sea, bringing a new and quickening stimulus to his eye and brain.

But to return to the etchings. While the *Antiquities of Norfolk* was still in course of publication, Cotman projected another large work, the *Sepulchral Brasses of Norfolk*. This occupied him between 1814 and 1818, and the work was published in 1819. In a second edition, published by Bohn in 1839, a series of Suffolk brasses were added. The *Brasses* need not concern us, beyond showing how absorbed in antiquities Cotman was at this period.

1814 is also the date of a little volume illustrated by him, occasioned by the fall of Napoleon in that year. The book, privately printed, is an account of the "Grand Festival at Yarmouth, on Tuesday, the 19th of April 1814."

Cotman's title-page represents, above, a scene at the dinner given on the quay to eight thousand people; the beef and plum-pudding are arriving, and foaming tankards uproariously lifted: below, the donkey races which followed. These festivities led up to the ceremonious kindling of a huge bonfire, crowned by an effigy of Napoleon (the head filled with gunpowder). This was also etched by Cotman, together with a plan of the dinner-tables on the quay, and an elevation of the *Funeral Pile of the Buonapartean Dynasty*, a picture of the Tyrant in the Devil's clutches. Altogether, it is an amusing glimpse into that wonderful time when Europe for a brief time breathed freely, and through Britain especially all men were in a rapture of excited joy.



Prior's Entrance, Ely Cathedral. From the Etching by J. S. Cotman.

It seems strange that while Crome took advantage of this opportunity to visit Paris, Cotman should have remained at home. Three years later he did cross the Channel, but it was on a different errand.

V. *Visits to Normandy—Etchings (continued)*

He went to Normandy, and to see architecture, not pictures. Dawson Turner's account is that Cotman, while engaged in recording the architectural antiquities of Norfolk, supposed to be of Saxon origin, was struck with the apparently Norman character prevailing in them, and wished to satisfy himself by studying Norman architecture in the land of its birth. It may be that this was rather Dawson Turner's own design than Cotman's. But at any rate Cotman agreed to accompany him and his wife on this first tour in 1817. He made a second tour in 1818, and a third, this time alone, in 1820. The result of these visits was the great series of 100 etchings, published in 1822.

These etchings are more interesting architecturally than as drawings; and avowedly so. For Dawson Turner, in his introduction, says expressly that the buildings selected were chosen principally for certainty as to date. He tells us that many much more beautiful subjects might have been selected, but that these were excluded; and significantly adds: "An artist accustomed by his habits to the contemplation of the beautiful and picturesque, requires above all men to be warned on this head." Still, some of the plates, especially those in which the building is made the centre of a landscape, are noble and impressive compositions. The British Museum Print Room possesses Dawson Turner's copy of the *Normandy*; it contains proofs of each plate in every state, some additional prints, and an unpublished portrait of Cotman etched by Mrs. Turner after J. P. Davis.

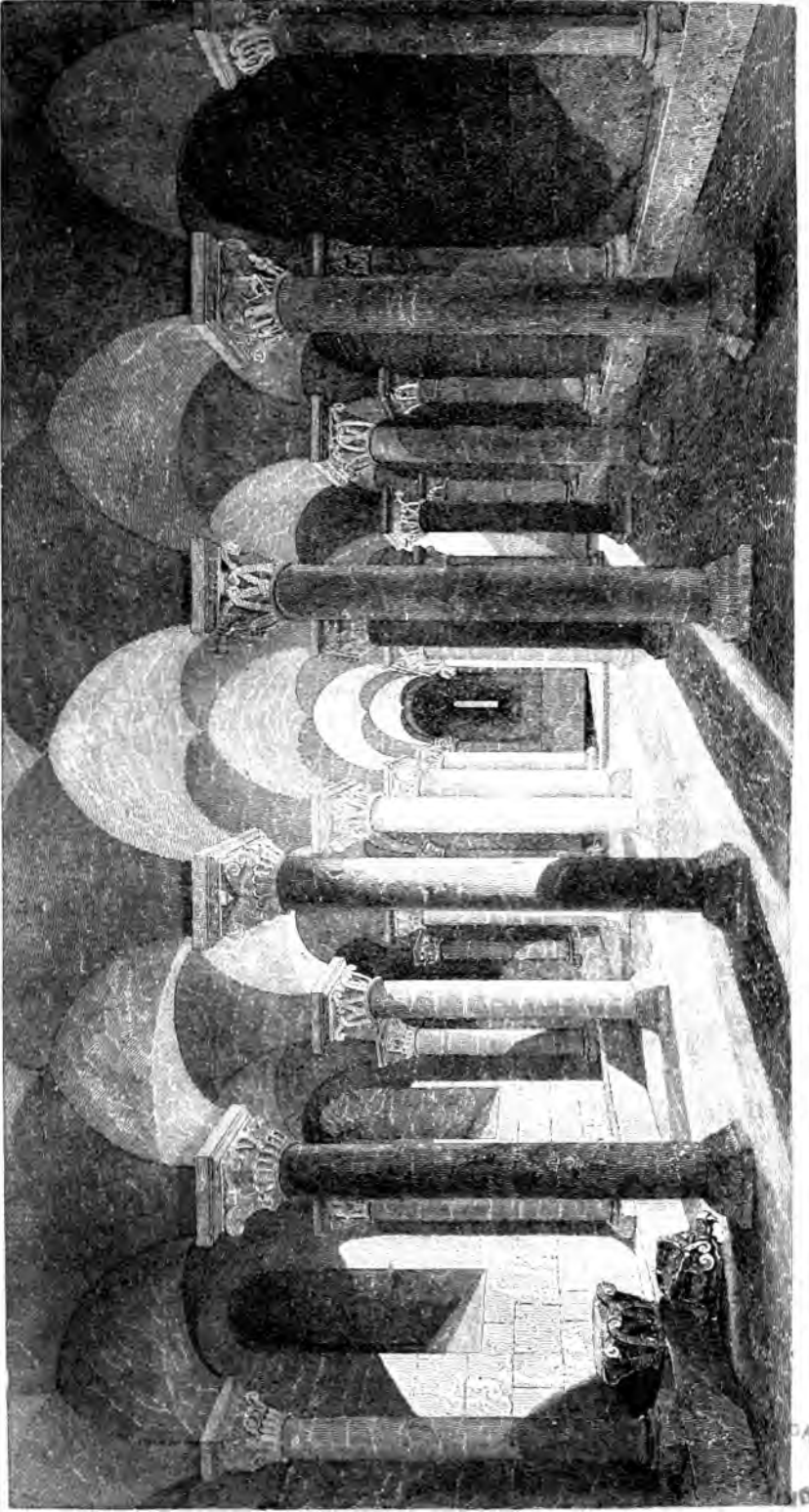
The *Crypt of the Abbey Church of the Holy Trinity at Caen*, here reproduced (p. 73), occurs in the second volume. It illustrates the powerful drawing of architecture which the whole series exhibits, together with a pictorial effect which is wanting in most of the etchings. But the most interesting plates are in volume iv. The two views of Château

