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**The Temple Biographies**

Edited by Dugald Macfadyen, M.A.

**The Life-Work of  
George Frederick Watts**

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*Mr. G. F. Walls, R.A. in his garden.*

THE LIFE-WORK  
OF  
GEORGE FREDERICK WATTS  
R.A.

BY  
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"THE POETRY OF PLANTS," ETC. ETC.



WITH REPRODUCTIONS FROM  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY HOLLYER OF  
SIX OF THE ARTIST'S PICTURES  
AND OTHER ILLUSTRATIONS

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“The utmost for the highest.”

*Watts' Motto.*

## Editor's Preface

TO include in the series of "Temple Biographies" one English painter may appear at first sight invidious ; but the principle on which the selection is made is not far to seek, and the book itself supplies the only justification needed.

The series aims at bringing together the lives of men of genius and character, who, in Mazzini's phrase, are "God's born interpreters." There are indeed many who see within life, and above it, its spiritual significance ; who live with a faculty of vision sensitive to impressions of that higher and finer order of being in which all truths find their highest reality, and all relations of life their true order and explanation ; but, of these, not many have the further qualification of an intellectual endowment enabling them to interpret what they see, and the self-surrender which makes a man the patient and resolute servant of his own highest ideals. It would not be just to English art of the century now ended, to let it be forgotten that it had one man who combined these high qualities and knew how to give them expression on canvas ; nor just to our own day to allow the happy circumstance that Watts may still be with us for some years, to deprive it of any inspiration to be got from a record

of his life written with studied reserve, by a competent and life-long student of his career and work.

For a period covering the life of two generations Watts has accepted as his high task the duty of presenting through his art the soul's reading of the universe. He has endeavoured to paint on canvas those interpretations and criticisms of life which, in the poet, make the substance of his poems, in the patriot constitute his mission, to the prophet are his "burden" or "word of the Lord." As the poet's words are often thrown out at a reality beyond the reach of words, and the prophet's a reach after a whole of truth which "exceeds his grasp," so Watts' artistic creations are often to be accepted as courageous and beautiful suggestions of a reality which lies beyond the range of perfect vision; and in this respect they are most true to a life which, as we know it, "half reveals and half conceals" the truth within.

With a proper sense of the dignity of his work he has allowed to his art the rare privilege of public utterance, as a prophet is bound to do even at his own cost. So that when his life is looked at as a whole it has an aspect of public duty honourably discharged—as of a man bearing a burden of spiritual truth with austere self-devotion—an aspect which separates his life from many who, in other respects, might be considered his equals, and entitles him to be ranked with other great idealists who have contended for their ideals to the uttermost.

D. MACFADYEN.

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## Prefatory Note

THOUGH George Frederick Watts has never painted pictures which could be called popular, in the ordinary sense of the term, he has won something far better than such popularity by his impressive work ; and his name is becoming to an increasingly large public, what it has long been to all who care for true art, the name of an honoured teacher and revered master. Much has been written in magazines, reviews and newspapers during recent years regarding his life-work, but this is the first attempt to devote a whole volume entirely to the subject. The aim of the book is to give a literary interpretation of what Watts, with larger, other eyes than ours, has seen in nature, poetry and myth, and in human character. The expositions of his most characteristic pictures, which will be found in the following pages, are the results of a reverential study of them by one who has derived from them much intellectual insight and elevation of soul ; and who has compared, and by so doing modified and corrected, his own impressions with those of many others who have devoted themselves to the fascinating task. An endeavour has been made to embody the conclusions of the growing literature which deals with Watts' work up to the present date.

Art, however abstract and timeless, develops within time, but the personal details which one expects in the biography of a man who has been as heroic in his life as in his art, are at present not available. Some day, no doubt, they will be given authoritatively to the world. In the meantime the artistic career of England's greatest artist, who professes himself a student still, for art is much longer than the long continuous years which he has given to the pursuit, is already public property ; and it is that which is the proper subject of such a book as this. The author has to acknowledge his great indebtedness to the charming account of Watts' Life and Work, by Julia Cartwright (Mrs Ady) in the Easter annual of the *Art Journal* for 1896, and to the editor of the series of Temple Biographies in which this book appears, for many fruitful suggestions.

HUGH MACMILLAN.

## Chapter I

# Pre-Victorian English Art

AN aged oak, standing alone on the site of an ancient forest, awakens in us a sentiment of profound reverence. It is the sole survivor of a multitude of trees, whose leafy shade had made a haunted world of its own, teeming with life, beauty and mystery. It embodies all the memories of the past in its pathetic loneliness; and in the pictures of spring freshness, and summer fulness, and autumn splendour, and winter nakedness, which it paints against the blue background of the successive seasons, it appeals to our imagination in a way that powerfully affects us. It is dowered not only with its own individual grandeur, but also with that of the forest, whose multitudinous history it sums up and represents. It has made a covenant with time, as amid the social changes that have been going on around it, and the varied influences of nature to which it has been subjected, it added generation after generation to its bulk and size, and recorded the growth of the silent years in the mystic rings at its heart. Like that venerable ancestral tree is a man like George Frederick Watts. He is one of the last survivors of the men of genius of the Victorian age. Nearly all his distinguished contemporaries have passed away, and he almost alone

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remains to impress us with his presence, and to remind us how splendid was the period that formed him, and of which he was one of the principal creative forces. He lingers in the solitude with the red sunset rays of the great epoch, casting their halo of glamour around him, giving to his unique personality and receiving from it a profound interest which touches alike the heart and the imagination. He unites in himself the storied past and the vivid present—not the mere immediate past of Leighton and Burne-Jones and Rossetti, or even the remoter past of Turner and Reynolds, but the past of the ancient Italian school, with the essentially modern art of his own day. He may be said to be the last successor of the old masters—"the old master in the modern man," as he has been described. He represents to us what Titian and Michael Angelo must have been in their day. He has the rich colouring of the former, and the statuesque grandeur of the latter, combined in a marvellous manner; while he has features peculiarly his own, which could only have been developed in an age like this, whose poetry has been inspired by science, and gifted with wider vision and deeper intuition than any previous age. A British Titian, with the veneration of extreme old age around him, and his brow lined and furrowed with the marks of a vast and varied experience, he looks out to-day at eighty-six upon life with the same fresh hopefulness which characterised his youthful years.

There are periods in human history that are analogous to the season of spring when we sow and plant with a bright enthusiasm and a large expectancy. Our minds are ardent and vigorous.

Everything is fresh and full of interest. It seems as if we had only newly awakened to the beauty and glory of the world. Looking back upon the past we can recall ages of creative genius when men conceived and executed great things in art and literature, when every work had on it the hall-mark of original inspiration. But they were followed by ages in which a woful reaction of weariness and decay took place. The productions of these autumnal ages were only a mimicry of the great works of the spring ages, with all the vital power evaporated. Rules and precedents were followed instead of the fresh insight, freedom and spontaneity of nature. Criticism usurped the function of inspiration, and everywhere might be seen the slavish conventionality of exhausted capacity. They were ages in which whatever intellectual energies men had left to them were expended in plucking up that which nobler ages had planted.

Of this periodicity of intellectual and artistic power, the age when Mr Watts entered upon the study of his life was a good example. The exuberant mental fertility of a previous age had passed away. A kind of listless decay stole over everything. The art world seemed to be suffering from the reaction of previous production. Whatever new things were introduced were merely the caprices and extravagances of worn-out invention. They were the works of an amateur type of mind, specially marked out by mediocrity and a want of style; and whatever excellencies might be found in them were purely accidental, and not the continuous reliable quality of the heaven-born artist. The circumstances of the age were not favourable to the pursuit of the fine arts. The excitement

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caused by the Napoleonic wars had subsided ; but the nations were long of recovering from the waste and desolation which they had produced. Common-place industries and matter-of-fact employments to repair the ravages of war absorbed all the energies of the people everywhere ; and they had neither leisure nor inclination for the refinements and luxuries of life. The robbery of the churches and galleries of Italy and Spain, and the transference of the immortal works of the old masters as spoils of war to Paris, had created a factitious interest in art, and brought the most exquisite paintings and sculptures within reach of the art student at his own doors. But the money value of these works was more appreciated than their transcendent beauty and intellectual character. They were judged by a utilitarian standard, and therefore did not impress the minds of men with their great importance as means of culture. Art throughout the Continent had reached a low level. It had no new inspirations. Artists became copiers and imitators. They were content to depict the landscapes of nature and the scenes and incidents of human life without any spiritual feeling, transferring not the soul, but the mere mechanical resemblance.

In our own country it was an interval of rest between the great works that had been achieved during the previous age, and the creation of the great works which should be worthy of them of the next age. One is reminded of the portentous saying of Constable, " In thirty years English art will have ceased to exist." There were few men of outstanding genius, upon whom the celestial fire had descended, to carry on

the artistic heritage. Among a host of more or less obscure men Sir Charles Eastlake, the President of the Academy, more conspicuous perhaps for the excellence of his literary attainments in the history of art, than for the merits of his paintings, which had "a refined feeling and deep thoughtfulness," came easily first; and Hilton who displayed much poetic feeling in his historical and religious pictures; and Etty distinguished for the vigour of his subjects executed in the grand style, were also well-known leaders in the artistic world. Gibson was sending his sculptures from Rome, illustrating what he alleged to have been the custom of the old sculptors and architects, to colour their marble statues—and the emphatic points of their structures. Turner like a Titan was carrying all before him in landscape painting; and Hodgson was astonishing the age by his magnificent creations and proofs of surpassing energy. But it may be said of the age, in general terms, that it was a period of reaction, or ebbing from the high water-line reached by Wilkie, Reynolds, Mulready and Maclise. The Pre-Raphael Revival, to which the International Exhibition of 1851 gave a great impulse and a fixed direction, had not yet dawned, although there were premonitory signs of its coming. Painters were here and there beginning to awaken from prosaic ideas of art to higher poetical conceptions, and to return to nature for new inspiration from the old conventional methods. As Constable's ominous date of 1850, when British art should disappear, drew nigh, instead of signs of approaching extinction, a fresh baptism of inspiration descended upon the worn-out artistic world, like rain upon the mown grass. The princess of art, as in

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Burne Jones' lovely masterpiece of the Legend of the Brier Rose, was asleep, imprisoned by the trammels and tangled thorns and briers of prosaic custom, but the prince of art came to awaken her by a new and previously unknown spell to charm contemporary imaginations. Madox Brown, Millais, Rossetti, Holman Hunt and Burne Jones were about to appear with their brighter and more vivid sense of colour, which afforded a striking contrast to the weary monotony of neutral tints and brown tones which used to prevail. Ruskin, by his marvellous lectures on art, was inducing men to study more carefully the minute structures and appearances of rocks and trees and flowers, in order to escape from confused generalisation in landscape to the meaning and value of individual forms. He taught all artists to see a world of subtle beauty and infinite suggestion in the commonest aspects of nature, and to regard their art as a revelation and interpretation of that suggestiveness and beauty; not merely as a scenic stage on which to represent the dramatic incidents of life, but as an essential and intimate part of their human interest.

Of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, Watts might well be considered a pioneer. His own style which owed little to any external influences, and which differed from that of the Pre-Raphaelites in the fact of choosing his subjects from the ethereal sphere of the imagination almost exclusively, while they represented real persons in an actual world, may be said, however, to have prepared the way for the new era in British art. He had certainly the unconventional methods of the new order, their love of brilliant colouring and their sincerity and directness of aim. His well-known



work, "Love and Death," for instance, is instinct throughout with the best influences of Pre-Raphaelitism—the novel and striking treatment of a great subject—the beautiful composition and colour—the wonderful power and clearness of all the details—the utmost conscientiousness refusing to vitiate a tone of colour or a line of form, of the pattern shown to his reverent genius on the Mount, in order that the world might more readily admire it and accept its truth. And though "he voyaged in strange seas of thought alone," he was prepared to give the disciples of the new cult much sympathy and appreciation. With them he created that distinctively English school of painting, the realisation of which seems to have struck M. Chesneau and M. de la Sizeranne with surprise in every international exhibition of fine art. M. de la Sizeranne, the latest and most distinguished of French art-critics, characterised the works of Continental artists as the works of individual painters; but he found in the works of English painters common qualities, which entitled them to the name of a School. "There are French, Belgian and Spanish painters; but there is an English School of Painting." No doubt there is among Italian, French and Dutch painters a wonderful uniformity and conformity to general type; and among British artists an equally wonderful divergence and absence of uniformity, there being as many styles as there are individual painters. But the uniformity of Continental artists is the uniformity of tradition and process, method and design; whereas the individuality of British artists is that of character and moral purpose. And national Continental artists often pursue "art for art's own sake"; the treatment being every-

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thing and the subject immaterial. British artists on the contrary always paint seriously for a high purpose. They desire to produce a real and lasting impression, and not a mere startled feeling of surprise or delight, as evanescent as it is trivial ; to convey or emphasise an important truth, rather than paint a technically beautiful picture ; to enunciate some great principle, or elucidate some historical personage or event, rather than merely to please the eye. Englishmen never paint meaningless pictures. Art to them is sacred ; and has a lofty purpose to serve, in human culture. It is a worship of the home, and is meant for the seriousness of domestic life. It is the predominance of this quality in the works of our modern artists which entitles them to the name of a distinctive school of painting—which foreigners recognise as savouring of the soil of this country. It is for this reason that M. de la Sizeranne speaks of an English School of painting which is differentiated from all Continental schools. With the grave and refined art of Leighton, with the classical splendour of Alma Tadema, with the poetical and romantic conceptions of Burne Jones and Rossetti, with the lofty scripturalness of Holman Hunt, and with the vivid grandeur of Millais, Watts was in entire accord. Above everything else he wished to be a teacher of his age, and to impress men more by the truth which he conveyed, than by his manner of conveying it. By this moral quality in unison, which they all possessed in a high degree, they succeeded in revolutionising art in England !

Watts is by universal consent allowed to be the greatest of the small number of what may be called intellectual as distinguished from simply artistic

painters of England. The philosophic element dominates his art, and shines through all its manifestations. The technical excellencies of his work are made to serve its intellectual qualities, and to excite higher feelings than mere sensuous appreciation of the beauty of colours and forms. He has endeavoured to give to his paintings the highest perfection possible to him, not merely to excite our admiration, but in order that he may thus most effectually express the thoughts and emotions of his own mind. He has done more than any artist of his own time, not to please and satisfy the public, but to inspire men with the noblest ideas. He is essentially a preacher, valuing his message more than the form in which it appears, although striving to convey that message in the highest terms of art, in order to make it more impressive and instructive. He has much of the old Hebrew prophet in him ; and his sense of the deep importance of what he has to communicate, has drawn him from the retirement which is most congenial to him, and made him do violence to his natural modesty and shrinking from publicity, in order to attract attention to the solemn truths which are a burden upon his spirit, to the necessity that is laid upon him to express these truths, with all the fervour and power of which he is capable. Like another Elijah he comes from the desert to proclaim to mankind the mystical lore which nature has taught him in her solitudes. The Hebrew prophets used "acted parables" as means of emphasising and enforcing their lessons. They appealed to the eye, when addressing the ear would not have availed. Isaiah walked for three years among the people "naked and

barefoot"; and this daily spectacle was exhibited to them to foreshadow the shameful captivity of Egypt and Ethiopia; the character and dignity of Isaiah rendering this wild appearance startling and exceptional, and therefore more fitted to serve the purpose of an acted parable to arrest attention and compel inquiry. Jeremiah hid his linen girdle in a hole of the rock near the Euphrates, till it was marred and decayed and good for nothing; a homely symbol of the marring on the plains of Babylon of Israel, who once clave to the Lord as a girdle to the loins, but was now outcast and rejected because of its idolatries. He further broke a potter's vessel in pieces before the priests and elders of the people in the Valley of Tophet, the scene of their vile and cruel idolatries, as a symbol that thus the Lord would break His people in pieces, so that their unity could not be made whole again. Ezekiel, when his young wife—the desire of his eyes—was taken from him by a sudden death, was forbidden to weep or show any of the outward signs of mourning as a pathetic picture to the people, that so they should lose those who were dearer to them than their own soul, and yet in the wretchedness of their loss, worn-out with suffering, they should be tearless, unable to mourn from very despair. All these instances of the acted enigma, virtually the same in idea and principle, employed to convey God's teaching to Israel, are types of Watts' method of teaching by his pictures. What Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel did in dramatic action, Watts did in silent paint, employing the power of art in its highest and most poetic form to catch the imagination, and so impress upon the memory the

eternal truths and symbolic visions of life and death.

Few painters have maintained so high a level over so large a surface as Watts; his finest and best-known pictures, numbering more than 250. M. A. Besnard, the Belgian art-critic, has said of him that he is skilful in creating his own forms. His ideas are entirely his own. He is himself a whole epoch of English painting. He combines William Blake, Flaxman and Fuseli, and superadds qualities pre-eminently personal. Watts' treatment is not separate from his subject, meant to give the beauty of consummate skill, and mastery of colour and form to an ignoble subject, but is entirely subordinate to his subject and informed by it. It is not virtuosity of technique, or miraculous cleverness of drawing and colour you admire, but some great principle, some splendid act, some heroic incident, made beautiful by the artist's way of seeing it, inspired by the meaning which he has put into it. His pictures, it has been well said, are pictorial by the illumination of his own soul, and because he has seen in them what has far transcended their hues and outlines. His mode of painting seems a kind of creation. The spirit passes from him into material things; the intention enters into the form; thoughtfulness comes into the human face, and beauty and delicate perfection into the landscape. The hand is trained to fair uses by the influence of the painter's soul; and the finished conception is placed before us in all its power of pictorial expression. As a dramatist would portray a human character in the varying light of successive passions, so with the same art he paints his pictures. He

brings a human sentiment into everyone of them. Amongst all the painters of our day he has confessedly the best chance of becoming to future generations an "old master." Of adventure and stirring incident there is hardly anything to relate in the life of Watts. A faithful biography of him would reveal "the depth and not the trouble of the soul."