Gaillard, one from below, the other from above, with the massive ruins standing desolate on their rocky solitudes; Tancarville Castle with its fringed cliffs reflected in the sunny stream; Falaise rising steeply above headlong boulders; and Mont St. Michel, surrounded by infinite sand and sea, are all seen as only Cotman would have seen them, and portrayed with a fine appreciation of their grandeur.

Before this work was issued, Dawson Turner brought out in 1820 his *Account of a Tour in Normandy*, the plates in which were etched by his daughter, mostly after Cotman's design. Indeed, besides the actual drawings for the *Antiquities*, Normandy supplied Cotman with an immense amount of material. It also seems to have given a fresh impetus to his art, and in particular to have set him working on new and more daring experiments in colour. Whether the journey to Normandy was the cause or the occasion of this new departure is hard to say. But it is certain that after 1820 Cotman began to conceive his paintings in a far higher key of colour, aiming at audacious effects, in which he often succeeded and sometimes failed. The change in his art is nearly parallel with that wrought in Turner's art by his first visit to Italy. This latter case one can understand. But why Normandy, more than other places, should have revealed to him new skies and a new sunshine, is not easily explained. Perhaps, after all, it was not the place itself, but the shock of change, and the freedom which he enjoyed there, away from the drudgery of teaching. Even had he remained at home, it was inevitable that his art should develop on such lines; one feels the change coming after the first settling at Norwich; and the Normandy journeys did but hasten this necessary development.

The Normandy etchings were by no means the only published product of this most industrious time. In the years 1816-18 Cotman etched fifty plates—decidedly architectural in character, many of them fonts and doorways—which were not regularly published, it is said, but circulated among his friends. They made a small folio, under the title *Specimens of Norman and Gothic Architecture in the County of Norfolk*.

A single etching of 1817 deserves a mention. It represents the Nelson Column, which every one who has visited Yarmouth will remember rising from the sands, and of which the foundation-stone



Crypt of the Abbey Church of the Holy Trinity at Caen. From the Etching by J. S. Cotman.

was laid in this year. Cotman etched in an effective sky, in which phantasmal battleships tower with great sails among the clouds.

In 1819 appeared *Antiquities of Saint Mary's Chapel at Stourbridge, near Cambridge* : Published by John Sell Cotman, Yarmouth. Dawson Turner's copy of this, with all the states of the ten plates, is, like the similar copies of the *Norfolk Antiquities* and the *Normandy*, in the Print Room. The etching of the *Prior's Entrance at Ely Cathedral*, here reproduced, is a happy specimen both of Cotman's etching and of his architectural drawing. The feeling of the stone is there ; it does not look like pastry, as with so many draughtsmen ; there is scrupulous precision, but no dulness or harshness of outline, and the copper is effectively bitten. Besides all these works, and the *Sepulchral Brasses*, a publication of 1818-19 contains a great number of illustrations, many of which, though not etched by Cotman, were engraved after his designs. Many of these little engravings are as admirable as the drawings.

VI. *Second Residence in Norwich*

The twelve years of residence at Yarmouth, which were the most active and well-filled of Cotman's life, comprise, roughly speaking, the period of the architectural etchings. Henceforward Cotman gave himself up to painting.

Not that these years had been by any means unfruitful in paintings. Of the drawings made before the Normandy towns we have already spoken. Some of his finest sea-pieces, both his oil and water-colours, must be referred to this time. The oil pictures may, for convenience sake, be dealt with in a separate section. At present it will be enough to observe in the beautiful composition reproduced as a plate, which dates from about 1820, how admirably Cotman could seize the motion of a boat and render the effect of moonlight broken on rough water.

With the publication of the *Normandy*, in 1822, Cotman's antiquarian labours came to an end. A family of five children, a daughter and four boys, the eldest of whom, Miles Edmund, was now twelve, was growing up round him ; and a sixth child, a daughter, was born

in this same year. Dissatisfied with what he had hitherto been able to earn, and becoming, with increasing claims upon him, anxious for the future, he sought for some way of bettering his position; and he determined to return to Norwich. There, he thought, he would have more scope, and at the same time he hoped to keep his Yarmouth pupils.

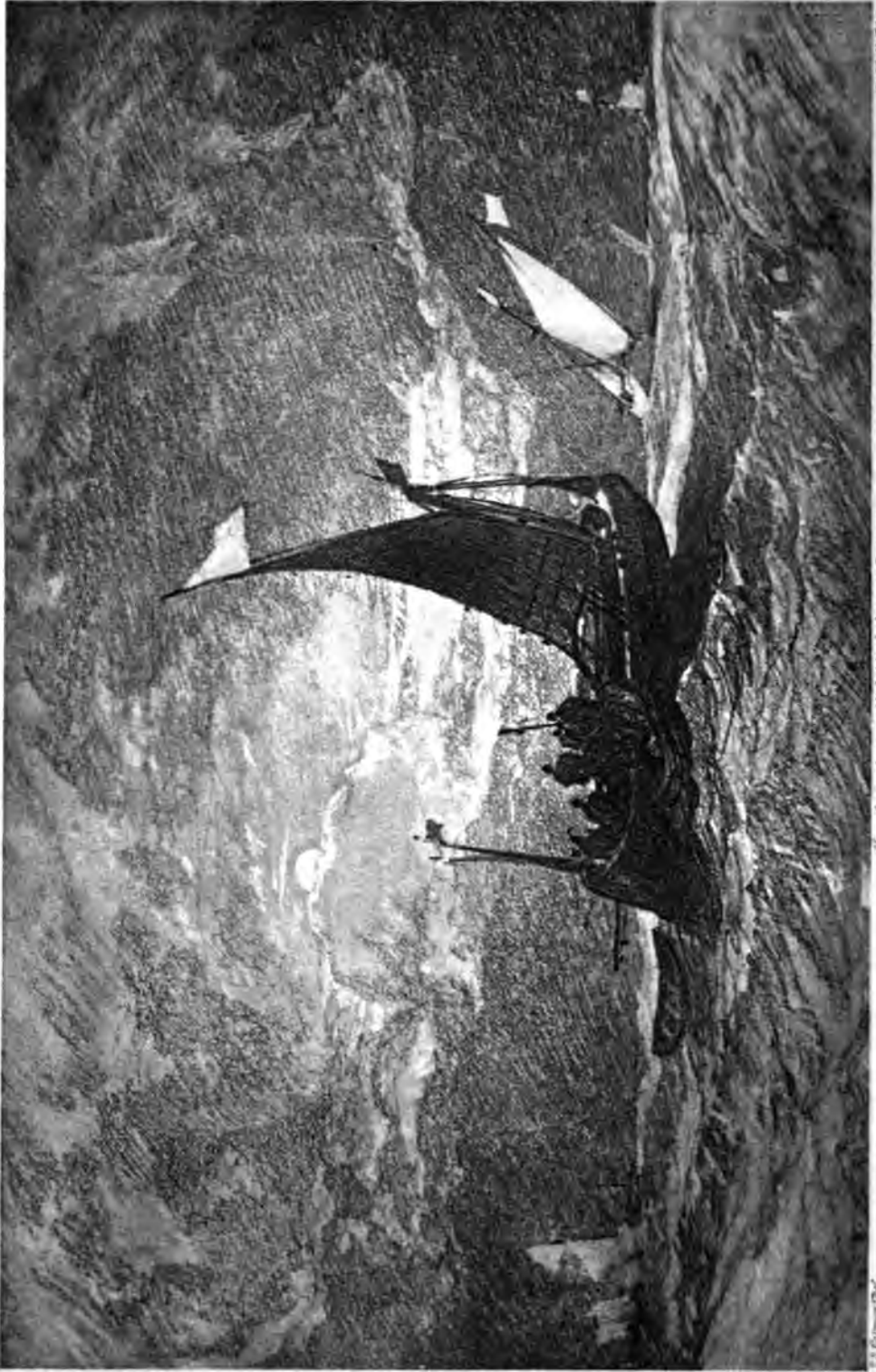
So, full of anticipations, which were to be little realised, he came back early in 1824 to his native city, and took a large red brick house on St. Martin's Palace Plain, opposite the bishop's palace. The house has a wrought-iron ornamental gate, in which Cotman doubtless took pleasure; and before it across the "plain," as Norfolk people, like the Dutch, call a square or place, is a group of trees for which he found use in his compositions.

In this house, before he left it, twelve years after, there was amassed a fine collection of prints and books and armour; for Cotman, like Rembrandt, and like many another artist before him, could never resist the temptation to buy beautiful things and have them round him. Moreover, as he was now no longer in daily sight of shipping, he had a collection of models of every sort of craft, "from a man-of-war to a coble."

To herald his return to Norwich he had, in 1823, contributed again a number of drawings, nineteen, to the Norwich Society's exhibition. Most of these were Normandy subjects. The *Entrance into Falaise*, lately belonging to Lady Eastlake, may be taken as a specimen of this date. A gush of vivid sunlight over the foreground plays on the trees and touches the entrance of the town, most of which is still in the blue shadow of retreating storm. It is a daring attempt in contrasted colour, such as Cotman in these later years became too fond of.

The *Dieppe* at South Kensington Museum, painted about the same time, is also a fair example of the drawings done from sketches in Normandy. In both of these, as also in the fine and characteristic *Windmill* (p. 85), the reed pen was used for outlines. Before this time Cotman does not seem to have used it.

But among these Normandy drawings none is more lovely than Mr. Reeve's *Château in Normandy* (p. 83), a drawing which is full



© 1900, 1901, 1902, 1903, 1904, 1905, 1906, 1907, 1908, 1909, 1910, 1911, 1912, 1913, 1914, 1915, 1916, 1917, 1918, 1919, 1920, 1921, 1922, 1923, 1924, 1925, 1926, 1927, 1928, 1929, 1930, 1931, 1932, 1933, 1934, 1935, 1936, 1937, 1938, 1939, 1940, 1941, 1942, 1943, 1944, 1945, 1946, 1947, 1948, 1949, 1950, 1951, 1952, 1953, 1954, 1955, 1956, 1957, 1958, 1959, 1960, 1961, 1962, 1963, 1964, 1965, 1966, 1967, 1968, 1969, 1970, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1974, 1975, 1976, 1977, 1978, 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025

From the reproductions published by the Autotype Company.

Fishing Boats, Moonlight.



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of summer, delicate yet bold in colour, succeeding perfectly in the effect of indolent sunshine and blue sky.

This same composition was used, in 1831, for another probably later drawing of fuller tone, which the writer has not had the opportunity of seeing,—Mr. Pyke Thompson's *Blue Afternoon*.

To the exhibition of 1824 Cotman sent fifty-two works, some in oil.



The Shadowed Stream. By J. S. Cotman. Collection of J. Reece, Esq.
From the reproduction published by the Autotype Company.

Mr. Bridgman's *View from Yarmouth Bridge* (see p. 91) was among the oil pictures, and an *Old House at St. Albans*,¹ also painted by Mulready, whose picture of it is at South Kensington.

There was also a pair of drawings entitled: "A Landscape, with the Fable of the Judgment of Midas, and a view of Whitby, Yorkshire, part of a series of designs intended to illustrate a work now publishing on landscape composition." This is interesting as showing that the book of etchings afterwards called *Liber Studiorum* was now

¹ Exhibited recently at Messrs. Dowdeswells'.

occupying Cotman, for the *Midas* and the *Whitby* are two of the subjects in it. The etchings were not actually published, however, till 1838.

VII. *Cotman joins the Water-colour Society—Depression*

The Norwich Society was suspended for a time after the exhibition of 1825, the last held in Sir Benjamin Wrench's Court. But from this year begins Cotman's connection with the Water-colour Society, and he now became a regular exhibitor in London.

From letters by Miss Turner and her sister, Mrs. Palgrave, written in January of this year and quoted in Mr. Reeve's *Memoir*, it appears that it was chiefly on their suggestion that he joined the Society. But the members were themselves anxious that he should exhibit with them. "They would be proud," Charles Wild the treasurer had said, "to admit him."