## Chapter II

### Early Life

BORN in London on February 23, 1817, George Frederick Watts was indeed a child of the spring, having the fresh vernal influences of nature in his blood from the beginning, fitting him to give a new impulse to the artistic and philosophic life of his day, from the old conventional methods. His nature fitted well into the period of his birth; and the quickening of the social and political world, by the great events that were taking place in connection with the cessation of the Napoleonic wars, and the development of Europe on new lines of progress, could not but have had a powerful influence upon a sensitive being like his. The year of his birth was made memorable by the marriage of the Duke of Kent, the father of our late beloved Queen, with the Princess Victoria of Saxe-Coburg. His parents were of Welsh origin; his father, described as "a man of scientific tastes and considerable inventive faculty," having come from Hereford to the metropolis to better his fortunes. From his Celtic blood, like Meredith and Burne Jones, Watts derived his vivid imagination and poetical enthusiasm, which have refined and glorified the strong common-sense and matter-of-fact prudence which he has also possessed in no ordinary degree. George Meredith, the foremost of our novelists, attributes his magnificent

literary success to the Celtic fire that courses through his veins; and Matthew Arnold has shown in a masterly way what the Celtic element has been in the literature and history of the world, supplying a large part of their poetry and romance. Watts' weird, mystical lore has come to him unconsciously from the glamour of the Welsh hills, and the dim legends of the Druids and bards of the Eisteddfod. We are told that he learned his first lessons in art from the quaint pictures in an old Queen Anne prayer-book, belonging to his family, on the fly-leaf of which the date of his birth was inscribed. He used to make copies of these pictures, for almost as soon as he could talk, he began to draw, with an instinct prophetic of his future eminence. Some of his sketches of horses and men, made when a boy, are still preserved by his friends. In his twelfth year the poems and stories of Sir Walter Scott made such a deep impression upon him, that he painted some scenes from them, which display a power of imagination, and an appreciation of colour, exceedingly rare in one so young. A more ambitious work stimulated his youthful genius in the struggle between the Greeks and Trojans for the possession of the body of Patroclus, the friend of Achilles, slain in single combat by Hector, and bears evidence of the vividness with which he realised the Homeric story, as well as of his attainments in classical studies.

Like most young men of genius, the youthful Watts was entirely self-taught. He derived no benefit from the technical schools which he attended, and therefore in a short time ceased to go. There was hardly any artist of sufficient ability to teach him. Haydon with his ungovernable nature and Titanic energy was out-



side the Academy, and Turner with his splendid genius for landscape painting was within it; but though these painters no doubt indirectly influenced him, it cannot be said that they communicated any actual impulse to him, and he was entirely without, what may be called in the ordinary sense, professional training. Wavering undecidedly between painting and sculpture as a life occupation, he frequented the studio of William Behnes, the sculptor, and though he received no direct teaching, he benefited greatly from watching the sculptor's processes, and by drawing from plaster casts, of which Behnes had a large collection, and the effect of this experience never left him.

From no other source, however, did he receive such inspiration as from the Elgin marbles. These immortal sculptures were the constant objects of his study, and gave him, as he himself tells us, not only ideas of form and composition, but also suggestions of colour that were invaluable. What English art owes to the inspiration of these sculptures cannot be reckoned. It is not more than eighty years since they were carried away from the Parthenon to the British Museum; and yet during that period they have exercised the most powerful influence not only upon sculptors, but also upon painters. Haydon was intoxicated by their unique perfection, and studied them almost every day. Again and again has the cry been heard to restore them to the Acropolis; for in spite of all the extraordinary care that is taken of them, they cannot resist the London air, and are slowly but surely perishing, and the loss of them would be unspeakable. As models of graceful drapery, whose many folds, as Ruskin tells us, are the signs of idealism and mysti-

cism, they have guided the studies of the greatest of our artists, of Burne Jones and Watts and Leighton ; and at the back of all English academic painting, as M. de la Sizeranne truly says, may be seen in mystic vision, the wondrous figures of the Panathenaic procession. The bent of mind which he thus early showed towards sculpture, led afterwards to the peculiar sculpturesque form in which all his single figures are represented, and in his later years to the execution of some very important works of sculpture.

In 1837, when he was barely twenty years old, he exhibited his first picture at the Royal Academy, entitled "A Wounded Heron," which, after being lost for more than half a century, was discovered a few years ago in Newcastle and restored to the artist. To the same Exhibition he contributed the portraits of two young ladies. That Exhibition was made famous by paintings from the studios of Wilkie, Etty, Landseer, Maclise, Turner, Cooper, Eastlake, Stanfield ; surely high company for the aspiring boy-artist to be associated with. The following year he sent another portrait ; and in 1840 some incidents from Boccaccio and Shakespeare, such as "Isabella finding the corpse of her wounded lover," and "A scene from Cymbeline," which was much admired at the time. His friends were able to detect his remarkable gift even when he was engaged in the task of making himself acquainted with what his predecessors had done, and obtaining a mastery over the materials and rules of his art. Even when he was obeying most faithfully the conventions hitherto accepted, he was manifesting a power to break the old rules, and display a capacity for original work. He affected his friends by his personality and by his

individual view of things ; and showed in many ways that he had the gift of seeing the simplest things in the most beautiful fashion, which is the first and most indispensable quality of all in an artist. He early acquired the skilful hand which could adequately record his impressions ; and when he combined the seer's vision, and the insight which enabled him to see things in a lofty and beautiful way with a brilliant technique, by which he could interest the spectator in his conceptions, he was in possession of all the elements of success. Not by mere intuition, but by hard training of mind and eye and hand did he acquire this twofold power. He accustomed himself to see things in their relation to each other, and to make the essential to triumph over the impulse to produce the trivial.

In 1841, he exhibited at the Royal Academy a portrait of Miss Brunton, and painted a half-length portrait of Constantine Ionides, which is a fine specimen of masterly drawing and rich colouring and intensity of life, and also of Mary his wife, which has a somewhat sad expression. Both these portraits are in the possession of their grandson. They are remarkable for two reasons—first, because they may be said to inaugurate the unique series of portraits of poets and painters, men of science and thought, soldiers and statesmen, noble men and beautiful women, whom he afterwards painted for the national possession ; his previous attempts at portrait-painting hardly showing any traces of the peculiar qualities which appear in these, his sensitiveness and many-sided sympathy, his suppression of his own personality, and his entire absorption in his subject. And in the second place, because they were the

first of a noteworthy series of portraits which he painted for one family ; no less than five generations of the Ionides family having had their members represented by his pencil. The first sitters were Constantine and Mary Ionides, painted about sixty years ago, and the last Agathoniké Hélène Ionides, the great-great-grand-child, painted in 1893, with all the freshness and charm of his earlier years, in which he has vividly shown the grace and sweetness that belonged to the little girl. One picture of this remarkable family is well known as "The Baby," representing an infant sleeping on his pillow, with closed eyes, seeing in dreams, as one would judge, from the smiling look on his face, angels watching over him. For the Ionides household he painted a picture which recalls the Aurora of Guido Reni, only that the rosy goddess is accompanied in her flight up the morning sky through the luminous air, not by grown-up divinities, but by lovely babies ; an idea which charmingly illustrates the dewy morning hours, fresh with all young beauty and possibility. It is an interesting circumstance that his first artistic efforts should have thus been evoked in connection with the members of a Greek family. He who has had all along the deepest sympathy with everything Greek, in this way received an early consecration to classic themes.

For six years after this he contributed no pictures to the Royal Academy. But he was not idle. He was diligently cultivating his art, and improving his mind by a varied and extensive course of reading. At this time it was in contemplation to decorate the newly erected Houses of Parliament with frescoes illustrating principally the history of Great Britain.

The Fine Arts Commission proposed to hold a competitive exhibition of cartoons, intended to test the capacity of English artists for the style of art best suited for this purpose; and many of the leading artists of the day enrolled themselves in the list of competitors. Among these the name of Haydon may be specially mentioned, not only on account of his own well-known connection with this department of art, but also because of his association with Watts who gave a very shrewd and graphic estimate of his character and work, which has been appended to Haydon's autobiography.

A short digression will put us in possession of the facts of the case. Haydon welcomed the scheme with delight, as the first step towards the realisation of what had been a life-long desire to see the highest art adorning the public buildings of the country. At the same time he felt humiliated that, after thirty-eight years of devotion, not without success, to the kind of art required in such a competition, he should be reduced to the ranks, as it were, and obliged to prove his capacity before being employed. He had hoped that, owing to his special knowledge and experience, he should at least have been put on the committee, and appointed an examiner and judge. He swallowed, however, his disappointment, and began to draw for the Westminster Hall Exhibition two cartoons, one entitled "The Curse pronounced upon Adam and Eve," and the other "Edward the Black Prince entering London in triumph, with the French King as prisoner." He began his work with prayer, earnestly asking God's help and blessing. But as he proceeded he began to cherish dismal forebodings of failure, increased by the wretchedness of his affairs.

His fears arose, not from the real failure of power, the result of the most harassing life he led, which had been apparent for some time to all his friends, although he himself seemed utterly unconscious of it, but from what he imagined in his morbid state of mind, was the hostile conspiracy of the authorities to thwart all his efforts, on account of his too outspoken criticisms on art-subjects. He had made himself obnoxious to them by running counter to their cherished views and plans, and fully expected that they would revenge themselves upon him by rejecting his cartoons. Accordingly, when the day of decision came, and he was informed by his friend, Sir Charles Eastlake, that he was altogether passed over in the competition, he seemed at first prepared for the disappointment, as what he had exactly predicted. But not the less did he feel it to be the bitterest reverse of his whole life. Next day was a day of the greatest misery. The blow indeed fell heavily, and doubtless prepared the way for the final tragedy.

Watts' fellow-prizemen were Mr Edward Armitage and Mr Cope; all of them young men hitherto unknown to fame, who snatched their honours from competing Royal Academicians. Owing to Mr Armitage having drawn his cartoon in the studio of Paul Delaroche in Paris, the prize was withheld for a time, but was subsequently bestowed upon him, upon his making another cartoon of equal merit in England. The prize cartoons were publicly exhibited, and from the shillings collected from the thousands of visitors a handsome sum was raised. The large cartoon which Watts exhibited, entitled "Caractacus led in triumph through the streets of Rome," eminently suitable in meaning

and execution, won one of the first-class prizes, amounting to £300. It was greatly admired, but somehow or other it was never transferred to the walls for which it was destined. It was sold along with the other successful compositions to a private art dealer, and ultimately cut up into fragments, which were disposed of separately.

## Chapter III

### Visits to Florence and Greece

THE money which Watts received for his prize cartoon enabled him to carry out a desire he had long cherished to go to Italy, the land of art. On his way south, he turned aside at Paris, where he remained a few weeks, visiting the art galleries and the studios of the leading French painters, and making some acquaintance with the curious Bohemian mode of life led by the art-students in the social ateliers of the city. With this, however, it need hardly be said, with his pure and lofty ideals, he had little sympathy, except in the way of gaining experience and enlarging his knowledge of artistic human nature. One day he presented a letter of introduction to Lord Holland at the Casa Ferroni at Florence, then occupied by the British Ambassador at the Court of the Grand Duke of Tuscany.

Florence was at this time the capital of a kingdom which occupied a high place among the principalities of Europe. Its society was the gayest in Italy. Its galleries and museums were full of the finest paintings and sculptures in the world. At every step the foot trod upon some reverent history ; every street had its charm of the olden time, or its poetry of the present hour. Every building had some great memory of the past connected with it. The Campanile of Giotto



reared its lily-like stem into the blue sky, as fresh and fair as though it were a dream of the previous night. The Arno that flowed through the city seemed like the stream of time itself—ever renewing its youth from the far-off hills, and ever recounting its mighty chronicles ; and the bridges, old and new—that joined both banks of the river—seemed to unite the crowds of the living inhabitants with the misty shades that had gazed upon Dante and Michael Angelo and Cimabue. To Watts it was a perpetual fascination.

He meant only to have stayed a short time in Florence, but he found its attractions so numerous and powerful that he was induced to prolong his sojourn in that capital of art for four years, and to make himself at home among the glorious masterpieces of the Pitti and Uffizi Galleries. At the town residence of the British Minister he found a friend who warmly appreciated his genius, and gave to himself a most hospitable reception. In this refined and hospitable home he met many distinguished visitors, and saw the most attractive aspects of English and Italian society, at a time when the glamour of romance was upon everything connected with the small rival kingdoms into which the country was divided ; a sentiment which has been since effectually dispelled by political unification and tourist familiarities. He accompanied his illustrious friends to their summer quarters among the Tuscan hills ; and there, in the Villa Careggi, which belonged at one time to Lorenzo the Magnificent, he entered into the spirit of the past, when Pico della Mirandola, Angelo Poliziano and Marsilio Ficino perfected those translations of and disquisitions on the Platonic writings, which have borne

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such abundant fruit in all subsequent ages. Here occurred that strange dramatic incident, when the great Medicean Prince on his dying bed, troubled with remorse for his crimes, sent for Savonarola, and made confession to him, expecting to get absolution at once ; whereupon the stern Florentine John the Baptist pressed upon him as a condition of forgiveness, that he should restore popular government according to republican usage to Florence, and upon his refusal, left him unshrived without another word.

From the sunny marbles of the loggia of this splendid and storied villa, Watts often looked down the wealthy slope upon one of the fairest views which the city of Florence presents, surrounded with its numerous garden-embosomed villas, and sharp-pointed spires of dark cyprus trees, and by tier upon tier of terraced hills, melting into the azure distance ; such a dream of beauty as is scarcely to be equalled on earth, consecrated too by memories of poets, philosophers, painters and patriots, such as no other portion of the world can boast. Here, inspired by the great traditions of the Italian Renaissance, he painted portraits of Lord and Lady Holland, the Countess Walewsky and the Countess Castiglione, and Mr Cotterell, and also made delicate pencil-drawings of Lord Normanby, Lord Walpole, Mr Petre, Cardinal Sacconi, Lady Dover, and several others of the English and Italian guests of his host. The particularly bright portrait of Lady Holland in her broad-brimmed Nice hat, and the bewitching one of little Mary Fox, afterwards Princess Lichtenstein, in her frilled cap and short petticoats, with her big dog Ella by her side, standing on the lawn in front of the old cedars of Holland House, survived the disastrous

fire of 1871, which destroyed or damaged many of the paintings associated with Italy, and they may still be seen in the old boudoir of the celebrated London mansion. On the walls of the Villa Careggi he left behind as a perpetual remembrance of his stay in the place, a beautiful fresco depicting with graphic power the execution by being thrown down a well, of the physician who was accused of poisoning his master. Lorenzo's last illness was suspiciously sudden and mysterious, seizing him all at once in the midst of his vigour and luxury.

The Fine Arts Commission resolved to have another competition of oil paintings for the Houses of Parliament in June 1847. Lord Holland communicated the fact to Watts, and strongly urged him to become a candidate. Accordingly, he returned to England in time to send in his picture of "King Alfred inciting his subjects to prevent the landing of the Danes," or "The First Naval Victory of the English." It was painted mostly in Florence, and has a greatly quickened sense of colour and form, caught from the study of the glorious art around him. It is a very vigorous composition, reminding us by the purity of its colouring, the clearness of its atmosphere, and most of all, by the boldness of the modelling of the figures, of Tintoretto. We can trace the influence of the Venetian school with its splendid colouring, and of the Florentine school with its fine emotions, upon his own paintings. He had been familiar with the productions of these schools at home, under the depressing atmospheric effects of our cloudy skies, but now he saw them in the bright sunshine where the artists wrought; and Titian, and Tintoretto and Paul

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Veronese appealed to him in a different way altogether under the blue skies of Venice and Florence. At a time when his heart was filled with the ardent dreams and aspirations of opening manhood, he came under the spell of the world's greatest paintings in their own proper setting, and he breathed the atmosphere in which they had been conceived, and spent his days amid the august associations of which they had been the natural outcome. His ordinary life, like a Tuscan portrait, had this golden background of romance, which glorified all that he did and felt. He did not directly copy the famous pictures which he saw, or make deliberate studies of them, but he drank in their inspiration, and the impressions of their scheme of colour especially, received almost unconsciously at the time, have endured down to the present hour. It was this that modelled his genius upon that of the old masters, and made him the living link between old Italian art and the modern English Renaissance.

King Alfred, according to Mr MacColl, is a Raphaelesque archangel. He is standing upon a gangway beside the boats, his long cloak hanging in graceful folds over his extended arm. In one corner is a figure kneeling in prayer with clasped hands, whose upturned countenance is serenely mild and beautiful. For this competitive subject, Watts received a first-class prize of £500. His picture was bought by the Government, and hung in a committee room at Westminster. Afterwards he received a commission to execute in fresco, a picture of "St George and the Dragon" for the adornment of the Upper Waiting Hall of the House of Lords. This work was begun in 1848 and took five years to

finish, and it may still be seen although considerably injured.