The result was that Cotman sent three Normandy drawings, which had been done as commissions, to the exhibition of this same spring. One was *Dieppe*, already noticed; another, *Mont Saint Michel*, one of several he painted of this subject; and a third, the *Abbatial House of St. Ouen, Rouen*, possibly the drawing now belonging to Mr. Colman. This last is a splendid instance of Cotman's later architectural drawings. The house, ornate and stately in itself, is appropriately set off by the gay groups of richly-dressed ladies and cavaliers. Mr. Roget's *Framlingham Castle*, a small but impressive drawing, is another example of Cotman's later treatment of architecture; it is dated 1828.

In this last year, when the Norwich Society, reorganised, began again to hold exhibitions, Cotman sent drawings to both societies and continued to do so for some years.

To this period belong most of a class of drawings by which Cotman is sometimes unfairly judged. These are the water-colours made by him from sketches by W. H. Harriott. They represent scenes and places never visited by Cotman; and their inferiority is very palpable when placed beside drawings which are entirely his own. As a rule, the consciousness of an intermediary vision between him and the subject, the loss of grasp and intimate comprehension, are sought to be atoned

for by daring and brilliance of contrasted colour ; never quite successfully. The *Cologne*, in Sir Charles Robinson's collection, lately exhibited at the Guildhall, is an example. It is to be hoped that those who saw this drawing, the only Cotman in the exhibition, did not imagine it to be representative.

And what of the artist himself, who had been producing his work



*Postwick Grove. By J. S. Cotman. Collection of J. Reeve, Esq.
From the reproduction published by the Autotype Company.*

with such unflagging industry? Of a temperament fine-strung in the extreme, and continually passing from high spirits or exaltation to fits of profound melancholy, he felt with ever-increasing keenness the wearing anxieties of his position. And conscious as he must have been of powers far superior to those of most of his contemporaries, he endured doubtless much bitterness in his comparative want of success. He got very few commissions ; his pictures and drawings sold ill ; he was more and more under the yoke of the drudgery of teaching. His income did not increase, and was inadequate to his needs ; and his mind

gave itself up to gloomy apprehensions. In 1826, disappointed of the hopes with which he had returned to Norwich, and encumbered with the large house which he had taken, his depression approached despair.

Dawson Turner exhorted him to look the facts in the face, to examine his circumstances carefully, and if it were necessary, retrench, and take a smaller house. His letter is printed in Mr. Reeve's *Memoir*, and from it we learn that Cotman had made £200 by teaching in the previous year.

But Cotman was difficult to comfort, and Dawson Turner then wrote to his father, urging him to persuade his son to get rid of his large house and if possible return to Yarmouth. This, however, Cotman refused to do; his pride was roused, he felt it would be to retreat, to surrender; and he resolved to make fresh efforts, to harden his heart and conquer. Fortune, however, did not mend.

A letter, dated June 26, 1829, refusing an invitation from a friend, reveals the depth of gloom into which he had fallen.

My views in life are so completely blasted, that I sink under the repeated and constant exertion of body and mind. Every effort has been tried, even without the hope of success; hence that loss of spirits amounting almost to despair.

My eldest son, who is following the same miserable profession with myself, feels the same hopelessness; and his powers, once so promising, are evidently paralyzed, and his health and spirits gone. My amiable and deserving wife bears her part with fortitude. But the worm is there. My children cannot but feel the contagion. As a husband and father, bound by every tie human and divine to cherish and protect them, I leave you to suppose how impossible it must be for me to feel one joy divided from them. I watch them, and they me, narrowly; and I see enough to make me broken-hearted.

In another letter there is an even more tragic disclosure of the state of Cotman's mind, brooding over a casual saying of one of his children,—*Why, Papa smiled*,—with self-reproach and horror at what he had allowed to be seen upon his face, and tormented with his own imagination.

VIII. *Cotman appointed Professor of Drawing at King's College— Sale of 1834*

Yet even from such dejection he could at times rally; not, indeed, without a feverish brightness that tells of uncertain moods.



Gunton Park. By J. S. Cotman. By permission of Mr. Paiser.

Only six months after writing the just-quoted letter, he was writing in great elation about a *conversazione* held by the artists of the Norfolk and Suffolk Institution. "It was the most brilliant thing ever witnessed for Norwich Art, and not one thing went amiss. *We, the Artists*, have reason to be perfectly satisfied. It was as far beyond my expectations as possible, and I was one of the most sanguine upon the subject of any."



*Château in Normandy. By J. S. Cotman. Collection of J. Reeve, Esq.
From the reproduction published by the Autotype Company.*

Even in this little fragment from a letter, one has a glimpse into Cotman's nature; easily persuading itself of good, and easily of evil; not the sort of nature which, in the happiest of circumstances, is best fortified against melancholy, but feeling joy and pain with equal intensity. Work was his great refuge; pencil and brush were scarcely ever out of his hand. But his anxieties did not decrease, until at last an event

occurred which showed him at least that he had friends eager in his behalf, and that his painting had won for itself a certain recognition. More than this, there seemed to open a prospect of better times.

The professorship of drawing at King's College had fallen vacant ; and in January 1834 Cotman was appointed to the post. Cotman's name was originally suggested, it would seem, by Lady Palgrave. In a letter to her, quoted by Mr. Roget (vol. ii. p. 35), Cotman expresses his gratitude.

DEAR LADY PALGRAVE (he writes)—The final arrangement is made. I am to have one guinea per annum beyond the annual sum of £100 for every pupil beyond 100. The numbers amount to from 170 to 180, consequently an income beyond the highest sum originally fixed. As you are the first spring or mover in this delightful plan for me, you will, I hope, excuse my eagerness in laying my happiness before you. Present my most respectful compliments to Sir Thomas Palgrave.—Most respectfully your devoted servant,
J. S. COTMAN.

Two of my sons are to be placed in the school, *one free of expense.*

A powerful seconder of Lady Palgrave's exertions was J. M. W. Turner. Several of the governors approached him to ask whom he would recommend. To each he replied, "Why, Cotman, of course," appearing impatient at last that any one should admit a doubt upon so clear a question.

Turner's admiration had begun long ago, when they worked together at Dr. Monro's; and we have other evidence that it had not decreased, besides being reciprocated.