In 1856, Watts accompanied Sir Charles Newton on the expedition sent out to examine the site of the ancient Tomb of Mausolus at Halicarnassus. Sir Charles had previously discovered many sculptured stones in the walls of the Castle of Budrun, built by the Knights of St John near at hand; and shrewdly suspected that the fort had been constructed entirely out of the ruins of the Tomb. In order to verify his conjectures, he next year obtained a firman from the Porte, owing to the influence of our ambassador at Constantinople, Lord Stratford de Redcliffe, authorising him to investigate the whole locality; and the English Government commissioned him to remove from the Castle of Budrun any sculptures he might find, and transfer them to the British Museum. The expedition occupied seventeen months, in the course of which some important sites in Cnidus, and other parts of the Greek Isles, were explored with great success. The Tomb and Palace of Mausolus were examined down to the foundations of the buildings, and all that was most valuable taken away to London and Constantinople. It was proved beyond doubt, from the treasures of art of the age of Scopas, discovered on the occasion, that the great fame of the splendid Tomb was more than deserved. Among the statues recovered were those of Mausolus himself, and his devoted wife Artemisia, who raised the wonderful monument to her husband, and who never ceased to mourn him. She died before the monument was finished; and her husband's brother, who succeeded to the throne, stopped the building; but the sculptors

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and architects engaged on the work agreed to complete it at their own expense—solely for art's sake. As Greek art was then at its best, it was a noble triumph of genius; fit indeed to be one of the seven wonders of the world. Lucian, in his "Dialogues of the Dead," introduces Diogenes accosting Mausolus, and wishing to know the cause of his pride. Mausolus for answer points to his monument as a sufficient reason. And it was indeed only a just compliment to call every magnificent tomb a Mausoleum after it. It is a most interesting circumstance that on this occasion Watts witnessed the exhumation of pieces of sculpture, glowing with colour, artificially applied, "as perfect as if painted only a few weeks previously." In the course of two or three hours' exposure to the atmosphere, however, the colour disappeared entirely, leaving the marble in its original purity. This circumstance goes far to settle the question, which some time ago was keenly discussed in art circles, whether ancient Greek statues and temples of white marble were tinted or not. And it was a happy coincidence that he, who is *facile princeps* the colourist of the English school, should have been present when this corroborative fact turned up.

Watts visited in the company of the officers of the expedition many of the fairest regions of Asia Minor, and acquired an immense amount of information regarding some of the most famous spots of antiquity. His enthusiasm for everything classic was kindled and fostered by his happy experiences at this time. In the sumptuous volumes which Sir Charles Newton published containing the results of his researches, Watts' name indeed is not mentioned, as he had no

official position in connection with the expedition. He did not paint the sculptures unearthed, or the scenes that were visited. He had voluntarily joined the expedition, because of the facilities which it afforded of becoming better acquainted with ancient Greek art and modern Greek landscape. As a solitary traveller in brigand-haunted lands, at that time rarely visited, he would have been exposed to considerable personal danger ; but under the august shield of such a British mission, he was protected and free to carry out his own plans and purposes. There can be no doubt, however, that he made himself of great use by his services ; and all reports assure us that while he was with the scientific and archæological corps, he was the life of it, being full of spirit and enthusiasm, not unmixed with the saving grace of a quiet and genial humour. After the purposes of the expedition were fulfilled, instead of returning home with the rest of the party, he pursued his travels on his own account in different parts of Greece and Italy.

He was greatly impressed with the beauty of Greek scenery. In the clear light and transparent atmosphere, distance was annihilated, and the sharp extremes of things were softened, and bare hard rocks acquired at their edges a chromatic radiance which blended with the tenderness of the sky. There was no mystery in nature ; no dark problems in life. All gloomy things disappeared in the mere joy of living. The islands rose out of the blue seas, like the mountain-tops of a submerged land, separated from each other, as peak is from peak, by depths of rich colouring, and effects of light and shade, which vividly appealed to the artistic sense. Everywhere there was

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the grace and charm, the lucid imagination, the glamour of old religion, the smooth harmonious life of the ancient Ionic race. In this delightful tour, Watts acquired that familiarity with classic art and landscape which was of immense service to him in his future studies. Especially the visit to Halicarnassus, where he had a splendid opportunity of familiarising himself with one of the most renowned statues of antiquity, deepened the devotion to Greek sculpture which he had acquired in his earlier days by the study of the Elgin marbles. That devotion may be seen in the "sculpturesque ideal of art" to which so many of his works have been conformed; the remarkable dignity of form and impersonality of his figures, the absence of confusing, distracting detail, and the concentration upon the one direct essential purpose of his picture—those outstanding points which differentiate the best paintings from the best sculptures. For it must be patent to every thoughtful spectator that Watts' pictures appeal to the simple truths and primary emotions of life—in the direct essential manner in which sculpture does—and produce upon us very much the same impression.



## Chapter IV

### Personal Habits and Methods

WATTS was born with a delicate constitution, and all his life he has been far from robust, indeed often very weak and sickly ; but he has managed to extreme old age to preserve a wonderful balancing of all his powers. This has kept him in life, and enabled him to do an astonishing amount of work, often necessitating the lengthiest and the most concentrated processes of painting.

It has often been noticed that strong men have one weak point, and their general constitution is not stronger than that one weak point. Some disorder comes and upsets the balance at that one weak point, and carries them off in spite of their generally strong constitution. On the other hand we see men whose weakness is balanced. They are weak all round. There is not one point weaker than another ; and so they are able for long years to maintain the equilibrium of life, even if that life be on a lower plane so far as health is concerned than that of other men. Watts has possessed this balancing of his bodily powers in a remarkable degree. His judgment, too, has always been sober and able to guide and control his fine artistic sensibilities ; and the fervent intensity of his nature has always been combined with bodily exercises which have corrected and calmed its excitements. Having to

take great care of a body that was naturally weakly, he was obliged to forgo the violent athletic games of youth, and to practice rigid habits of abstinence. He himself has said, "I have never smoked. Greater things were done in the world, immeasurably greater, before tobacco was discovered, than have ever been done since. The cigarette is the handmaid of idleness. Possibly it may be a sedative to overwrought nerves; but overwrought nerves are in themselves things that ought not to be. Of wine I have taken very little. In my earliest years I used to take a little, but for a long time I have never touched any form of alcohol. At meals I never drink anything, not even water. Tea, yes, in moderation. And so with regard to food I have been compelled to eat moderately, and of simple fare; to go to bed early, nine o'clock for the most part; to rise with the sun; to avoid violent exercise, and to enjoy plenty of fresh air." Until the last six or seven years he was one of the best riders in Surrey; and often, like many other artists we know, has prepared himself for the work of the studio by a long ride on horseback.

How far the weak health from which Watts has suffered all his life more or less has affected the character of his painting, it is hard to say. It certainly did not impair its strength in any appreciable degree, or cast over it the pale, languid hue of suffering. On the contrary, it has quickened his imagination, so that real life has become to him much of a dream or a shadow, and the dream-life a reality. The phosphorescence of the unseen world requires to be developed by senses that are somewhat touched by decay. Rude health and vigour give a matter of fact conception of

things which interferes with their poetry. When the senses are robust, the spiritual powers seem to languish ; and on the other hand the spiritual powers, like some beautiful orchidaceous growth, develop best on a constitution that is feeble and decayed. If Watts had been favoured with better health, there can be little doubt that his work would have acquired a robuster quality. But it would have lost something deeper and richer which makes it more interesting and rare. He would have touched less frequently the grim and sad side of life ; he would have had less sympathy with those inevitable mysteries which are so pathetic, because we can neither solve nor avoid them. He would have had a less friendly feeling towards death ; and not so keen an appreciation of all that lifts this vain and transient life of ours into the heroic and the immortal.

The knowledge of Watts' weak constitution greatly increases our admiration for the singleness of purpose and the steadfastness of intention which have enabled him to continue at his work, requiring often great strain, and producing great exhaustion, until he had completed it. And when we remember that, with such a feeble constitution, he had to struggle for long years with a certain measure of indifference on the part of the general public towards the kind of art in which he most delighted, and for which all other forms of art were only preparations, we cannot but be lost in wonder at the indomitableness of his will, the loftiness of his aim, and the unrelaxing perseverance of his genius.

Nothing but a thorough consciousness that he was devoting his powers to the highest objects, that he was

making English art worthy of the great place which England had won by her literature, and by her history, could have sustained him. For this he fought with his strong natural dislike to publicity, until he had conquered it, and freed himself to do work which he exhibited to public criticism. The joy which healthier and stronger men find in the natural exercise of their powers, he found in the overcoming of the bodily hindrances in himself which made all work a labour, and in giving expression through much prolonged effort to the spiritual conceptions of his fervent and intense nature. But though he has been successful far beyond his highest expectations and hopes,<sup>1</sup> and has had much true enjoyment in his heart—he himself tells us that he has never rejoiced in life for the mere sake of living, and has never had a buoyant exuberance of animal spirits. The sorrow of the world has pressed heavily upon his spirit. With-

<sup>1</sup> As an indication of the increasing popularity of Watts' imaginative work, the prices may be mentioned that were obtained at the sale of some replicas or original designs for the artist's best-known works acquired direct from himself, and also a number of portrait studies of persons notable in modern society for distinction, talent or beauty. The collection was made by Mr Charles Hilditch Rickards of Manchester, and sold at Christie's in April 1887. Most of it was purchased by Mr Agnew, who was the best possible judge of the value of pictures in the art market; and the result conclusively showed that the public had a higher appreciation of the painter's work than was commonly supposed. "Love and Death" sold for £1155; "Love and Life," for £1207; "The Return of the Dove," for £903; "The Angel of Death," for £577; "Time, Death and Judgment," for £525. Joachim's portrait was bought for the Chicago Gallery at £401; the Manchester Corporation acquired "Prayer" for £525; Lord Tweedmouth bought the portrait of Recorder Russell Gurney at a high price; Mr Firth acquired "Ariadne" for £787; the "Birth of Clytie" was bought by Mr Cyril Flower, M.P., for £231. Altogether the fifty-seven pictures and designs by Watts included in the sale realised a total of £15,686.

out any special or grievous trouble of his own, the great trouble of humanity, the groaning and travailing together in pain of creation until now, has saddened his soul, and put everything for him in the minor key. The larger the nature, the more it feels the woes of others, the more it is at leisure from its own experiences to enter into those of others, and the more it suffers from its keen sympathies.

At an early age he achieved the highest reputation as a portrait painter, and for many years he stood at the supreme head of this branch of the art. He might have made a very large fortune by his craft. But when he diverged into allegorical or mystic themes, and became a Bunyan among painters, people did not regard these as art at all. They were puzzled and mystified by the subjects, and turned away from them in indignation or indifference. But, notwithstanding this treatment, he persevered in painting such pictures, to the neglect of what people considered to be his proper work, hoping that some at least might be influenced by the truths which they expressed. He has, by paintings of this high spiritual character, raised the whole tone of English art, and made it more worthy of the nation.

M. de la Sizeranne, who visited not long ago for the first time the Art Library at South Kensington Museum, said:—"I took by chance the staircase leading to the library—one of the least known, and least frequented corners of the immense palace. The walls of this staircase are covered with canvases exhibited there for some years, which then disappear like goods from a shop. At that time I held the conviction, common to many, that mythological

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painting was a false, decadent, commonplace style; that of art of such impersonal figures as Death, Justice, Time, Love, etc., nothing more could nowadays be made than a spiritless decoration for the ceilings of a public building, or of a confectioner's shop. I then thought, like many others, that to infuse fresh life, blood, and moving, speaking feeling into these myths, worn out by soaring into abstractions, they must of necessity be metamorphosed into portions of contemporary life. For example, Death must be represented as a dying mother surrounded by her children on a day in springtime, Love by a pair of rowers confiding the secret of their happiness to the calm reflections of the islands of the Seine. I still held this opinion when I mounted the first steps of that staircase. By the time I had reached the last step, I no longer believed that mythological painting was dead, nor that in order to enlarge the figure of a fact, to the sexless impersonal universality of an idea, all warmth of feeling, all the drama of life must be extracted from it. What was there between these two opinions? Two pictures of Watts'—"Love and Death" and "Love and Life."

In the East End of London, where his allegorical paintings have been exhibited for a score of years, they have had a more remarkable influence on the more thoughtful of the poor than any others that have been shown. Canon Burnett, of Toynbee Hall, Whitechapel, says that "they appeal to the great things of life, which are the common things. They are poetic, and the 'masses' of the people are, I expect, more open to poetry than the 'classes.'" On his eightieth birthday Mr Swinburne sent him the

following sonnet, full of allusions to the subjects of his principal works :—

“ High thought and hallowed love, by faith made one,  
 Begat and bare the sweet, strong-hearted child,  
 Art nursed of nature ; earth and sea, and sun  
 Saw nature then more god-like as she smiled.  
 Life smiled on Death, and Death on Life : the soul  
 Between them shone and soared above their strife,  
 And left on Time’s unclosed and starry scroll,  
 A sign that quickened Death to deathless life.  
 Peace rose like Hope, a patient queen, and bade  
 Watts’ first-born, Faith, abjure her creed and die ;  
 And Love, by life and death, made sad and glad,  
 Gave conscience ease, and watched Goodwill pass by.  
 All these make music now of one man’s name,  
 Whose life and age are one with love and fame.”

Many men having arrived at Watts’ age would feel themselves abundantly entitled to rest from their labours, and to lead henceforward a sabbatic life ; but there are few like him who work as hard, and with as much skill and vigour, as in his early prime. And it is pathetic to hear a man who has been continuously at work, almost before the oldest of our present artists was born, lamenting that he has so little time to accomplish all that he has to do.

He spends the year almost equally between town and country. His home at Little Holland House, in the Melbury Road, where artists love to congregate, is too well known to need description, for visitors are admitted to the gallery of his pictures which it contains on Saturday and Sunday afternoons during the summer. But a few words may be devoted to his country house of Limnerslease, situated about thirty miles south-west of London, on a slope of the

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curiously-shaped, narrow chalk ridge of hills between Guildford and Farnham, called the Hog's Back. It is little more than eleven years since he fixed upon this retreat, on the summit of a knoll, near the old road which Chaucer's pilgrims frequented on their way to the tomb of St Thomas à Becket at Canterbury, which was no other than the ancient British track, called the "Tin Way," along which the Cornwall traders brought their tin to the Kentish coast; and since then it has developed around it a wealth of shrubbery and woodland which makes it an ideal residence for an artist. On the outskirts of the domain, some wild country clothed with the original juniper and gorse bushes appear, with large patches of purple heather growing among the rough boulders of the hillside. Tall Scotch firs crown the knoll, which redden in the sunset, and impart to it a picturesque appearance, suggestive of the Highland mountains. The building is in keeping with its environment, with its deep-mullioned windows and slanting roofs, overgrown with climbing plants. The interior, contains many precious specimens of Watts' own art, and gifts of their works from his brother artists. The studio is given up exclusively to painting, and has no ornaments except Watts' pictures at various stages of completion, many of them being replicas of favourite subjects, and recently finished works. In this ideal spot the artist enjoys a measure of quietude and repose which he could not possibly have secured in London. The scenes around are as rural as though he were in the heart of England, furthest removed from the traffic of the world's great thoroughfare. The noise does not reach him in the faintest, far-off echo, and



the silence is only broken by the song of the thrush during the day, and in the charmed night by the nightingales which sing in every hedge. He rises in summer at four o'clock in the morning, and takes advantage of his own fresh feelings and of the exhilarating light for work on his paintings, and he goes to bed at sunset. He has lived a life of almost monastic simplicity and regularity.

Watts is a remarkable example of a life-long devotion to his own conception of art. No one could hire him or induce him to work privately or under conditions. He has never been tempted to swerve from the realisation of his ideal. For its sake he has kept himself detached from the influences of all the schools of his time and maintained the even tenor of his way, turning neither to the right hand nor to the left, while novel schemes and principles and theories of art have tried to win his allegiance. While manifesting a thorough admiration for and a genuine sympathy with the work of many of his fellow-artists, he has never adopted their methods, but always retained his own self-centred individuality in a remarkable degree. The Pre-Raphaelite movement arose, and with the intense beliefs of the brotherhood he had much sympathy, but their views and ways in art were not his; and his own individual imaginative power kept the nature and the manner of his work distinct from theirs. The wave of Impressionism has passed over the schools of art, and though he has been always to a certain extent an Impressionist, and has been moved by the genuine feeling of the fashion, he has been undeviatingly faithful to the tenets of his artistic creed throughout his whole career. No doubt we can recognise in that

career two periods and distinct methods of painting : the first period, when he sought the highest technical perfection and proficiency in mere mimetic dexterity in his painting ; and the second, when he asserted that the thought of the picture was nobler than its manipulation. But throughout both methods and periods he has kept always steadfastly in view the ethical bearing of his art, and he has consecrated his labours to the service of his fellow-men.

He had early formed the resolution to present to the nation and to public institutions specimens of his work, that might have the effect of refining and elevating the popular taste, counteracting the prevailing materialism of the time, and nourishing higher purposes by visions of things that ennoble. The ugliness of most of the things connected with our daily life has been deeply impressed upon him ; and he has striven to introduce as much as possible a feeling for the beautiful in all these objects and relations. Accustomed to see art regarded as merely something to please, as existing only for its own sake, he has ever taught that art has a direct ethical purpose, and enters far into the province of morality. He has sacrificed everything for his ideals. He has earnestly worked to keep the soul of the nation alive to these ideals. All who visit the Tate Gallery know the marvellous series of allegorical paintings, by which as a prophet and teacher of eternal truth, he has left his mark on the minds and hearts of the people of these realms. When you enter the gallery, and find yourself gazing upon these masterpieces, the great sordid world of trade and commerce is shut out, and you feel yourself in a sanctuary. You are at once ushered

into a visionary world, in which the hard facts of experience are transfigured into noble imaginings, and life and death and love glorified with a radiancy of light and colour which seem to belong to a heavenly sphere. There you feel that the artist has preserved an eclectic imagination, and that whatever defects may exist in his work, are owing to noble efforts to realise his own conceptions. To complete this remarkable series, and to make it more worthy of his great purpose, has been the chief labour of his life.

In 1885 a collection of Watts' pictures, amounting in number to fifty of the best known and most popular, was sent to America, and exhibited in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. About half of them were portraits, and the collection as a whole gave a very fair, though not by any means a complete representation of the painter's purpose and mode of treatment. Although Watts was almost unknown to the American public, and although the artist's aims and methods were entirely different from anything they had hitherto seen, and the pictures themselves had none of the popular qualities which had been regarded as characteristic of works of art of a high order of merit, and were indeed sober if not sombre in hue and peculiar in effect; yet the exhibition proved a remarkable success, and proved how ready the community was to value more highly imaginative painting that appealed to the higher nature, than the depressing mechanical realism which hitherto had principally governed art, and made anything worthy of being painted, if only it was painted well. Watts was not asked to grant the loan of his pictures on the

ground that he reflected some English school. The motive which influenced those who got up the exhibition, was simply to show to the American public pictures that in themselves were noble, that taught the highest truths of nature and life in such a way as to make the spectator forget the means by which these truths were expressed in the profound impression which they themselves produced, although the means also were technically admirable, and harmonious with the character of the subject. No collection could have so greatly strengthened the conviction, by its broadly human lessons, as this, that there could be no such thing as a national school of art, which artists nevertheless were striving to create. What impressed the public in Watts' pictures was as much American as English. There was no nationality in them, either in the nature of their subjects or in the methods of dealing with them. They taught the grand lesson that all good art must be cosmopolitan. Mrs Barrington wrote an admirable catalogue of the New York Exhibition, in which she expounded the principles of Watts' art, as well as described in detail the individual pictures in language remarkable for its deep insight and poetic charm.

There are two schools of painters. One makes observation and technical skill in reproducing what has been observed the principal thing. It is founded upon a close study of nature, which helps to express and give form to the conception which has been primarily evolved in the brain of the artist. Every object is represented with the utmost care and minuteness, and attention is apt to be diverted from the principal figures to the subordinate details of the background ;

and thus instead of emphasising and elevating the main idea of the picture, they make it conventional and mechanical. The other school of painters makes the picture more the creation of thought and review than of simple observation and refined feeling. Nature is used as an auxiliary, as the servant, and not as the master of the artist. Its help is required to give the necessary correctness and excellence to the technical part of the craft ; but the main idea is not suggested by nature, but is the direct offspring of the human intellect. Such a method of treatment has the precious quality of individuality, like the bloom on the fruit, which the other method lacks, and admits the spectator into the inmost recesses of the artist's soul. It is to the latter school that Watts belongs. He knows the great importance of going to nature, and ascertaining from her how the scene which he wishes to depict should have actually occurred, and then sets to work to render his experience exactly and faithfully. But critics who approach his work from the side of technical excellence do not interest him at all. His endeavour has been to make his pictures as good as works of art as was possible to him, for fear that they should fail altogether in their appeal, but beyond that, their excellence as mere pictures is nothing to him. He does not choose a subject merely for its beauty of form or colour, and yet he strives to reach and succeeds in attaining to great perfection in the purely technical elements of his art ; because, as he says, "a well-written book tells its story with greater force than a badly written one."

Watts is essentially the seer. He thinks in pictures that come before the inward eye spontaneously and

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assume a definite form almost without any effort or consciousness. Jules Breton, the well-known French artist, used to say of himself that he thought in images as other people thought in words; and this was a happy birthright to him as an artist. The same might be said of Watts. This faculty is usually considered to belong especially to the child age, and to disappear afterwards as the power of thought expands. It belongs to the earliest formation of mental growth, which becomes atrophied as the mind is able to form ideas for itself, as the growing bean drops the cotyledonous leaves which are the first it inherits from its seed, as it sends its own roots down into the soil, and is able to produce leaves for its own nourishment. But there are some natures which retain this primitive formation to the latest. They take it up with them, and the cotyledonous leaves become the ordinary foliage of the mind's own production. And Watts always had this pictorial imagination. It formed part of the heaven which lay around him in his infancy; and now in his old age it fills his mind with visions and panoramas which are a source of great enjoyment to him. In some respects Watts reminds us of Blake, the "Swedenborg of painting," as Dr Muther calls him. There is the same love of the mystical and the ideal. Like him he loves more to suggest than to describe, to leave his conceptions to the artistic conscience and imagination to find out what they mean, than to work them out so that they may be plainly and fully revealed. What interests them both is not the technical excellence of their work, but what it teaches. But Watts has none of Blake's eccentricity, his readiness to depart from the main idea of the picture

into side issues and vague vagaries, into which an undisciplined imagination leads him. He keeps to the point that he has in view, and focusses all the interest of the picture in it. Every line, every tint has some special reference to the main idea, and helps to illustrate and enforce it. You are not allowed to lose sight for a moment of the fact that there is something in the picture beyond its artistic merit, something to lead you out of the material into the ideal. Whistler does not at first sight seem to have any points of resemblance to Watts; but Dr Muther, in his "History of Modern Painting," groups them together. "Different," he says, "as this wonderful magician in tone-values may be in the purport of his work from Watts, the illustrator of ideas, it is not a far cry from the delicate *grisaille* style of the great Watts to Whistler's misty harmonies dissolving in repose."

The method of Watts' working is entirely his own. He never uses any model to help him; nor does he arrange, as is the manner of the painters, the folds of robes, and the other lay-figures and furniture of his pictures beforehand in his studio, to enable him to realise these features more vividly. He paints his pictures entirely from first to last from his own imagination, and introduces no copy of any outward object to mar the ideal effect. In this way, the outward representation of his conception is, as it were, of one piece with the inward imagination. There is no incongruity between the idea and the physical form in which it is embodied. They are in perfect harmony. You have at one and the same time an ideal representation of some imaginary scene or abstract quality, and also an ideal representation of

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the dress in which it is clothed, of the landscape in which it appears, or of the objects of nature or art around it, that lend their aid to illustrate or adorn it—all true to nature and reality, and yet appearing in this ideal form. He makes no preparatory studies in whole or in part of his pictures. He first thinks out the subjects of them in all their details in his own mind; and then directly begins to sketch them out on the canvas, without the intervention of any design between him and them. He uses neither palette nor maulstick, nothing but the simple brush, and the assorted colours which he requires beside him. He lays on these colours with a seemingly careless lavishness, but nevertheless with a deft hand. There is no smearing or covering large surfaces with broad effects, with as little labour as possible. The outlines are brought out with the most distinct definition and clearness, while at the same time he surrounds his ideal forms with a misty or cloudy atmosphere for the purpose of showing that they are visionary or ideal. He finishes the smallest features of his pictures with the utmost care, carrying out himself the advice which is frequently upon his lips, "Remember the daisies." If he ever finds himself at a loss for some circumstantial detail, he has recourse directly to nature, from which he copies at first hand. But though thus striving after perfect accuracy and verisimilitude, he dislikes any display of skill in his pictures which would draw attention to some subordinate point, and to that degree lessen the general impression of the whole work.

His early fresco-painting habituated him for a time to the use of comparatively dry colour, with little



medium, and he has endeavoured to maintain the purity of his ground colour throughout his painting. In later pictures he greatly modified his scheme of colour, toning it down from an almost "garish" brightness to a soft mellow richness, much more impressive. He has had a special love for different shades of yellowish brown and blue; and these hues prevail in the great majority of his works. But in more recent years he has adopted for some pictures, notably his "Love and Death" and "Orpheus and Eurydice," a kind of greenish-grey, which covering large spaces, has a peculiar chilling effect, and is not beautiful in itself, however much it may be appropriate to the nature of the subject. It must be said, however, that he has shown in some instances a wonderful skill in his use of shades of grey and greens, as in the "Dove Returning to the Ark," and in "Psyche," which add considerably to the general effect of the picture; and in cases where scarlet and crimson, and various shades of red have been introduced, he has displayed a splendour and joyousness worthy of the greatest colourists.

As a draughtsman Watts lacks to a certain extent the delicate beauty of outline which characterises Lord Leighton's work, and the exquisite tenderness of detail which we admire so much in Burne Jones' paintings. His conception of what art should be, as more the expression of thought than technical execution, has given to his drawing a certain ruggedness and massiveness, which though true is heavy, and somewhat incompatible with minute refinement of form so pleasing to the eye.

Judged by mere technical skill, Tadema and Leighton

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are perhaps better as mere painters. But no other artist has combined as he has done high qualities of colouring, skilful drawing and composition and a lofty meaning pervading the whole. "No other artist has given us so many beautiful illustrations of poetry and religion ; no other has touched the old Greek myths and the poems of England and Italy with so much human sympathy ; no one has left such a living record of our greatest men." And if he has sometimes failed, where no one could succeed, he has failed to the extent that he could not confessedly realise his own ideals, or give the absolute perfection of technical skill to the conceptions of his great imagination. And therefore failure with such sincerity and earnestness of endeavour is haloed with glory ; it has, as Stevenson says, "a radiancy of better things, and is adorned with ineffective qualities." He has been often asked to illustrate books, but has been obliged to refuse. His subjects must be of his own suggestion ; he cannot illustrate another man's thought ; "not even," as he himself said, "that of Tennyson, who is one of my best friends, and whose works I admire so much." "He does not lean upon the poet," says Dr Muther ; "he invents allegories himself."

## Chapter V

### Home Arts and Industries

WATTS was prepared to undertake other frescoes of noble subjects for the decoration of public buildings. One of the dreams of his artistic life was to get a great Temple or House of Life built, with wide corridors and stately halls, in which he might obtain ample space to exhibit a grand series of paintings of the mysteries of life and death. The opportunity of realising this dream was not granted to him; but notwithstanding his disappointment, he did not allow his ideas, which were supremely original and grandly ethereal, to pass away, but wrought steadily at them in succession, until in a detached way, he completed the series. He offered the Benchers of Lincoln's Inn to adorn gratuitously the north end of their great hall with a fresco to be entitled "The School of Legation." In this magnificent work, supposed to be the largest and finest fresco in England, there are upwards of thirty typical figures from all countries, Sir William Harcourt appearing as Justinian, Tennyson as Minos, and Holman Hunt as Ina. It measures forty feet high, and is forty-five feet long. A few years ago, when it was sadly damaged by smoke and fog, Professor Church restored it with much loving care and skill. Though Watts would accept nothing from the Benchers for this splendid work, they gave him,

nevertheless, an enthusiastic expression of their gratitude, accompanied with a gift of £500 and a gold cup. He designed several compositions for his own special delight in this kind of art, which he reckoned the noblest. One, an oil painting, is a study of the nymph Echo, standing on the bank of a winding stream, and listening with startled eyes and animated look to the response which the mysterious voice in the distance makes to her own call. Another a small red chalk drawing, depicts the great expectation of mankind of the rising of the Sun that is to shine with healing upon a world full of woe and death—founded upon the passage in Isaiah, "The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light"—with the eager faces of the waiting crowd illumined by the reflection of the first rays of the eastern horizon. An oil painting represents "Aristides and the Shepherd." The great Athenian, on account of the jealousy of his rivals, was banished from the capital for ten years, although no charge of mal-administration of the affairs of the government or of personal unworthiness could be brought against him. While the ballot which led to his unjust ostracisement was being taken, Aristides one day in his walk in the neighbourhood of the city met a shepherd, who asked him to write for him the name of Aristides on the fatal oyster shell which he handed to him for the purpose. And when he had done this, Aristides asked him why he desired the exile of a man who had never done him any harm, and who had greatly benefited the state. "Because," was the reply, "I am tired of always hearing him called 'the Just'"; a sentence which has passed into a proverb, and well indicates a state of mind to which

any variety or change would be welcome, even if it were for the worse. Watts' graphic picture tells the story very effectively. All these cartoons may be seen in Watts' private gallery at Little Holland House, and there await whatever final touch he may wish or be able to give them before they are handed on to the custody of the nation. Besides these cartoons he threw himself with ardent zeal into the execution of a splendid fresco, entitled "Achilles, Briseis and Thetis," at Bowood, the seat of Lord Lansdowne; and this fresco has been admirably preserved. He also painted in fresco the dining-room of Lord Somers in Carlton House Terrace,<sup>1</sup> representing in his cartoons the dwellers of Parnassus and Olympus disporting themselves among the four elements. He thoroughly believed that it was by fresco-painting alone that English art could be raised to monumental grandeur, nobleness and simplicity. But there can be no doubt that his various attempts at mural decoration and his imaginative efforts on a large scale, were not welcomed with so much understanding and sympathy as to encourage him to persevere in this mode of painting.

Even in the interior of buildings, frescoes have suffered greatly from the dampness of the climate and the corrosive impurity of the atmosphere of this country, and it has been found exceedingly difficult to repair the ravages so caused. For this reason several of Watts' cartoons have been perpetuated in mosaic, as, for instance, the famous picture of "Time, Death, and Judgment," which now adorns a panel above a fountain outside St Jude's Church, White-chapel; while in the church of St James the Less,

<sup>1</sup> The present owner is Gertrude, Countess of Pembroke.—G. F. W.

near Vauxhall Bridge, an early fresco of Watts on the subject of the Ascension has been reproduced with great success in Venetian glass mosaic, by the well-known Venice and Murano Glass Company. He also designed figures of St Matthew and St Mark, to be executed in mosaic, for the decoration of two spandrels under the dome of St Paul's in London. But our regret that he did not find fuller scope for this line of artistic effort, for which he had a genius unknown since the days of the old masters, is mitigated, not only by the reflection that his frescoes would in all probability have shared the fate of all such works of art in England, but also and chiefly by the conviction that the immense and long-continued toil expended upon such work would have prevented him from painting a larger number of smaller pictures, and so the world would have been impoverished instead of enriched. On the other hand, had he met with greater appreciation, he would not have turned aside to portrait painting, which, though most of his best work was expended on it, was not in reality his own highest choice, but only an incidental pursuit, and he would have found time to carry out to completion the fragmentary series of designs which he had begun as a gift to the nation. We cannot regret, however, the time that he did spend upon his early frescoes; for there can be no doubt that this kind of art greatly influenced his style of painting throughout the rest of his life. We can trace to this youthful predilection for cartoons, the large manner, the bold conceptions, the dignity of form which distinguish so many of his late pictures; and it has been said, probably with some measure of truth, that many of the faults which may be

found with some of his pictures, are owing to this cause.

Watts and his charming wife have thoroughly devoted themselves to the "Home Arts and Industries Association," which has for its object the resuscitation of the old handicrafts of the country, which flourished before the general adoption of machinery. In a wooded hollow a short distance south of the house at Limnerslease, they have established pottery-works for the manufacture of art-ware, such as vases, terra-cotta window-boxes for the growth of flowers, and sun-dials. In the grounds a narrow bed of granite clay has been found admirably adapted for the potter's wheel; and this has suggested to the artist and his wife the establishment of a school, in which to teach the young people of the neighbourhood to make things, that would not only develop the artistic capacity which they believe to be latent in every English child, but also prove a commercial success. In this experiment they have been rewarded by finding that it pays well, in every sense of the word. It has given not only romantic employment to the people, but has educated and refined their taste. Everything on the premises is done by the hand. As might be expected, all sorts of quaint and symbolic designs are wrought into shape by the dexterous fingers of the employees; and ware equal to that of Vallauris, or some of the well-known potteries of Italy, can be supplied in a rural village among the Surrey downs. It has always been a strong desire of Watts not only to make the beautiful pervade everything in daily life, but also to awaken the unconscious artistic instinct that is natural to man. Modern manufactures have smothered, if not extinguished,

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this instinct. In olden times objects were carved by the hand if in wood, or beaten out by the hammer if of metal, and the objects so made showed marks of the personality of the worker; but now carvings are executed by machinery, or moulded by the melting-pot, and lose all trace of the worker. Patterns are multiplied by the score, and each resembles another so perfectly that the monotony becomes irksome. Cheapness and rapidity of execution, wholesale multiplication of the same designs, and the wish to give to articles made of inferior materials a good appearance, these are the qualities which are now estimated, and for the sake of which all other excellencies are sacrificed.

Watts' work in connection with the Home Arts and Industries Association is thus part of a much larger movement. It ought not to be impossible, as he himself has so frequently shown, to restore home handicrafts; for there was a time in our country, still within the memory of living men and women, when families made their own clothing from the very beginning in all its processes: sheared the sheep, carded the wool, spun the yarn, and wove and dyed the cloth. Chests full of household linen testified to the industry of the women, who reaped the flax that grew in their own fields, rotted the stems in the flax-pools, and separated the fibre, then prepared the tow, and formed the thread, and in the loom in the ben-room of the house made the most serviceable and durable linen. This they bleached to a snowy whiteness in the sunny fields, and wore with a purity that was as clean as their own lives, and unconsciously laid an obligation upon them to live up to its purity; and which finally formed the shroud that wrapped their cold



remains in the coffin, and gave them dignity even there. The women who did these things had the pride of their art. They strove to make it as perfect as possible; and in its turn their art had a most wholesome reaction upon their own lives. Nowadays a person goes into a shop and clothes himself or herself by means of articles with whose creation he has had nothing to do, which have been manufactured for him in thousands, and which make him an undistinguished unit in a multitude, whose raiment comes to him like the feathers to a bird, or the fur to an animal, without any thought or toil of his own. In former times a joiner constructed the whole furniture of a house, the chairs, tables, kitchen shelves and dresser, and parlour requisites. One man did the whole of the varied labour. His skill was continually called forth. He saw his work in all the stages of its progress, and each difficulty called forth a new expedient and resource in him. He was thus an artist, and, like God Himself, the supreme Artist, who, we are told, has "a desire to the work of His hands," he wishes to finish his work to the best of his ability. Work done in that way is a moral discipline. It raises him in the scale of being. It is a revelation to him in which he can see and sympathise with the creative methods of the universe. He is kept sober and diligent, his faculties are sharpened, and his nature ennobled and widened by his work.