Turner's *Liber Studiorum* appeared 1807-19, and Cotman made from it a number of exquisite copies in pencil, now in Mr. Reeve's collection. Whether Turner saw these, we do not know; but he certainly saw a copy that Cotman had made of one of the subjects in the *Rivers of France*. He liked it so much that he wished to have it. It was given him; and a few years afterwards he gave it away again as his own! When the owner had it remounted, he found on the back: "By John Sell Cotman; presented to my old and esteemed friend, J. M. W. Turner."

This emphatic championship on Turner's part must have gladdened Cotman. His spirits were roused too at the new prospect opening before him, and he occupied himself eagerly with the business of the change. It was necessary to arrange for the move at once.

The eldest son, Miles Edmund, was to continue his work as teacher at Norwich. Before bringing his family to London, he took lodgings



Windmill. By J. S. Cotman. By permission of Mr. Palsler.

there himself with his son John Joseph in Gerrard Street, and finally took a house at No. 42 Hunter Street, Brunswick Square.

All this meant expense. And for this and other reasons it was determined that the collections formed in the house at St. Martin's Palace Plain should be sold.

The sale took place in September ; it lasted three days, from the 10th to the 12th, and fetched £569 : 6s. Besides engravings, etchings, paintings, and drawings, the entire library and the collections of models, of boats, casts, and armour were included. The books, nearly all fine illustrated works, numbered about a thousand ; the prints, among which were etchings of Rembrandt and the other Dutchmen, and—special favourites of Cotman—some of those brilliant Bolswerts and Vorstermans after Rubens, numbered about 5000. Among the drawings Guido, Vanderveelde, Ostade, and Zuccherò were represented. Cotman's own drawings were not sold, but kept for use in London. But there were several oil pictures of his, framed, which were sold, the highest price gained being five guineas for *The Mishap*, now at Carrow House.

As the catalogue of this sale gives us evidence for the date of these pictures, some of which can be traced to their present owners, this may be an appropriate place for gathering up such clues as can be found about Cotman's production of oil pictures, intermittent and fragmentary as it had been up to the present period.

IX. *Oil Paintings*

Cotman was always haunted by the desire of painting in oils, but his other occupations never left him free to pursue it regularly, ambitiously, with the devotion that he wished. And not only his other occupations, but lack of purchasers. He must have had very few commissions in all his life. One instance of a commission is known ; and in this case Cotman received £10, with the price of the canvas and colours. This was not a great sum, but it was twice as much as was fetched by any of the oil pictures at the sale of 1834. Among them was the *Fishing Boats off Yarmouth* (p. 89), now in Mr. Colman's possession,—perhaps Cotman's masterpiece in oils,—and this had hung unsold for years in his house at St. Martin's Palace Plain.

It is obvious from these considerations, as well as from the scarcity of



*The Waterfall. By J. S. Cotman. Collection of J. J. Colman, Esq.
From the reproduction published by the Autotype Company.*

leisure allowed by a drawing-master's duties and the incessant production of water-colours and etchings, that Cotman could not have painted a great number of oil pictures. We have it also on his son's authority that he never painted a large picture ; a somewhat vague statement, but one that confirms what one would surmise.

Probably, therefore, the list of oil pictures sold in 1834 comprises most of those painted during the second residence in Norwich ; some may date from the Yarmouth time, when Cotman certainly took up oils more earnestly than he had hitherto.

The Waterfall (p. 87), for which Mr. Reeve has the first sketch, must be fairly early, dating from about 1815 perhaps. It is rather flat, designedly, and in a cold key of colour, but painted with a full, fat brush, like nearly all of Cotman's oil pictures, and very characteristic in composition. This was not in the sale of 1834 ; but another picture of the same period, *Wherries on Breydon*, the picture now in the National Gallery, was in the sale, and fetched 18s. It was since sold as a Crome, and is not in its original condition. Nevertheless, it remains very beautiful ; boldly simple in design, direct in execution. Nowhere surely has the poetry of sails been more perfectly expressed.

Of the *Galliot in a Gale*, also in the National Gallery, it may be enough to say that whoever imagines that in this picture he sees a representative or fine Cotman, errs. Cotman could draw boats with mastery, and waves with mastery ; but this boat is superficially painted, these waves are stage waves, and though a wave is striking the boat, the boat is evidently unwetted. Contrast all this with the *Fishing Boats off Yarmouth*. Here the boat rides in the swinging mass of the swell ; the masts and rigging of the two anchored smacks strain in the wind, the air is dim with fine scattered spray ; all is wet and wild, blown cloud and living sea.

These pictures were painted before the visit to Normandy. Afterwards, Cotman took to painting on a warm yellow ground, and the later pictures have a warmer and more glowing tone. *The Mishap* (p. 91) is one of these. In an earlier picture of trees, the *Alder Car*, in the possession of Dr. Cotman, the painter's grandson, the foliage has a dark, sombre colouring, which makes the beautiful painting seem a little heavy ; in *The Mishap* the trees are brightly touched with golden, almost ruddy hues. This little picture fetched the highest price at the 1834 sale—



*Fishing Boats off Yarmouth. By J. S. Cotman. Collection of J. J. Colman, Esq.
From the reproduction published by the Autotype Company.*

£5: 5s., and its companion, *The Baggage Waggon*, £5. Slighter but somewhat similar to these are two pictures owned by Mrs. Gunn; one, a charming piece, with delicate soft trees; another, a composition of trees, founded on the view from Cotman's window on St. Martin's Palace Plain.



The Mishap. By J. S. Cotman. Collection of J. J. Colman, Esq.
From the reproduction published by the Autotype Company.

One or two characteristic little compositions, for which Mr. Reeve has sketches, are, or were, in Messrs. Dowdeswells' possession.

But more important than these is Mr. Bridgman's very beautiful

View from Yarmouth Bridge, looking towards Breydon, just after Sunset, in which there is more subtlety of atmospheric effect than is usual with Cotman, yet not less simplicity and largeness. The flush is just beginning to fade from a glowing summer evening, and from the sails upon the peaceful water. This is one of the very finest of Cotman's works in oil. It was exhibited at Norwich in 1824. The companion, also owned by Mr. Bridgman, *Dutch Boats at Yarmouth*, is splendid and luminous in colour, but less wonderful.

X. Residence in London—Last Works and Death

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, it is interesting to recall, was Cotman's pupil at King's College School, doubtless the most illustrious pupil he ever had. Cotman had been some five years at the school when Rossetti entered it, and for some few years more he taught Rossetti drawing. In W. M. Rossetti's life of his brother (vol. i. p. 73) there is a vivid glimpse of the artist in this later time. "An alert, forceful-looking man, of moderate stature, with a fine well-moulded face, which testified to an impulsive nature somewhat worn and wearied. He seemed sparing of speech, but high-strung in what he said," with "a rather abrupt and excitable manner."

It is such a face as we see in the water-colour portrait by H. B. Love in Mr. Reeve's possession, wrought upon by time and care, yet with the nervous energy behind it intensified in expression, since the early portrait of his youth.

Just now, however—it was not for some few years that Rossetti joined the school—Cotman was in cheerful spirits; the lifting of his anxieties by the prospect of a better income made him look forward with something like happiness to his new life. Letters to Miles Edmund show us the whole family occupied drawing in the evenings for the college. The studies made by the sons and daughter were included among Cotman's drawing copies, and sometimes the work of a promising pupil would be honoured in the same way.

In 1835 Miles Edmund came to London, and at the end of 1836 was appointed to assist his father when John Joseph returned to Norwich to continue the teaching there. Letters to the latter give us glimpses of

Cotman's busy life and his amusements. He writes of the pleasure which had been given him by a mention of him in a book by an old pupil, and again of a party at his house, and the old friends who came.

He now saw more of brother artists than he had done since his



*The Baggage Waggon. By J. S. Cotman. Collection of J. J. Colman, Esq.
From the reproduction published by the Autotype Company.*

early time in London. Stark was living now in Chelsea ; Cattermole and Prout, too, from whom there are letters to Cotman that have been preserved, were his friends ; and Varley, who came to visit him once when he was ill at Norwich a few years before this, and prophesied his

living for another ten years ; and David Cox. With Cox, who admired his work excessively, he was to have made an excursion to Birmingham in August 1838, but something or other prevented.

Cotman had drawings by some of these painter friends. At a sale at Christie's in May 1836 a number of Cotman's drawings, with others by Varley, Prout, Cox, Cattermole, Müller, and Copley Fielding, which belonged to him and had been made up into lots with his own, were sold. It was a miscellaneous sale, the chief feature of which was a number of sketches by Wilkie. Neither the Coxes nor the Müllers fetched so much as the Cotmans, one of which, a *Yarmouth Sands*, brought no less than £2 : 10s. What days for collectors were those !

This and the former sale at Norwich doubtless taught Cotman that money was not to be made by his painting. Yet he continued to produce, even though his labours at the college were tyrannously exacting of his hours. The work was, in fact, too much for him ; it was wearing him down. His health began visibly to weaken. But he had fewer anxieties than heretofore, and wrote cheerful letters. He felt himself appreciated in London, and was easily gratified with little things. In 1836 he was made honorary member of the Institute of British Architects, a tribute to the knowledge and antiquarian enthusiasm of his architectural works.

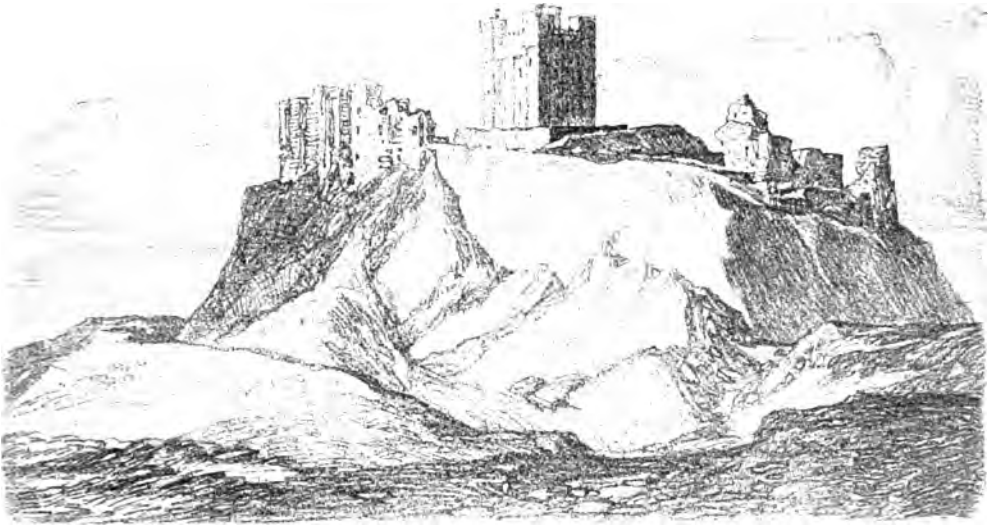
Two years later the whole of the etchings were published by Bohn in five parts, the fifth of which was the *Liber Studiorum*, also published separately. Cotman's *Liber*, once, it seems, intended to illustrate, like Turner's, all kinds of composition in landscape, though the scheme was never carried to completion, remains a valuable index to his mind. It contains nearly all his favourite themes. The etchings, called by Bohn "early efforts," seem to date mostly from Cotman's maturity, and the second residence in Norwich. They are nearly all on soft ground.

As Mr. Roget has pointed out, it is remarkable that there is no sea-subject among Cotman's etchings. But otherwise his versatility is well represented. The *Bamborough* is a fine example of his drawings of old castles, planted firmly on rocky heights. And *The Devil's Bridge* (p. 97) is a variation of a favourite subject for which Cotman's name was *Height and Depth*. Mr. Colman has a drawing with this title. Some of the larger plates are classical compositions with graceful trees and figures, such as

The Judgment of Midas, which dates from 1824. Cotman's own copy of the *Liber* is in the British Museum; it contains a few unpublished plates.

The water-colours of this last period are not very numerous,¹ but some are of large size and ambitious.

Figures had before this, about 1830, begun to play a larger part than hitherto in Cotman's pictures; and some of these later drawings are frankly "historical," with a landscape scarcely secondary even. *The King John and Prince Henry at Swinstead Abbey* and *The Duke of York and the Earl of Sandwich hoisting signals prior to an action with de*



Bamborough Castle. From a soft-ground Etching by J. S. Cotman.

Ruyter, both of 1833, are examples. Mr. Colman's *Spruggins Hall* is also of 1833, and with another drawing, *Sir Simon Spruggins*, represents Cotman's protest against a contemporary satire in which pedigrees and armorial bearings were irreverently scoffed at. But the one which Cotman himself seems most to have set his heart on was a very large water-colour—"a whacker" he calls it—representing a piece of imaginary history—the *Presentation of a Rose and Sword to the Lady of the Manor at Flixton Hall*. This is a splendid failure; charged with colour, a

¹ He had only one drawing at the Water-colour Society in 1838, four in 1839, after which year he exhibited no more. Mr. Roget (vol. ii. p. 37) tells us that his average for fifteen years was scarcely three drawings a year.

festal scene with figures in rich attire, and against the intense blue of the sky a magnificent banner luxuriantly unfolding its rosy silk above the battlements. The glow, the pomp, the gorgeous unreality of romantic art are here. One is reminded of Delacroix.