But to-day a man in the same kind of employment, instead of doing the whole of a suite of furniture, or the whole of an individual article, is occupied all the time doing only a limited part of it, and he becomes so expert by this division of labour that

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he could carry on his function in his sleep. He is only a machine, or part of a machine, and in the meantime his artistic gift is asleep and inert within him. It is never called forth. His work becomes at length monotonous and wearisome. And is it any wonder that he should do it perfunctorily—put as little of himself into it as possible, and scamp it and get it done somehow, if only it can be made to present a fair appearance. And then when his day's labour is over he has recourse to the intoxicating cup, to give him the excitement and relish for life which he ought to have found in his work. He flees to the tempting Circean draught, that for a brief while he may forget that he is a machine, and realise that he is what God meant him to be—like Himself, knowing good and evil, king of circumstances, ruling over them and moulding them to his will with a divine faculty. From this state of things there is now, however, a reaction. There is a great and widespread desire felt to go back to primitive hand-work, to get things done by individual skill with a character, and not by a colourless wholesale machinery. The spinning-wheel, once universal in hut and hall, is coming back to be not merely an ornament, but a useful instrument for making yarn for stockings in the drawing-rooms of the ladies of the house. The hand-loom weaves the husband's plaid and rough shooting clothes; and the stockings of the family are dyed with native colours extracted from the natural objects around, and woven with knitting needles, without ever having been in a shop. Exhibitions of native industries are fostered and encouraged in various parts of the country, and a wholesome artistic competition is thus created which

has already done wonders, and promises to do far more for the education and elevation of our rural population.

It was the law of ancient Thebes in Greece that art should enter into and beautify every department of life. It should give grace and glory to common things, as well as to the higher things of devotion and study. No object that was repulsive, no scene that excited feelings of dislike, was allowed to be represented. The meaner and more sordid passions of human nature were not to be given permanent expression to in painting or sculpture. Nothing that was ugly, or that lowered the moral tone of the people, was considered a legitimate subject for the chisel or the pencil. And the consequence was that this lofty standard of art raised the general tone of society far above the level attained by other cities; and made the inhabitants of Thebes as distinguished for their pure patriotism as for their refined taste and generous culture. With these views Watts has always had the deepest sympathy. These ideas summed up the whole philosophy of art for him. He has wished that we should imitate the example of the ancient Thebans, and think of and do whatsoever things are pure and lovely and of good report, so that future ages might read our domestic as well as our literary and political history, in the artistic beauty of the objects that minister to our daily use, as we read the highest feeling and the fairest thought of the inhabitants of Pompeii, or of the ancient Etruscans, in the objects we extract from their tombs. He was particularly struck with the downright ugliness of our dress and towns and houses and places of public resort. We do

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not realise how much we suffer from this cause ; many of us are unconscious of the depressing circumstances in the midst of which we carry on our daily work. We do not know how the inartistic hues and forms of things insensibly affect our spirits, and even our health. An artistic object is ever in full accordance with the laws of nature. It is in harmony with the circumstances around it, and therefore it has a pleasing and soothing effect upon our nervous system. It is not only sensitive natures that feel this, but every one is affected in some measure. In sickness the ugly pattern of the wall-paper of the room to which we are confined becomes discordant, and has an insanative influence in retarding our recovery. How much of the immorality, the drunkenness and dissipation of our large cities is owing to the inharmonious surroundings of the inhabitants.

So much indeed has modern utilitarianism injured the picturesqueness and beauty of our cities, that even Rome itself has parted completely from its glorious past, and instead of being what it so long has been, a centre of ancient and modern art, favoured by its historical position as the highest seat of ecclesiastical power, has become in these days a busy commercial city, rivalling in trade and industry and general shoddiness any of our own towns. Its inhabitants have abandoned art, and adopted mercantile pursuits which yield quicker and more tangible profits ; and the result has been a great and noticeable deterioration in the artistic taste of the country. Hence it is of the utmost importance that where men and women are congregated in our large towns, there should always be influential voices raised up on

behalf of the beautiful in nature and art. Everyone should be educated to appreciate the beauty of the world around them. The instinct of beauty, as I have said, is latent in all, but it is inoperative because it is not developed and trained, and the artist who brings out this inherent faculty adds immensely to the sum of human happiness. English people do not realise the civilising effect of art on the community, because they have not the same appreciation of it which southern races have always manifested; but there can be no doubt that it could easily be cultivated, and assuredly it would repay general cultivation by refining, strengthening and ennobling the national character. Municipal corporations especially should seek by every means in their power to further the love of art, for in this way their cities might be made more beautiful and satisfying than at present, and they themselves might have a stronger public opinion to fall back upon, in framing measures that might be helpful in improving the appearance of the streets and buildings, and making them more pleasing to the eye, and at the same time more convenient for traffic and business purposes. If one wishes to see what a town might become in the hands of authorities gifted with true taste, a visit to the charming town of Nuremberg—so graphically described by Longfellow in his beautiful poem on the subject—would be a revelation. People from all parts of the world come to see the mediæval beauty of this quaint old city, where all the citizens are naturally artistic, and for generations have worked together to impart to the architectural features of the streets and buildings a quiet picturesqueness, which has made it a positive pleasure to live in

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it, and every inhabitant proud of it. It is not easy to live up to such a pattern; but other cities might endeavour to approximate as much as they can to it.

About half a dozen years ago, a Society was established in Brussels called "L'Œuvre Nationale de l'Art appliqué a la Rue," the aims of which were to beautify city-life, restore art to its old social mission, and to make the streets and all that pertained to them an artistic education to its inhabitants. The idea spread rapidly to other towns in Belgium besides the capital. A fortnightly journal was started as an organ of the cause, which secured a wide circulation, and supported the application of artistic treatment to all objects of public utility, such as street fountains and monuments, electric poles, newspaper kiosks, trade signs, house and shop fronts, the decorative elements of business structures, and harmonious advertisements. A national conference was called, attended by delegates from all the important towns and from many artistic societies; congresses were held which stimulated a deep and widespread interest in civic art, called for municipal intervention in cases where public projects might be carried out for their utilitarian advantage exclusively, leaving the artistic element connected with them entirely out of sight, and a demand was made that all designs for council work should be submitted to the judgment of experts in industrial art before being executed. From Belgium the organisation passed on to Holland, France and Italy, and everywhere it awakened a general and profound interest in all methods that go to make a city beautiful. "Art dans la Rue" has become a rallying cry for the setting up of kindred associations all over Central Europe. The belief is becoming universal

that there is no inherent reason why cities should be ugly, especially when the artistic and beautiful in public work is as cheap as the hideous, and much more to be desired. Already the aspect of many cities has become in consequence much changed, and their modern type which had sunk so low is being restored to the glory of their mediæval state. In 1863, when Watts sat at the Board of the Royal Academy Commission, appointed for the purpose of promoting the amenity of our public institutions, he strenuously advocated the artistic decoration of all places of public resort ; and he has since taken every opportunity of pressing his views on the subject, in quarters where he thinks they may have a chance of being practically carried out.

In two particular departments the almost universal ugliness of our civic life has been made especially conspicuous, viz., in our railway stations, and in hoardings of buildings in course of erection, and other places of public advertisement. So deeply did Watts feel this evil, that on one occasion he offered the directors of the London and North-Western Railway to decorate at his own expense the great hall at Euston Station, with a series of frescoes illustrating the progress of commerce. But so short-sighted was the policy of these officials, that they rejected the offer as a mere Quixotic enterprise. But the offer was not altogether in vain, for the publicity given to it awoke the minds of men to the necessity of doing something to make our places of public resort and our advertisements more pleasing and educative. Since then there have been successful attempts in some quarters to make our system of advertisement not a

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necessary evil, which it is to a large extent at present, but an interesting and attractive feature of our social life. Not only are our poster and advertisement designs made less blatant and extravagant, but they are seized upon as opportunities for some sort of entertainment and decorative effect, and they display a considerable amount of quaint humour, originality of design, and good drawing. Things that are common and even ugly in themselves, are often made pleasing by their combination with a pretty or amusing picture. The covers of all kinds of ephemeral literature have decorative designs which show a great deal of good taste ; and men are beginning to feel that it is worth while to expend thought and pains even upon the most short-lived things, which itself is a great gain. But it will require still more strenuous and combined effort, to make our railway stations in some measure what they are in the north-east of Spain, where they are not only adapted for commercial purposes, but are at the same time elegant and enjoyable public resorts for the people.

In connection with the work of the "Home Arts and Industries Association," it may be mentioned that it led directly to the construction of the beautiful Mortuary Chapel at Compton, a short distance from Limnerslease. The situation of this quiet home of the dead is remarkably pleasant. It is built on the side of a hill commanding a fine view of the valley, and is delightfully shaded by trees, while the cottages of the living near at hand gain a sacredness and solemnity from its vicinity. For the expenses of the building and the laying out of the grounds around it, Watts provided the money—which he earned by painting





MORTUARY CHAPEL: PORCH AND DOOR.

*Reproduced from a photograph by A. FRASER-TYTLER, Esq. (kindly lent by him).*



some special picture for it. But the chief work of carving, designing, and superintending the erection of the building was done by Mrs Watts—to whom her husband invariably attributes all the credit. She was helped by Mr George Redmayne, an architect, who overlooked the practical work of erecting the building. A charmingly written monograph on this chapel was published soon after its erection, from which a few extracts may be taken to show the object for which it was designed. “Built,” says Mrs Watt, “to the loving memory of all who find rest near its walls, and for the comfort and help of those to whom the sorrow of separation yet remains, the chapel for the new graveyard in Compton has on its walls the story, or at least some fragments of the story, of the spiritual life, on the wing of which, in the passage between the mystery of birth and the mystery of death, material life is lifted to the glorious consciousness of its affinity with the Infinite.”

“In trying to revive in some degree that living quality which was in all decoration when patterns had meaning, the character of our own Celtic art—ancient British, Irish and Scotch as it is—has been followed, and many of the symbols are taken from carved stones and crosses, or from those rare and exquisite illuminations on vellum, now the treasures of national museums and libraries, but once the most sacred possessions of the Celts, who with devoted labour loved thus to make beautiful their manuscript books of the Gospels. Some of the symbols, however, are immeasurably older than any Celtic art, and have travelled here and all over Europe, like the root words of languages, from their birth-place in the east, and

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the general plan of the chapel is one of these symbols."

"The circle of Eternity with the cross of Faith running through it, is from pre-historic times. The earliest Christians found this sign sacred among men struggling to find, like the men of Athens, the "Unknown God," and they gave to it the consecration of the fuller revelation of the Christian faith. If the cross had been used in past ages as a symbol of power over the four quarters of the earth, it was more to them. It was the power of redeeming love, with arms outstretched to all the world. If it meant to others the path of the swift sun in his course shining over the four quarters—that path of glory that led men to cry in the oldest language of the world to the 'Light Father'—it was more to them, it was the sign of the Divine speaking to the human, saying, 'I am the Light of the World, he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the Light of Life.' And the circle running round this sign of love and light and life, completes it with the sign of eternity, being, as it were, the promise of those perfected and immortal. So do these signs, simple enough in themselves, come to us through the ages, bearing with them not only their deep spiritual meaning and suggestions, but being also witnesses of the eternity of religious aspiration; the inarticulate cry of the spirit of the human, seeking then, and now, and always, a return to its own source in the Divine Faith. As far as is possible, therefore, any bit of the decoration of this chapel, modelled in clay of Surrey, by Compton hands, under manual conditions—much of the work having been done gratuitously, and all of it with the love

that made the work delightful—has something to say, though the patterns can claim to be no more than are the letters of a great word : hieroglyphs, and very inadequate as representations of the possible reach of the underlying thought suggested by them.”

The monograph goes on to tell us how in the erection of the chapel, every one of the inhabitants of the surrounding district took part. The squire moulded some of the bricks ; the villagers, who attended the classes taught during the winter evenings by Mrs Watts, prepared the bricks and symbolic reliefs ; and the iron work at the door was beaten out by the village blacksmith. The whole structure is an admirable specimen of what can be done by the employment of good material fashioned by carefully trained hands, under the direction of a highly artistic mind. Visitors are especially attracted by the door of the chapel, which is unique in its elaborate Celtic design and patient, loving execution. Both Watts and his wife have done all they could to make the last resting-place of the village dead fair and bright as a garden, wherein the lofty teaching of the great artist, that death is only a dreamless sleep and will have a bright awakening, may be carried out. Here the fragrance of flowers and the song of birds and the murmur of trees, and all that is suggestive and beautiful in human architecture and skill, enhance the comforting thought, and make one in love with the pitiful and merciful death that comes alike to all. One thinks of that other sacred resting-place under the shadow of the Pyramid of Caius Cestius at Rome—where the immortal poet felt, as he said, “ the daisies growing over him ”—when walking over this delightful

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spot and learning its history, and realising that it is a portion of the ideal England of one's dreams, where old memories of Chaucer and Shakespeare are blended with all the refinements of modern art and cultivated nature. It is a striking practical illustration of the Gospel which Ruskin was never tired of preaching, but too often to careless ears.

The beautiful surroundings have inspired the treatment of the chapel, which is full of thought and art, and have lent it a charm which it might not have possessed in a less picturesque scene. It shines among the trees, with whose green foliage its red roof and walls strikingly contrast, and looks like an oriental building that has somehow strayed to our country. It has an extremely simple effect, reminding one of the early Romanesque style by its round walls and the rich decorations of the mouldings of the doorway. The lovely interlaced work which characterises all the details of ornamentation was inspired by the old Irish crosses, and by the kindred illuminations of that marvellous specimen of Celtic art, the Book of Kells. Symbolism pervades every part of the architecture, which is exoteric and esoteric in its character, being in some instances so plain and simple that the most uneducated can understand it at once, and in others so hidden and intricate that only those who are well versed in mystic lore, and who are possessed of high imaginative powers, can interpret them. Though founded upon the great central truths of the Christian faith, it does not express any accepted dogmas of religion, but enforces only the universal laws of justice, charity and love, and is so broad and catholic in its teaching that it should conciliate even the most divergent ecclesiastical sects.

Its plan shows in an admirable manner the combination of the circle, emblem of eternity, and of the cross, emblem of sacrifice; the circle being formed by the walls and the domed roof, and the cross by the transepts without, and the crossing double arches of the vaulting in the interior. On the principal door of oak with iron mountings, there is a grand cross which occupies the whole surface, borrowed from the archaic form which was used in the earliest British churches. It rises from the scaly monstrous wriggings of the dragon of evil below, which it has overcome, to the interlacing circles and flames of light mixed with cherub wings on its upper part, representing the heaven it has won. Over the doorway is the idea of "the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness," expressing by simple and obvious hieroglyphics the comforting passage in Isaiah, peculiarly adapted for a mortuary chapel. Round each section of the circular wall on the outside runs a frieze underneath a tiled roof, whose projecting eaves cast a soft shadow, with symbols in sequence of Hope with its anchor, Truth with its owls, Love with its cross of hearts, and Light with its eagles. It would take too long to describe in detail the devices on these friezes, as well as on the roundels, and on the corbels which support them. The symbolism on all of them is extremely elaborate, and much of it is purely original; but it is all combined in the most harmonious manner to carry out the moral teaching of the building. The altar is of terra cotta, modelled in small panels. The designs are simple, but full of detail, and they are sufficiently varied to attract without fatiguing the eye of the worshipper. On the reredos there will be a small version of Watts' well-

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known picture, "The All-Pervading," surrounded with Celtic ornamentation and bud and floral devices. The whole work is a model of what earnest and patient artistic skill can accomplish, with simple materials and limited resources, under teachers like Mr and Mrs Watts.

One of the things which Watts insists most upon, in his intimate talks with his friends upon questions of social economy, is the waste of education in our elementary schools. There is nothing in that system to enable young people to find out their own individual capacities, and to be educated generally through these. Their latent faculties are not drawn out; their senses are not trained; they are not taught how to observe the objects around them, and to understand them, and so prepared for making the best use of the circumstances of life in which they may find themselves when they are grown up. The principles and rules of things are taught, but not the application of them to the realities of things around them. And what is even worse, our girls are allowed to grow up utterly ignorant of the very rudiments of domestic economy; so that the result, when they marry, is unhappy homes, waste of money and food, and an amount of positive discomfort and wretchedness which it is appalling to think of. Our Board School education has given the working class notions which unfit them for following in the footsteps of their fathers and taking up their work. The handicrafts are despised, and only the professions are regarded with favour. Everyone seeks to press into these professions, preferring the genteel poverty of a clerk to ample comfort as a joiner or mason or blacksmith; and there is a



growing scarcity of men and women who can work with their hands as well as with their heads, with a tool instead of a pen, and who are content with that primitive feeling that they are doing God's work in the world, and helping to make it a fairer and happier home for their fellow-men, as thoroughly as though they had what is called a genteel calling. To be able to cook is a most important end in life. Culinary genius in our common homes is what the working world is eager for ; and many other things might well be sacrificed for proficiency in that art, considering how much depends upon it.