This was painted in 1838. Cotman, writing in the ardour of creation, says that he will charge sixty guineas for it, perhaps more, if it comes well. But it remained unsold till his death.

Was it reaction from such work as this, cloying with its exotic luxury, that in the last few remaining years he turned back to simpler methods and a fresher contact with the earth and sky, the sun and wind? Whatever the cause, it is certain that in the sketches of 1839 to 1842 we find Cotman in a new phase. He returns to nature, intent, as he had rarely been before, on seizing the essential spirit of a scene, not preoccupied with weaving the matter of his vision into his own schemes of form and colour, but submitting his mind to the aspect of things, bent on piercing to the heart of them. He works now with the aim which was habitual to David Cox.

Every year in his holidays Cotman visited Norwich. He loved the place always. And it was on these visits that the drawings just mentioned were made. One of 1839 is the sketch of a boat upon the Yare, the bows leaping a wave; a delightful sketch of motion. But most date from 1841. In the autumn of this year (the last autumn that Cotman was to see) he went down to Norfolk in flood-time. He went in an impressionable temper. He saw pictures everywhere. His eye was alert and his hand active.

Two wonderful sketches, *Below Hardley Cross* and *Below Langley*, were made on the same day of October, the 19th. The latter, to which Cotman gave also the happy title of *The Wold Afloat*, is one of the most masterly sketches ever made. It has that intensity of imagination which makes the actual means of expression seem to partake of the material on which it works. The record is brief, but haunting. The listless wetness of the beaten branches, the drooping sedges, the empty sky, the blowing wind; how keenly is it all brought to the senses, as with the keenness of physical contact, yet expressed on the gray paper with a few black chalk lines. Only less powerful in effect is the companion sketch, with its forlorn willows standing chilly in the wind.

One day in November Cotman rode over Mousehold Heath to dine with his father at Thorpe. A hailstorm was pouring down, but he was



The Devil's Bridge. From a soft-ground Etching by J. S. Cotman.

“obliged,” he says, “to stop and sketch a magnificent scene”—one of the same series of sketches. “Oh, rare and beautiful Norfolk,” he adds; “but Norfolk is full of such scenes.”

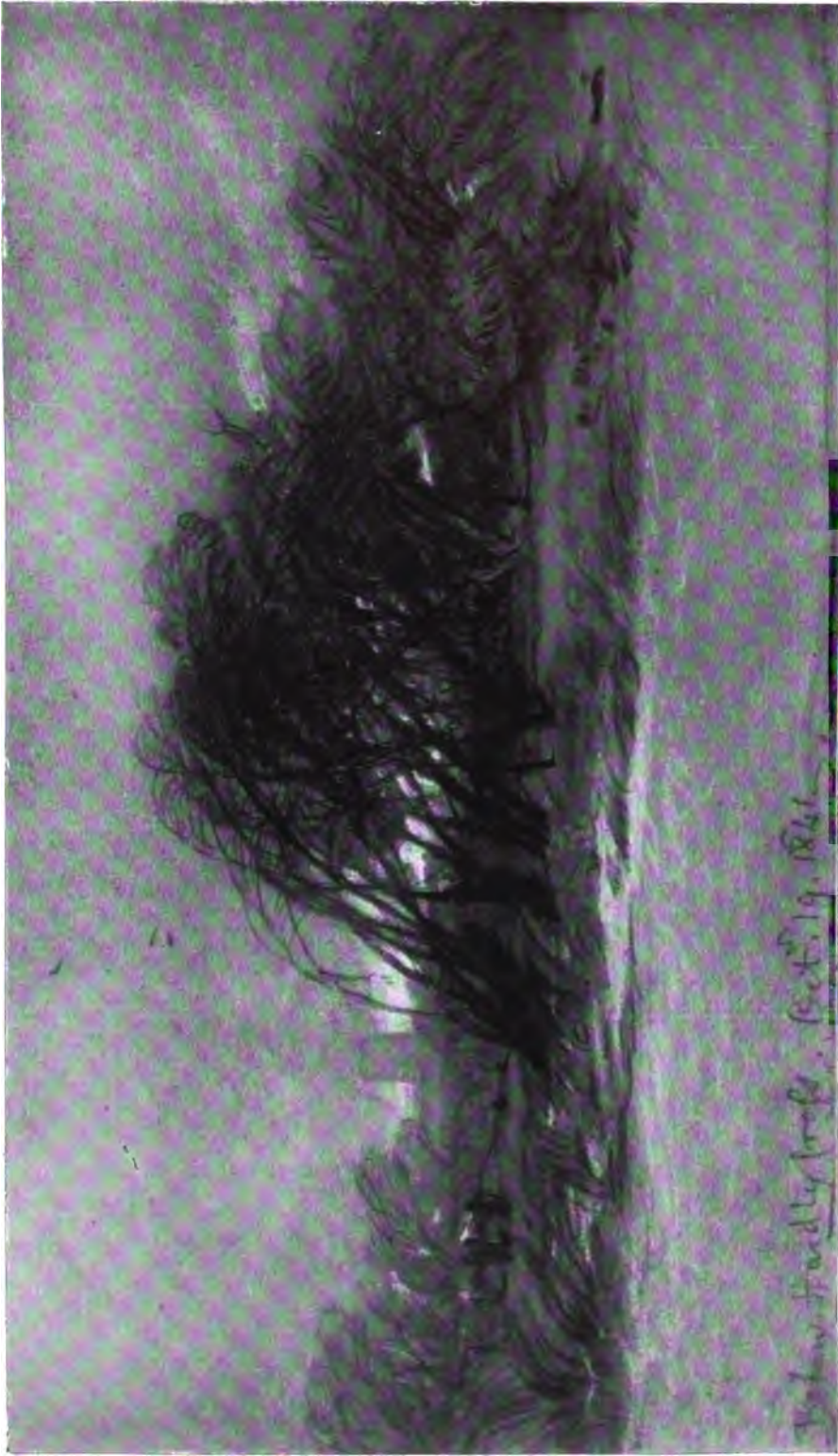
Another sketch was made at the house at Thorpe; the place to which his father had retired in his old age. It had a garden overhanging the Yare with poplars and sloping lawn, to which Cotman in his sketch has added peacocks on a terrace.