## Chapter VI

### The Portrait-Painter

IT has already been said that it was by portrait-painting that Watts achieved his earliest reputation. He was the leader of the reformation of the art of portraiture in England. He gave it a new point of departure and a fresh inspiration, and throughout his long life he has maintained the foremost position in this highest and most difficult form of artistic execution. Of late years he has laid aside the practice of this art, in order to be free to devote himself more entirely to the ideal subjects which he deems more worthy of his brush. He has resisted all bribes to resume it ; the only occasions on which he has been induced to accept commissions to paint portraits, being those which enabled him to earn money for the funds of some Institution, whose aim is to brighten humble lives and homes, and make work a joy, ennobling the character, instead of a deepening and degrading curse. For the desertion of portrait-painting, however, we may express a modified regret ; for in his portrait-painting as in his ideal pictures, he has shown essentially the same high qualities of keen discernment and active imagination. Indeed his portraits are ideal in the best sense of the word. They do not depict the expression which happens at the moment to come into the face, but the inner mystery of the personality ; not the accidents of life,

but the essentials. They penetrate to the representation of the character. Every feature discloses the true individual ; and the eye is not a mere organ of vision, noted for its brightness or beauty, but is the window of the soul. We have had no such perception of character—no such power to paint the mind as well as the body in portraiture, since Vandyke painted his Charles I., Henrietta Maria, Strafford, Laud, or the Countess of Carlyle. In his portraits, those whom he painted—

“More of their hearts than yet they knew,  
Through their own gaze looked out on them.”

The only other portrait-painter with whom we can compare him is Millais. But Millais gives us the whole man, mind and body perfectly balanced, such as he saw him with his bodily eyes ; whereas Watts gives us the intellectual and emotional personality—as none but he could see it, with the clear vision of the inner eye. He seldom painted more than a half-length portrait, in order that the attention might not be distracted by details of the figure from the full revelation of the face. It is the case with many portrait-painters that they carry much of their own personality—not only of their own character, but even of their outward appearance, into their artistic work. They see their own adaptable face reflected as in a mirror in the faces of those who sit for them ; and one is reminded of themselves even in the portraits that seem most different, and in which they are least conscious of seeking such a resemblance. Thus what one sees in all their subjects is more or less of the composite order. The striking phenomenon of what may be called auto-portraiture—to which Lavater

gave expression in words, when he said that no man could be a good physiognomist, who was not himself good-looking, and to which Raphael Sanzio gave expression in hue and form when he painted his wonderful Madonnas after his own image — is altogether wanting in Watt's portraits. They have a most expressive originality and individuality of their own; and nothing of the creator is seen to detract from the marvellous fidelity of the work.

Watts has apprehended as few have done, what the human face is—the noblest of God's works—the highest type of His image and likeness. It is the subtle and swift conveyer of every varying light and shade of passion, the silent, unconscious, but effectual revelation of many a sad or joyful secret. The workings of the inner man are disclosed on its dial. It is the exhibition-room of all the thoughts and emotions, and the facile means of intercommunication with others. The human face implies society. It informs the whole being, and is the basis of confidence or suspicion, love or hate, approach or reserve. Watts has realised all this as few have done, and therefore he has made his portraits the living impersonations of the individuals he painted. No one knows better than he that portrait-painting on the part of the subject of it is a test of character. When one comes under the magnetic influence of such a man, no matter how great one may be in his own department, he unconsciously feels exalted and quickened in his presence. Into the occasion is crowded a whole life-time of emotions and experiences, which fully bring out the individuality of the sitter. The best of the man comes to the surface. In order

to understand the nature of his sitters the artist engages in conversation with them, finds out their favourite topics, and has tried as much as possible to enter into their individual life. In this way he has caught the best expression of which their faces were capable, and quickened his own capacities, for it must be obvious that a portrait-painter can only now and then be inspired. Tennyson once asked Watts to describe his ideal of a portrait-painter, and from the answer he received the poet was led to write the beautiful lines which afterwards appeared\* in the poem of Elaine in the "Idylls of the King."

"As when a painter, gazing on a face  
Divinely thro' all hindrance, finds the man  
Behind it, and so paints him that his face,  
The shape and colour of a mind and life,  
Lives for his children ever at its best."

Watts, like David d'Angers, who devoted half a lifetime to the formation of a portrait-gallery of the celebrities of his day, has had the singular good fortune of getting most of the great men of the Victorian age to sit to him, poets, philosophers, soldiers, statesmen, musicians, artists, men of different natures and varied gifts, nearly all that was most influential in the intellectual and spiritual forces of the age; each drawing out from the artist a sympathy peculiar to himself, and all interpreted with a fine discrimination of character. The faculty which has enabled one man to set himself in tune with such a great variety of minds, all of the highest order, must be indeed extraordinary—and shows that he himself must be many-sided. It implies a wonderful concentration of mind to be equally interested and impressed by each type of character

presented to him ; and no doubt the intense application which it involved must have greatly fatigued him at the time. Virtue must have gone out of him through the touch of other natures, as it went out of our Saviour at the touch of the suffering woman's hand on His robe. Frank Holl, the well-known portrait-painter, tells that, when painting Mr Gladstone at Hawarden, such was the nervous earnestness and conscientiousness which he threw into the work, he was all the five days spent in the place in a state of semi-exaltation, and slept little more than two hours each night, dreaming of his picture and getting out of bed to look at it ; the result being that in the end he was fairly exhausted, and a serious illness was brought on ; and he died not long after of heart disease, a victim to his success. Watts must have often felt a similar severe strain upon a constitution far from robust, involved in so much work at high pressure as he undertook.

His chief aim, in this unique and amazing gallery of portraits, has been to present to the nation a biographical series of the most famous English men and women of the nineteenth century, which might be kept together and preserved for all time. It was for this purpose that he solicited sittings from his great contemporaries. The value of such a collection to future historians cannot be overestimated. What should we not give to have a similar gallery of the men of note of the preceding centuries, who helped to make their country great. Had Watts painted nothing else than these unparalleled portraitures of genius, he would have earned for himself a most prominent and enduring place in the national regard ; while his generosity, in destining

the collection to be the cherished property of the country, will be immensely appreciated. Most of the portraits can be seen in the National Portrait Gallery. He laments that the collection is not so complete as he could have wished it to be. Several names are unrepresented in it; particularly those of General Gordon, for whom Watts had a profound respect as the modern Bayard, and of Darwin, whose great generalisation has revolutionised the whole world of science. To his eternal regret he never obtained a sitting from his friend Ruskin, with whose artistic principles and seemingly Utopian views on political economy he was in most cordial sympathy. Of course he painted a very large number of portraits, including many well-known men and women, which are not in the national collection, but are to be found in all parts of the country.

Some of the foremost philosophers of the day sat to Watts for their portraits, and revealed to the eye of friendship, inspired by the keen insight of genius, their most prominent characteristics. Most of them are faces which the physiognomist would wish to study. The artist saw them in the right focus of vision, every part in full harmony of proportion and perspective. Petty accidental traits were lost on him, while the more distinctive ones came out and the permanent constructive forces of the soul stood forth in clearer light. He thought of them not merely as they were to the world, but as they were to themselves and their Maker. On the high placid brow of John Stuart Mill, the most exquisitely characteristic of his portraits, thought sits as on a throne, and glorifies his thin, precise, ascetic features. Dr Martineau has a dark face shadowed

with reverie, and scarce holding converse with things seen and temporal at all. There is a pitying look in his eyes, gathered from the world's pain, not specially for one individual in sorrow, but belonging to all humanity. Dean Stanley has a sensitive lip, which seems eloquent of the refinement which is characteristic of his writings. Lecky the historian looks as if he laid the greatest stress on his impartial accuracy, and strove to disprove the Napoleonic axiom that history is nothing but established fiction ; while Motley's thoughtful visage, not at all American in type, painted in 1882, is enwrapped in the consideration of the close connection between the course of Dutch political life and the main currents of European history. George Meredith's pure and cultured face gleams shyly out at us from the canvas ; while Thomas Carlyle, with fierce and strongly marked features, fulminates at the shams of the age. With this portrait of Carlyle he was less successful than with any of the others. In all other instances he ennobled his subject, imparted his own qualities to it, lifting his sitter to an intellectual equality with himself. But in the case of men of genius with whom he was not in entire sympathy, he only caught the most common expression of their face, which might perhaps be that by which they were best recognised by their friends, but was not their most characteristic intellectual expression. The study of Carlyle only occupied two hours, contrary to the artist's habit, to expend much continuous labour upon his portraits. Like Herkomer, some of Watts' most successful portraits were finished in less than a day, but the great majority were carefully elaborated. Among the latter may be mentioned the portrait of



Cardinal Manning, sitting in his armchair, as a grand old man, whose severe intellectual cast of countenance contrasts with the rich lace upon his sleeves, and the scarlet cope, against which the golden chain with the crucifix attached stands out in relief. Numerous admirers have seen in this portrait a likeness to Leonardo Loredano—the celebrated Doge of Venice.

Tennyson was a favourite subject for the pencil of Watts. He painted his portrait no less than five times; and as Lord Tennyson was a most intimate friend all his life, he had many opportunities of knowing his inner life of thought and feeling, which was so nobly reflected in his face, and of which his charming poems were the outcome to the world. Each of the portraits brings out some special trait of character. One of the earliest represents the poet as he was in the full maturity of his powers, when he had shown his mastery of poetry through all its range, with his massive features subdued by the pale cast of thought; and the latest was painted a year or two before the poet's death in 1892, and exhibits him in his scarlet doctor's gown, as he was receiving his honorary degree from Oxford, when he had reached the limit of poetical variety, and there remained no new chord for him to sound. Even then the latest fruits of his genius, with the pathetic touch of age in their spirit, were as lofty in feeling, as finished in strength, and as musical in cadence as ever. Another favourite subject was Robert Browning, with whose type of mind, and mode of expressing himself, Watts was in cordial sympathy. The artist who embodied thought which is prized by the mind in search of truth, rather

than created beauty to afford pleasure by contemplation, was the fittest to depict the strong, vigorous features of a poet who depended less upon style than upon matter, and whose very excess of self-asserting individuality made his works not merely interesting, but luminous with inspiration. He seems to read the inmost soul of Browning, and to see his grand optimism rising above the sense of failure in life which pervades our modern literature; and accordingly, he has given expression in the poet's own profile to the mood which must have been the predominant one with him. "All I could never be, *that* I was worth to God," is the formula of faith which you seem to see stamped in every line of that strong countenance.

With much sympathy he painted in 1863, the youthful-looking face of Swinburne, that "reed," as Tennyson called him, "through which all things blow into music," and whose classical refinement of thought, and exquisite harmony of verse, appealed to all that was Greek in the artist; while Matthew Arnold appears to us under the spell of his pencil as the creator of Obermann, with a face that reflects the temperament of the poet, and the convictions of his contemporaries. The elements that lay deep and broad in the minds of his generation are embodied in his thoughtful features. One of the best examples of his portrait-painting is the likeness of Leslie Stephen, which was executed at a single sitting, and though somewhat slight in finish, is effective in its suggestiveness of the combination of carelessness and fastidiousness, critical assertiveness and self-depreciation, sarcasm and sadness, peculiar to the man. Rossetti's portrait is one of the finest of the whole series. It was a difficult counte-

nance to depict ; for while there were noble features in it, the impression of the whole was sometimes not elevated. There was something that detracted from the charm. But Watts has brought out the ideal man, the combination of poet and painter each in its highest form, in such a way as to impress us deeply with its spiritual force. Indeed, the remark has often been made that it bears a singular likeness to the bust of Shakespeare at Stratford-on-Avon ; and convinces one that the portrait, like a good deal of his own poetry and art, belongs to that perfect work which is for all time. Behind Mr Morris' powerful head, Watts has painted a background of artistic wall-paper, to tell us that the genius which expressed itself in the beautiful rhythmic tales of the "Earthly Paradise," found also a practical outlet in the exquisite productions of the Kelmscott press, and in the furniture and appointments of our houses and churches.

Of artists, Watts has painted the portrait of Sir Edward Burne Jones, with which he seems to be better pleased than with anything he has ever done. He has succeeded in giving the charm of that countenance, from which Rossetti made one of his finest studies for our Saviour, and which has a remarkable resemblance to the types of our Lord's face in Rembrandt's "Christ blessing the Children," or in Van Uder's "Christ and the Magdalen." You see that charm in the form and colouring of the features, and in the soft gleam of the pale blue misty eyes, through which his beautiful mind, with all its dreams of mystic loveliness, shone softly. Along with that far-seeing inner sight which none possess except those who dwell in an ideal world, and gaze upon the

ineffable, there is a twinkle of quiet humour in these eyes which allies him most closely with the common experiences of humanity. The chivalrous man, as well as the great painter, appears before one in that portrait, and gives one a most vivid conception of what he was to those who knew and loved him most. Rarely has Watts given us a more sympathetic study, spontaneous, sincere, lovable, the unaffected realism that reaches the true poetry of life. The drawing is truly accurate and delicate, showing much less of weakness than in life, and altogether the colouring is blended in a harmony that is full of tranquil emotion. Lady Burne Jones possesses this portrait at present, but it is ultimately destined to form part of the series of Watts' portraits to be presented to the National Gallery.

Another of his fellow artists whose living presentment he has given us, is Sir John Millais. This also is a noble portrait, but it was not susceptible of such tender and high-toned treatment as the portrait of Sir Edward Burne Jones. Its quiet directness and subdued colour give it an unmistakable dignity. There is little suggestion of spirituality in the picture ; but you feel when gazing at it, that in a world of strivings, he has his own quiet ideals, to which he has succeeded in giving deathless expression. Then there is Walter Crane, with his keen, thoughtful face, whose portrait done by Watts was greatly admired when it was publicly exhibited in 1893 ; and Lord Leighton, for many years President of the Royal Academy. In this latter portrait he had a subject entirely worthy of his brush ; a thorough Englishman, he was nevertheless a Greek of the Greeks, exhibiting

in his magnificent physique that manliness of beauty which by the Hellenic race was carried to the highest pitch, and in his mind at the same time that completeness of mental culture which gave the race such eminence in the high provinces of thought. Modern life has diviner things than any of which even Plato dreamed, but it has not the outward conditions of beauty and fitness in the midst of which Plato lived, and which made his life a model life ; but Lord Leighton surrounded himself with these conditions.

He painted the gods, and he lived a high and serene life in their fellowship. He painted pictures that were not only beautiful, to be admired and to sell, but which possessed a wonderful power of inspiration ; and every artist has felt the high impulse that he gave to art during the unparalleled period of his Presidentship. His splendid personality was in the very forefront of his life's work, and his art was not a special talent merely, but the outcome of his whole nature, the combination of all his unique gifts and attainments. The high-bred courtesy of his manner, the sweetness of his disposition, and the genuineness of his sympathy, have created an ideal of what an artist should be ; and all these gifts and graces appear in his face, which is as the face of Jupiter Capitolinus. Watts painted two portraits of him ; but the finer of the two is the one which belongs to the Royal Academy, and was painted in 1881. It represents the President sitting in an easy-chair, clothed in his scarlet robes as D.C.L., with his palette beside him and a small bronze statue behind him. It is a picture of courtly elegance, beautifully conceived and executed, in which we see a noble personality that was qualified in a pre-eminent

degree, not only by his gifts as a painter, but also by his manifold social graces, for the high office he held. It has been acutely remarked of this portrait that Watts has given more prominence in it than he usually does to the dress, figure and surroundings of his sitter, as if he had a subtle, unconscious feeling that a great deal of Lord Leighton's success lay in these outward things, and that the artist's genius was to a certain extent overlaid by the circumstances of the man.

Then there is the picture of Watts by himself, painted for his friend Sir William Bowman, when he was in the prime of life. This picture was placed in the Tate Gallery by Lady Bowman herself, so that future generations will be able to see what manner of man he was who executed the marvellous collection of pictures in the National Gallery. There is a youthful portrait of him executed by himself when he was eighteen, in which we can trace the beginnings of the genius for beautiful form and colouring which afterwards distinguished him. It is a very uncommon countenance, made picturesque by an open collar and flowing locks, and informed by dark eyes and finely-cut features, which indicate great candour and thoughtfulness. Later he painted his own likeness among the habitués of Lady Holland's salon, as he appeared at a fancy ball at the Casa Ferrari. He is dressed in a suit of ancient armour, and the principal buildings of old Florence, including the tower of the Palazzo Vecchio, lifting its well-known landmark above them, in the background. A photograph of Watts is in the *Art Journal* for 1895, taken by his own gardener at his country house of Limnerslease, in which he is seated beside a beautiful specimen of Della Robbia's

work, a gift from Lady Mount Temple, and in appropriate surroundings, admirably arranged, showing his dignified aspect to the best advantage.