This same month he went to Wolterton, to see the famous picture of *The Rainbow* by Rubens. And, strangely, just as he reached the house, a rainbow appeared on a retreating-storm, and Cotman sketched it hanging bright above the woods. Yet another storm-effect is recorded in a sketch at Cromer of this same November; a most original composition, of the sea spread vast, with huddling white waves to the sky, and diminutive watching figures of men upon the shore.

Some of these sketches were intended by Cotman to be made into oil pictures. One such picture, now owned by Mr. Holmes, is from a sketch dated December 28. Another was from a drawing of a wood, with a great fallen tree. Mr. Reeve possesses the tracing used to transfer the composition to canvas, and on it Cotman wrote: "Commenced the picture December 17, 1841." But the picture is now unknown, or perhaps no longer exists. Lastly, the *View from my Father's House at Thorpe* was transferred to canvas. This unfinished picture, now in the Norwich Museum, is dated January 18, 1842. It is interesting, apart from its beautiful composition, as it shows Cotman's method of working. The design is lightly sketched in black and white over a warm yellow ground. It would have been a beautiful picture.

And this is the last we know of Cotman's painting. The fresh impulse to his art of this final autumn was but the last leap of the flame. Before the summer was over it was quenched.

July found Cotman ill. It was no serious disorder, but a mortal languor had settled upon him. He had no will to struggle; worn out, he desired peace. "If he would only take his proper food," wrote his daughter to her brother, "he would soon be better. He always expresses himself as though he hoped it would be the last time he should have to take anything." On the second day after this was written, he was dead. "Natural decay," says the register, was the cause of death; and indeed his spirit had quite worn out his body. He was buried in the cemetery behind St. John's Wood Chapel. In the May following there was a two-days' sale of his pictures and drawings; but though there



*The Wild Afloat. By J. S. Cotman. Collection of J. Reeve, Esq.
From the reproduction published by the Autotype Company.*

were close on three hundred lots, all went for the miserable amount of £219 : 17 : 6. On the 6th, 7th, and 8th of June his prints and library were sold, and these fetched £307 : 10 : 6.

There remains to be mentioned the set of eight etchings published at Norwich after Cotman's death in 1846 by Charles Muskett. These are interesting as showing Rembrandt's influence, and are very different in style from the early etchings. Four are figure studies, one of which looks like a study after Terburg; but the best are *The Windmills*, the *Beach at Fécamp*, and the *Fishermen at Yarmouth*. These, if they had but been richly printed, would be effective and successful etchings.

XI. Characteristics

Cotman's time has not yet come; he still awaits his due of fame. Many things have hindered the right appreciation of his genius; but chiefly that his work is so little known. All his finest water-colours are in private hands; hence a widespread misconception of his work, based on very insufficient knowledge. According to Redgrave, "his colour is rich, but a hot yellow predominates." One knows the kind of Cotman which produces such an impression; drawings with strong contrasted blues and yellows, especially the drawings made after Harriott's sketches. But to make such an absolute statement about Cotman's work as a whole is ridiculous. Mr. Reeve's collection is the largest and finest that exists, and it represents Cotman at every stage of his career; yet there is scarcely a single drawing in the collection which could justify Redgrave's description. Cotman was, in fact, wonderfully various and versatile. Enough has been said already, in recording the successive phases through which he passed, to indicate the lines of his development. To a certain extent it was parallel with that of Turner. But there are differences to be noted. Cotman's individuality was earlier disengaged. His youthful architectural work is less rich in minute observation than Turner's, but freer, broader, more personal in style, and with richer harmonies of colour. Cotman is at this time more akin to Girtin, though never Girtin's imitator. Again, his devotion to composition marks him at a very early stage; the sketching club drawings and several beautiful water-colours of the

London period abundantly show it. And all through his life Cotman kept up the two strains in his art side by side ; taking refuge often from severe labour at patient architectural work in compositions of freest fancy and sometimes extravagant colour. These colour-dreams look as if inspired by Turner ; yet dates seem to show that Cotman was here the earlier in point of time. Cotman's first essays in these glowing contrasted effects date from before 1820.



Landscape Composition with Figures. By J. S. Cotman. Collection of J. J. Colman, Esq.
From the reproduction published by the Autotype Company.

But it is not these which represent Cotman at his finest. They are the offspring, it seems to me, of his melancholy, luxuriating in a richness as of "globed peonies" and "rainbows." They remind one of some of Shelley's lyrics ; and indeed, in his untiring and brilliant production, without recognition, with scarcely any appreciation, Cotman resembles Shelley ; "stanzas written in dejection" by the shores of a visionary beauty, that haunts the mind but is beyond possession.

It is rather in such a drawing as *Breaking the Clod* that Cotman is

seen at his happiest. For here there is no attempt to escape from the actual, no revolt; only the distillation of what is loveliest in an actual scene, without effort or vehemence, accomplished with the quietness of power. It seems, indeed, almost as if the scene had created itself upon the paper; so unconscious, so lost in its subject, has been the working of the artist's mind. The drawing, once seen, haunts the memory; it overflows with its own atmosphere; it is scented with the dawn; one hears the labourer's cry to his team in the early stillness, in the shadow of the sleepy elms; one feels all the charm of the "sacred morning": the Greek epithet suggests itself appropriately before a creation that recalls the Greeks in the sanity of its beauty. Whoever sees this drawing must think at once of Corot and of Millet, for it combines the dominating sentiment of the work of each of them. Yet it was made probably not later than 1815; it belongs to Cotman's earlier work. Slight as it is, in an obvious sense, this is a production of high importance. And very important also are those wonderful sketches of the last year of Cotman's life, *The Wold Afloat* and its companions, in which, as Mr. Wedmore has said, he anticipated the impassioned force of David Cox's later time. Cotman's work in oils is, we have seen, inconsiderable compared with the rest of his work; but were he represented at the National Gallery by a few pictures equal to the *Fishing Boats off Yarmouth*, *The Mishap*, or Mr. Bridgman's *After Sunset*, he would be seen to take rank with the greatest of our landscape artists. As a water-colour painter he has few equals. Turner apart, there is no one in our fine English school, of imagination so rare, of achievement so various.

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