The finest portraits of the great painters have invariably been executed by themselves, for it is obvious that no one else could know or interpret their inner nature so well. They have taken themselves also as models for other pictures, as Leonardo da Vinci painted himself for an ideal scholar, and Titian as a stately courtier. But Watts has never posed for any other subject than himself; you never find any shadow or representation of himself in any of his works. Like Sir Joshua Reynolds, Rubens and Vandyke, he has given to us one of his most natural and truthful studies, free from all affectation and exaggeration in his own noble face. Like Lord Leighton's, that face is a transparent indication of his character. It is exquisitely wrought, and gives us a strong impression of the sincerity of artistic feeling which belongs to all Watts' work. Its beauty is not a mere beauty of features, but of soul. It expresses most plainly the lofty nature of the man, the co-mingling of simplicity and intellectual power and moral self-abnegation. The picture has an atmosphere of shadowed luminousness about it, of which Watts was so great a master. In the portrait gallery of the Uffizi in Florence, side by side with Leighton and Millais, is a replica of this work. All the portraits are by the hands of the painters themselves. Then there is the picture of Alfred Gilbert, the well-known sculptor, with a pleasant harmony between the blue tints of his neckerchief and collar, and the deep blue of his eyes, as fresh and life-like as any portrait Watts ever painted. It will be delightful to have all

Watts' pictures hung together in one place, with the painter himself in the centre, mutually shedding light and interest upon each other. They will all appear in the same associations, and in the same particular atmosphere.

Of statesmen he has painted the portrait of Mr Gladstone, in the full vigour of his manhood, and in the height of his political career, the eager, subtle expression in whose face he brought out by the interesting talk he had with him ; Lord Salisbury with his massive, thoughtful head, dressed in his robes as Chancellor of the Oxford University ; Lord Lawrence, Viceroy of India, who saved the Punjaub from revolt, and whose noble countenance, bright blue eyes and massive chin, were the mirror of his calm, high-principled nature ; Lord Lytton, who showed in every strong and yet refined feature the signs of a mind at home in the administration of political affairs, and in the pursuit of letters ; the Duke of Argyll, painted in 1860, with a fine glow in his eyes, lit up with youthful enthusiasm and political and scientific forethought ; and Lord Dufferin, whose admirable work in the highest places of the world of diplomacy has been the marvel of the age. Lord Lyons he painted at Constantinople ; Lord Stratford de Redcliffe appears as the firm and undaunted minister, whose uncompromising policy dominated Eastern affairs at the period of the Crimean war ; and Sir John Peter Grant of Rothermurchus, whose wise governorship of Jamaica greatly increased the prosperity of that dependency. Garibaldi was a congenial subject, and no portrait has done such justice to his picturesque features and romantic character as Watts'. Sir Austin Henry



Layard is expressively rendered as the thoughtful antiquarian ; Sir Antonio Panizzi, as the political refugee, who became principal librarian of the British Museum, making an entry with a quill in one of the books before him ; and Sir Henry Taylor—the author of Philip van Artevelde—as the loving personal friend, whose high-bred poetic face is sympathetic in style and colouring. Besides these, he painted the portraits of the great physician Sir Andrew Clarke, the eminent statesmen, Earl Russell, Lord Sherbrooke and Lord Lyndhurst, and the well-known philanthropist the Earl of Shaftesbury. His portrait of Russell Gurney has been greatly praised on account of its strong characterisation. The eyes are living, and the mouth is delicately modelled, combining great firmness with highly sensitive feeling. Every feature and accident of dress helps to complete the idea of the man. While the general effect is greatly enhanced by the quiet brown colour of the picture, finely toned and modulated in a manner that suggests Turner.

During his residence in Paris with Lord Holland in 1856, he painted the portraits of Lord Holland, Guizot, Thiers, Prince Jerome Buonaparte, and the Duc d'Aumale. In these portraits he has given not only the physical traits of these distinguished men, but the moral characteristics as well. He has penetrated beneath the surface of the mere likeness, to the mental habitudes, to the essential and permanent lineaments of their natures, so that in each case we have the whole man exhibited to us, and we know him better than even the best biography of him would have shown him to us. Some of the most distinguished musicians of the Victorian epoch have also had their

portraits taken, such as Sir Charles Hallé, called by the painter "a lamp-light study," and Joachim ; these are beautiful as pictures, especially that of Joachim, in which the gifted performer is drawing the bow across his violin, with an entranced look upon his face. We listen for the music within the music, and feel like Keats when he gazed upon the Grecian urn, adorned with figures of nymphs and youths playing upon pipes and timbrels, that while heard melodies are sweet, those unheard are sweeter. It is music itself in the abstract that is expressed as much as the musician. If we compare Watts' portrait of Guizot executed at the beginning of his career as a painter of faces in 1848, with the Gladstone, eager, subtle, self-conscious, painted seventeen years later, we see the marked advance he had made in that art. But if we compare still further the portrait of Gladstone in 1864 with the portrait of John Stuart Mill in 1874, or with that of Cardinal Manning in 1882, we see how what was prophecy at the early age became a realised fulfilment at the later age ; and his art as portrait-painter culminates in his portraits of Tennyson, in which he seems to rise through his sympathy, to the intellectual elevation of his subject, and to make his pictorial art the equal and companion of his country's literature.

Women are confessedly more difficult subjects to portray than men, and therefore Watts' art is marked by greater inequality in their case than in the case of men. He could not sympathise with the mere accidental qualities of a beautiful woman, whose beauty was that of features and not of soul ; and therefore he could not reveal in the face the secrets which he failed to fathom in the character. But not-



JOHN STUART MILL.

*Reproduced from a photograph by FREDK. HOLLYER.*



withstanding he has caught the full charm of some youthful female faces, which had more than mere prettiness, a depth of nature which ever retained the freshness and hopefulness of the youth of the heart ; such is Miss Mary Prinsep in her grey ulster, and her kinswoman Alice sitting at the piano in a blue gown ; and Eveleen Tennant (now Mrs Myers), resting her head on a bank of flowers, whose picture is exceedingly fine. He had no difficulty in painting an admirable likeness of the ladies in whom he discovered some sympathy and thoughtfulness akin to his own. His portrait of Mrs Langtry could not lift him above the commonplace in spirit ; while on the other hand he painted Miss Villiers (Countess of Lytton) and Mrs Percy Wyndham, dressed in a green robe, leaning on her garden balustrade, with a pot of white magnolia blossom at her feet, with a sympathetic insight which raises these portraits high above mere minute likeness into the region of creative art. The last-named portrait especially is usually regarded as one of the finest female portraits that has ever been painted, having " all the grand pose and magnificent setting of the work of Carolus Duran, the fashionable French painter, and a sweet pensiveness and nobleness of look and charm of colour which that artist did not possess."

By the way, Carolus Duran has much in common with Watts as a portrait-painter. In the portrait of Gounod in 1891, he shows the same qualities which Watts shows in Joachim. He is attracted by the mystery in the human countenance, and makes us feel it. Watts has succeeded admirably too in portraying the classic features of Mrs Leslie Stephen, and the delicate charm of Lady Granby's face, and in present-

ing to us the portrait in profile, with exquisite simplicity, of his own highly-gifted wife, wearing a large garden hat, and with a reticent and yet refined and intellectual face. The portrait of Lady Lindsay of Balcarres, though not nearly up to his usual standard of excellence, is interesting, as showing how widely Watts departed from the dignified repose of the conventional portrait of former times, and brought out the true personality in connection with some characteristic action. As he painted the great violinist Joachim in association with his own professional pursuit, so he has painted Lady Lindsay as a skilful amateur performer on the same instrument, in the act of drawing the heel of the bow across the strings. He has placed the left hand too in the third position, as if he understood the violin in a way which few painters do. This, it need hardly be said, is the true way to paint a portrait; for Rembrandt proved long ago by his famous portrait of Professor Tulp, that we can scarcely see the true man unless we see him at work.

Some of Watts' best portraits of women are those of persons far advanced in years. We admire the fair countenances of the young, on which time has had no opportunity of leaving its sad impression, and think there is nothing in the world more lovely. And yet the finest of all subjects to paint is the countenance of an old lady who has lived a pure and unworldly life.<sup>1</sup> Wearing the wrinkles and the

<sup>1</sup> "Oh! you mysterious girls, when you are fifty-two, we shall find you out; you must come into the open then. If the mouth has fallen sourly, yours is the blame. All the meannesses your youth concealed have been gathering in your faces. But the pretty thoughts, and sweet ways, and dear forgotten kindnesses linger there also, to bloom in your twilight like evening primroses."—BARRIE'S "The Little White Bird."

marks of the sore experiences that have tried, and at the same time ennobled it, such a worn, aged face possesses a moral pathetic beauty which appeals to the heart and imagination more deeply than anything else. One of the most charming of such venerable faces is that of Lady Mount Temple, whose spiritual beauty fascinates one, and makes one think of a gracious life well-lived, rich in experience, mellow in character, ripe in charity and love. Among Watts' last portraits is that of Mrs Ellice of Invergarry, which was much admired when exhibited at the New Gallery, on account of her youthful appearance set in a halo of pure white hair. Such a countenance radiates an inspiration of grace from it, and one is bettered by the presence of its kindness. To look at such a sweet face is, as it were, to gaze upon some mountain top when the snow lies thick above you, while you sit among the flowers in a quiet nook, and hear the birds singing the glad songs of summer. No portrait that Watts has ever painted can surpass it as a highly-finished and most vivid study of expression and character. Some of his finest portraits of women and children have been executed not in oil but in chalk. A notable example of this may be seen in his chalk drawing of the beautiful head of Lady Somers, and of Arthur Prinsep like a young soldier with his wavy hair forming a framework round his face.

In passing through a gallery of portraits of men and women who have done eminent service to the world, treated as Watts has treated them, one feels that their individual being is not bounded by the colours of the painter's brush, but that they have a fulness and range of life far surpassing those of mere flesh

and blood. They become to us creatures of the imagination, exponents of great principles and powers of human nature like the visionary forms of persons who live only in books. We are wrapt into a mood like that of the old monk of the Escorial, who came to regard the figures in one of Titian's great pictures hung in one of the rooms as substantial and living, while the spectators who passed through the palace to gaze upon it seemed fleeting shadows. Our great men and women, under the magic of Watts' pencil, abide with us as possessions of the soul, seen in a new aspect, and exercising over us a new spell.



## Chapter VII

# The Interpreter of Nature

A RECENT French writer made the remark that Watts had never been known to paint a landscape. He could not have said this, if he had known how many landscapes of an exceedingly attractive character he had actually painted ; although his reputation in that department was cast into the shadow by his better-known portraitures. So versatile is his genius that it has expressed itself in multiform ways. Studying his portraits we should have imagined that he had done nothing else, so completely does their production seem to have engrossed his whole energy. His landscape-painting, however, has nothing in common with the conventional methods which used to prevail, and which were largely based upon the arbitrary rules of the studio. It goes back to nature, and is quick to perceive the superficial aspects of landscape effect—those visual facts of nature upon which true representative art finds its only solid basis. But at the same time his art perceives the deeper and finer elements of his subject, and he holds that his true function is not to give an accurate literal copy of a natural scene, but to express some imaginative and creative power of his own, “which the visual elements of nature excite into activity.” In this spirit he has visited the lands of the East, and those bordering the

Mediterranean and brought home many interesting proofs that his eye and mind were not unappreciative of the unfamiliar scenes of these regions.

M. Sizeranne, in his "English Contemporary Art," maintains that our country is not adapted for landscape-painters. It is constantly enveloped with mists and fogs, and the number of rainy days far exceeds the number of fine ones. The prevalence of leaden skies seems to favour only neutral tints and to repress all susceptibility to colour sensations. And yet in Scotland, where the sombre influences of our climate reach their extreme degree, the painter finds the best conditions for landscape art, and the finest pictures of this kind which the world possesses have come from men who have dwelt habitually under what may be supposed to be the depressing effect of atmospheric moisture. The meteorological factors that have made us what we are as a people have given a wonderful variety and softness to our greys and greens, and are indirectly responsible for the most alluring colour schemes ever seen on canvas. The perpetual sunshine and dazzling blue skies of foreign lands give a sharp distinctness and hardness to their measureless landscapes; but the dampness of our weather gives a charming nearness and a mystical unreality to our scenery, and disposes the inhabitants to patience and deep placidity of temperament. We can fully appreciate the saying of Wordsworth, "I would not give up the mists that spiritualise our mountains for all the blue skies of Italy"; and can sympathise heartily with the feeling that prompted the British sailor, when coming home from a tropical cruise, to thank Heaven for the drenching channel fog he en-

countered: "This is something like; none of your blooming blue skies for me." Watts has been peculiarly susceptible to the effects of our climate upon his artistic genius; but so far from having a tendency to make his landscapes blurred effects of cloud and shadow, they have developed in him a wonderful sensitiveness to the most refined and delicate variations of colouring. In fact his landscape pictures are "the counterpart in painting of those poems of Wordsworth which convey sentiments towards nature not dissimilar nor less beautiful."

One of the finest of his paintings of nature is that which places before us the broad imposing summit of Mount Ararat, rising up precipice beyond precipice, from the gloomy mists of the plain into the radiance of the eastern sky at night, bathed in an intense transparent blue. The whole picture is a vivid play of light blue tones. What appealed to him in this landscape was not the natural features of the mountain, grand and sombre as they were, but the sacred story of the Ark associated with it. That lofty peak was the nucleus of a new world, the starting-point of a fresh advance of the human race over the graves of the older generations. And therefore he saw far more in it than mere rock and snow. To him it was the witness of the one great poetic idea of the universe, a symbol of the continual renewal of the earth, its emergence from deluges and revolutions that have destroyed the old and effete condition of things, into the fresh beginning of a new creation. Ever since the first morning has youth been incessantly reappearing from decay and disintegration, and death is the mere casting-off of the old worn-out form in order

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that the new may be assumed. Ararat is the great monument of nature, the Jegar-sahadutha or "heap of witness," that nature is one vast vitalising and sustaining rejuvenescence, that all things in the world of nature and man are striving to begin as well as to finish, and that death and destruction are not absolute and total extinction, but the removal of particular presentations that have served their purpose in one shape, and are therefore no longer efficient, in order to make room for the appearance of a new invigorated presentment, and thus virtually perpetuate the original. Every seed is an ark in which the life of the world floats securely over its submergence, over all its winter desolation and its stormy destruction, and therefore it depicts the great eternal truth which underlies it constantly presented before us in all the phenomena of nature. This thought was no doubt present to the mystical mind of Watts when he painted his splendid landscape; and therefore instead of the old ark that rested on the top of Ararat, he painted a star sparkling more brilliantly than the others above the loftiest summit, transfiguring it with the eternal light of hope.

"The mountains of Carrara" were painted by Watts, with a largeness of atmospheric effect, and a clearness and beauty of distant perspective, that might be regarded as similarly typical. While nature is most accurately depicted, and the hue and form of jagged rock and shady tree and curling mist come out vividly and with the utmost distinctness under his magic pencil, he has painted into the landscape, thereby increasing its significance and impressiveness, suggestions and memories of the uses which these mountains

have been put to in the service of the fine arts—what they have done for the education and uplifting of the race. While other mountains have yielded quarries from whence have been extracted the material with which man has built the walls of his home, the Carrara mountains have yielded the pure white marble, out of which the genius of the sculptor has carved those divine forms which have adorned that home, and brought the gods down to the earth in the likeness of men, and trained and elevated man's finest faculties. Thoughts of Michael Angelo, and of the pillared temples of Rome, and the sepulchral monuments of Florence, arise in the mind as we gaze upon these rocks whence they were hewn, and these pits out of which they were dug; and we feel that a being who can see hid in the rude white block of stone the immortal form made in the image of God, and can release it from its prison to gladden the world, has capacities which shall endure when the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed. This landscape reminds us of a somewhat similar one by Signor Costa, the Italian painter who has recently passed away, for it is touched by the same living issues. It represents a wide plain at the foot of the Carrara mountains, emphasised by a solitary pine-tree in the foreground, with the grey mist of morning silvering its expanse, and a delicate flush of dawn stealing over the nearest hill, and the autumnal hues of brown and yellow on the trees standing out against the soft blue of the distant range. The scene is animated by two peasant maidens lying half-asleep under the shadow of some juniper bushes. The painter, like Watts, has caught the spirit of the land-

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scape, and stirs our heart by the poetry and tenderness of its colouring. Every detail is executed with exquisite delicacy; but it is the presence of these brown-faced maidens that gathers up and harmonises all the separate beauties of the landscape into one grand whole. Like Watts, Signor Costa does not introduce human figures into his landscapes in order to give a conventional effect to a vacant space; they form, on the contrary, "part of the subject, and help to give expression to the central thought which governs the picture. He has realised as all great painters do, the intimate connection between the beauty of nature and the experiences of toiling human beings who live in the midst of it. Both belong to the same divinely appointed order of things, and are bound by the same eternal laws." And therefore there is a harmony between them which must in all cases be felt in order to give adequate expression to it. The human figures must give life and meaning to the landscape; and the landscape belongs to them.

Equally typical in another sense are the Pyramids on the banks of the palm-fringed Nile. The sight of the broad river yields a harvest of thought in our minds as its beneficent waters yield a harvest of grain in the fields; and those hoary figures silhouetted against the sunset, express to us the grandeur and mystery of the desert, and enable us in some degree to partake of the old Egyptian life, and to see the things that shaped the Egyptian's thought in the far back dawn of history, and have made us all servants of the ideas and forms of this most ancient of civilizations. The Hill of the Acropolis crowned with the mystic pillars of the Parthenon, affords a

suitable foreground from which to survey the laughing blue waters of the Pyræus, which lave the "marbled steep" of Sunium on the one hand, and the sacred rocks of Eleusis on the other, and fade away in the distance into the paler blue of the sky. That magic horizon, telling of all the glory that was Greece, speaks of the debt which our civilization owes to that lovely land; and the contrast between the eternal sameness of nature, and the ruins of the highest human art in the midst of it, reads to us a lesson more impressive than anything in Grecian poetry or philosophy.

Another set of ideas altogether is awakened by the magnificent amphitheatre of the Bay of Mentone with its olive woods, and rock-villages, and lemon groves, rising abruptly upward into the lofty background of arid peaks storming the blue sky; a circle of landscape within whose shadow often brood disease and death which no southern clime can arrest. That Mentonean landscape proves how well Watts can paint the rugged rocks and the upland valleys and the dark smoke of olive woods which diffuses over the soft Italian scenery the same illusion which the mist lends to the mountains of the north. "Off Corsica" is a very fine example of atmospheric effects, reminding us of Turner's work. It is a grey expanse, with a distant island emerging from the misty sea. From the roof of the hotel where he resided at Naples, he painted a splendid impressionist picture of Vesuvius, in somewhat sombre hues, with the great purple mountain, and the thin flag of significant smoke waving from its top, rising up from the radiant bay—suffused with the glory of the gorgeous sunset. This picture has been admirably engraved by Mr

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Frank Short, and is nearer to Turner in feeling than the landscape-painting of any other who ever came under the direct influence of that renowned artist. The painting of all these classical landscapes by Watts adds another interesting association to the many great historical memories of which they so impressively remind us.

But not less at home is our artist in depicting the quiet homely charms of English scenery; the drowsy downs and uplands of Sussex and Surrey covered with the softest turf, with the glamour of light and shade upon them all the day; the lullaby of the wind in the trees that crown their tops, and their slopes that seem like the beautiful curves of the human figure, "the solemn slopes of mighty limbs asleep"; the woods where the young verdure is so luminous, that shut out the wide world with their veils of translucent foliage, and the spring-time lights up the ferny sward strewn with last year's russet leaves, with the mimic sunshine of primroses, the starry radiance of anemones, and the blue spears of hyacinths, like fallen fragments of the sky; and the homesteads with the dappled cattle around them, and the merry children playing on the threshold, and the leafy elms casting over all their flickering shadows in the sunny light. Beautiful scenes like these—that show the close connection between English landscape and English character, upon which English eyes have looked with calm unimpassioned pleasure for generations, which do not belittle those who live among them, or give them any sense of awe or struggle with difficulties, where nature is a friend and never an enemy, inviting man's co-operation and culture—were the landscapes he



loved to portray. No one has felt their tranquil charm, or entered into their inmost soul, so thoroughly. He has felt that such scenery is naturally sensitive to human moods, as it is to the chequering of the sunlight and shade. It is so liberal in its character that it lends itself easily to many moods. To the sad there broods over it a sadness ineffable; while the gay sympathetic soul may find the gladness of the Elysian fields in a copse full of wood-sorrels. The enjoyment of such scenery is like the kingdom of heaven "within us." Each man creates it for himself.

Watts has also not been insensible to an entirely different class of scenery, peculiar to the Highlands of Scotland, where the sudden transitions of nature are like a vast kaleidoscope, and the hoary walls of the everlasting mountains imprison the soul; where nature is seldom in a benignant mood, but is covered with dark mists, and beaten with fierce storms, and man in his lonely cottage on the moor has a continual consciousness of struggle with the elements for food and for dear life itself, which has made him melancholy and imaginative. Watts' representations of such scenes are apocalyptic in their rapid clearing of storms, and breaking of wild sunlight through the clouds, and wonderful effects of calming waves, and mountains rising from the shores through the darkness into the serene spaces of the clear upper air. In 1899 he spent some months in the Highlands of Scotland, making his home for that time at a lodge on the Aldourie moors, in the neighbourhood of which he made many studies. One of the most charming of these Scottish landscapes is Loch Ness, with its grand mountain setting and wooded shores, showing his deep sympathy

with nature in her grandest moods, and bearing upon it the same stamp of originality and poetry which characterises all his work. Another picture exhibited in the Royal Academy in 1901, entitled "In the Highlands," reminds one, by its entirely fresh and buoyant treatment, how thoroughly he enjoyed his tour, and how his knowledge of nature in some of its most picturesque aspects was as intimate and living as ever. Scotland produced a deep impression upon him. He appreciated Millais' comparison of its colouring to that of a wet Scotch pebble, and willingly admitted that for artistic themes no country could excel it. No more striking landscape effects have been caught by the best Scottish painters than those which he has shown.

His picture called "Rain Passing Away" is an admirable example of Watts' experiments in atmospheric effects. It is an aerial dream, representing the passing away of a summer storm, and the formation in the blue rain-washed sky of the soft billowy clouds, which are the last remains of it, giving a brighter gleam to the sunshine by their dazzling whiteness, and a tenderer tone to the landscape by their motionless shade; while away at sea, appearing dimly through the mist on the horizon, are the masts of a ship, on its outward voyage, giving a human sentiment to the scene. His treatment of scenery in his later years is much bolder and freer than it used to be; a few of his early landscapes being somewhat hazy and indefinite. Some of his best landscapes with the signs of past geological revolutions on the rocks, and the footsteps of vanished storms on the waters and the hills, seem a very "liturgy of tempests."

Watts' ideas of art in relation to nature are very exalted. I have said he is no mere copier of nature in its literal similitude. He treats it as Turner treated it, who depicted not the accurate features of the scene but the spirit of it, as it was seen by his spirit, and as no mere photograph in colours or mechanical transcript could possibly see or reveal it. The landscape treated by his art conveyed a spiritual message, was interpreted and not merely imitated, imparted revelations for the soul, and not mere realities to please the eye. "Nature and realism," he says, "are very different. Nature we rarely see except in the country, where man's hand has not been lifted against the landscape. The men and women we see walking about are no more nature than a well-ordered garden is nature. The artist must learn to understand the real form, and endeavour to see nature through it." True artistic beauty is therefore higher than natural beauty. It is the interpretation of the natural beauty by the spirit of man, the selection and arrangement and idealisation of the features of nature by the spiritual consciousness of the spectator. With the colours and forms of the scene, we get the soul that looks at it with supernatural eyes—eyes purged by heavenly eye-salve—and therefore a new creation, regenerated, redeemed from all limitations and imperfections, and made complete by the transfigurative power of spiritual imagination.

Watts looks out on nature with eyes like Swedenborg's. He sees the wonderful correspondence between natural and spiritual things as few see them. Most people are apt to use natural illustrations in a haphazard kind of way. They imagine that the resem-

blance is merely accidental or superficial. Nature is a storehouse of images, from which the preacher or writer, who wishes to illustrate his theme, draws at random a comparison which happens at the moment to catch his fancy. But there is more than such fleeting capricious correspondence in nature. There is an actual parallelism between the natural and spiritual world, which is as fixed and profound as the natures of these two worlds. Look for instance at the striking parallelism between the self-sacrifice of a plant and the self-sacrifice of a human being. A tree that produces leaves only, lives for itself and it remains green and dull. But a tree that produces flowers and fruit sacrifices itself, terminates its own growth, for the sake of the race, for the young life that is to come from its seed. And in this sacrifice of itself all the finest qualities of the tree come out, the fragrance, brightness of colour, grace of form of the flower, and the richness and sweetness of the fruit. And so in the self-sacrifice of one human being for another, of a mother for her child, of a friend for a friend, of a martyr for his faith, all the brightest and noblest qualities of human nature come out in the process. The very countenance is transfigured. It is an actual human blossoming and fruiting. The comparison is not a fanciful, but a real one, founded upon the essential laws of vegetable and human life.

The higher ministry explains all the beauty and wonder of the world, which would otherwise be superfluous and extravagant. As the servant of common household wants, giving us bread to eat and water to drink, and raiment to put on, and air to breathe, and soil to stand and build upon and to cultivate, nature might

have been clothed with homely russet garments girded for toil ; but as the priestess of heaven, ministering in the holy place, appealing to the higher faculties of man, she is clothed like Aaron with temple vestments, and Solomon in all his glory is not arrayed like her. Her ultimate purposes are grander than her ordinary uses. Her forms are evanescent, but her ministry is everlasting. Her grass withereth and her flower fadeth, but the word of the Lord that speaketh through these fading, withering signs endureth forever. The truth which she teaches, and the beauty which she forms, are a part of the everlasting inheritance of the soul, and become incorporated with its life for ever more. It was a true instinct which made Manoah's wife exclaim when her husband said, " We shall surely die, because we have seen God"—" If the Lord were pleased to kill us, He would not have received a burnt-offering and a meat-offering at our hands, neither would He have showed us all these things, nor would, as at this time, have told us such things as these." And surely it is a true instinctive feeling in the human heart, that God does not mean to destroy us for ever, when He clothes the earth with so much beauty, and permits us to gaze upon scenes and to study objects, whose wonders and glories appeal to the highest wants and capabilities of our nature. Surely by the glory of perishing nature He is training our souls for the excelling glory of immortality.

So much has thus been said regarding the deeper meaning of nature, because this seems to explain Watts' attitude towards the things of the natural world, as he has depicted them in his landscape paintings. He has lifted the veil from the face

of nature, disclosed in living reality to our eyes its wonderful spiritual beauty and significance, and connected the common sights and incidents of our daily life with the laws and objects of the spiritual kingdom which he has opened up to us. Hence his nature-pictures are in a most unusual degree informing and educative; and he who has eyes to see, will see visions in them of things unseen and eternal. Over all his landscapes, however, we cannot help perceiving that there is a certain vague mournful shadow, as if he penetrated beyond the superficial gladness of nature to the sorrowful refrain that always sounds beneath it, to him that hath ears to hear; and in the quiet spring afternoon with its long lingering light, and its brooding grey sky, he felt the grief of joy—the unutterable sadness of things that ever comes back with the returning year, the wistful yearning of the soul for the vanished past and for the unattainable hope; and he could not look upon the autumn fields with all their happy splendour, the iridescence of decay, without unshed tears welling up from the depths of some divine despair. The spiritual beauty of his landscapes affects us as all his imaginative pictures do—with their earnestness and solemnity. “They have much of the poetry of Corot and Millet; and yet with all their solemnity and even sombreness, they have not the slightest trace of the morbidity which we cannot help seeing in the landscapes of Lawson or Legros.” Had he done nothing else than paint landscapes, he would have achieved the highest reputation in that branch of art, for he put soul into the work of his hands. But the ease and mastery obtained by doing these pictures fitted him for what he regarded as higher work, viz.,

embodying his allegorical conceptions, and presenting them in all their perfect beauty before the eye. His apprenticeship, as it were, to portrait-painting, qualified him for the representation of all that was noblest and most spiritual in the human face, and from thence to the realisation of the ideal qualities and abstract virtues. And in a similar way, it might be said, that he needed the training afforded by landscape-painting to make those scenic backgrounds to his pictures, which bring out their lessons with such captivating charm. Millais could paint admirably what he saw ; and Watts needed to paint admirably what he saw in order that he could paint effectually what he did not see, or rather saw with the eyes of his imagination. Our artist did not attach, as has already been said, undue value to his skill in painting the landscapes of nature ; rather did he value that skill because it enabled him to make his higher conceptions of the mind more attractive. He wanted to make us see the glory in the grass, and the splendour in the flower, in order that we might see the surpassing glory of things which eye hath not seen in the visions of the soul.

## Chapter VIII

# Greek Myths

“ Not all asleep, thy gods of Greece,  
Lie tumbled on the Coan shore :  
O painter ! thou who knew'st their peace,  
Must half-remember evermore.”

IT has often been acknowledged that much of what is most beautiful and enlightening in our modern civilization, is a rich inheritance from the ancient Greek world. Sir Henry Maine, indeed, went the length of asserting that with the sole exception of the forces of nature, “ nothing moves in the world which is not Greek in origin.” We may not admit that, but we feel deeply that many of the best influences at work among us are Hellenic. The contribution of the Greeks to the world's education has been the refinement of the taste, the perception and passion for the beauty of truth, and the truth of beauty, and the development of the reasoning faculty. Nor were they wanting, as was supposed by many, in a capacity for religion. Indeed, the cultivation of religious thought and sentiment was the consummation of the marvellous development in literature, art, science and philosophy which they had achieved. St Augustine himself admitted that in Hellas was to be found no small part of that *vera religio*, which dimly existing without specific designation among ancient races, received the name of



Christianity at last when Christ came. What would Christianity have been had there not been a Greek world in which to receive its fluent elements, a Greek language in which to express its ideas, and Greek preachers to diffuse its tenets throughout the world? We are coming to understand better the Greek gods, whose worship in the mind of the Greek combined a diversity of persons with a unity of divine power; that mythology which was so exquisitely beautiful, a dreamland of charming fancy, the very poetry of the poets, and yet was often unmoral in idea and immoral in practice. The old problem has for each age to be stated anew, and to receive a fresh solution. And if Greek influence is not to disappear altogether, it is necessary that some one who has drunk deep of the Pierian spring, should from time to time, as Professor Jowett says, "renew the love of it in the world, and once more present the old life with its great ideas and great actions, like the distant remembrance of youth, before the delighted eyes of mankind."

Never had the beautiful Greek myths received such adequate treatment as at the hands of Watts. He was deeply imbued with the feeling of the far-off times when the world was young, and fact was as significant as fable. He saw the inner meaning of those classical stories, their use as channels of modern thought, and illustrations of experiences of life, such as are realised every day among us. With what exquisite grace has he depicted Diana in her robe of diaphanous blue, with long golden tresses, stooping down from heaven to kiss the sleeping youth, on the lonely side of Mount Latmos. With a subtle appropriateness, which greatly enhances the graceful

beauty and deep meaning of the incident, he has given to the floating figure of Selene the curved shape of a sickle or crescent, thereby suggesting the moon in its last quarter, when it has least of the intolerable, unapproachable loneliness of heavenly light, and most of the companionable shadow of the earth on its disk. The very music of the name of Endymion goes into one's being, as it did into Keats', when we gaze at that picture.

Poets delight to sing of the secret love which Diana cherished for the youth; and the sleeping Endymion was a frequent subject of representation on ancient sarcophagi and monuments. But in Watts' picture a deeper note is struck than the ancients have sounded. In his hands the fable personates the beautiful visions which come to the soul when the night is calm and serene, and sleep falls lighter upon the senses than the meeting of two snowflakes in a windless fall of snow, and dimmer than "the groping of the night-moth for the lily's nectared lip." It suggests the close communion of nature in her loneliest and stillest hour, with the nature of man, when the lower side of it is subdued, and the higher side is active. The deathless Beautiful then draws strangely nigh, and we marvel that we were so long content to drudge for the perishing sordid joys of earth. Stephen Phillips in his exquisite poem on Endymion puts into musical words—subtler even than Keats'—what Watts represents in lovely hues. He makes Selene say—

“Now I see

How cruel the eternal ways of heaven ;  
That only from my loneliness comes light,  
That my bereaved life this candle is,  
I may not overlong approach the earth.

I had so yearned for joy ; and to be loved  
A little if only such a simple love  
As hath a gleaner's wife in evening hour—  
Kind hands, a still and sweet anxiety,  
Brave prudent talk about the coming day,  
Even with this could I have been so pleased.  
I had but hoped for happiness.

But yet at times, I still must visit thee,  
Incline and touch thee swiftly at midnight,  
And lest thy face like my face should be  
Buried away, and I should only feel  
With melancholy mouth a grassy mound ;  
I give thee immortality, for I  
Will suffer not my darling to decay.'  
Then said Endymion : ' After that high kiss,  
After that sorrow more supreme than joy  
That floating in imagination's heaven,  
How should I live again in earthly field ?  
After thy dimness what to me is light ?  
After thy kiss I feel I cannot die,  
Then suffer me immortally to dream.'  
' So be it then. Dream on, Endymion,'  
She answered, ' and at deep of midnight I  
Will lean and kiss thee ; thou shalt feel my kiss  
In deepest dream ; and I shall hear thy lips  
Distinct into the quiet say my name.  
And yet, sweet boy, think not that in this dream  
Thou shalt not suffer, for thy trance shall be  
More quivering intense than waking hour.

Thou shalt with all rejoice, and weep and die  
For ever ; though the dream hold on its course.'"

How admirably, too, has Watts told the exquisite story of Orpheus and Eurydice. His picture is a striking illustration of the keen sense which he has for the dramatic in incident. He knows the exact moment when it becomes most pictorial, and therefore

most suitable for his purpose. We are impressed by the representation of the sad parting of the lovers, on the marble relief of the Villa Albani at Rome. But the cold, passionless marble cannot express such heartrending grief. It was terrible to lose the beautiful Eurydice, when, by the snake's bite in the foot, she was snatched away from Orpheus by death, and he filled mountain and valley with his piteous songs of lamentation, which enchanted the wild beasts and rocks and trees to follow him ; but far worse was it when he descended to the lower world, and released her by the magic music of his woe from the grim king of shadows, and brought her back to the upper world, and he turned with an irresistible longing to see her beloved face, and so violated the condition of her restoration, and Eurydice was once more lost to him. The contrast between the living vigour of Orpheus and the dying helplessness of Eurydice is heightened by the ruddy colour of health in the flesh of the youth and the pallid, nerveless, drooping limbs of the victim whom fate has claimed. Dim forms and sombre hues fill up the background, suggesting the awful gloom and mystery of Hades into which she is falling. It is that supreme moment of the second and final parting that poets of all ages have striven to describe, and music has spent its utmost efforts in fixing in immortal song, that Watts has depicted in shapes and colours as tender as the subject.

There are two versions of Orpheus and Eurydice. They are both among the finest representations of the pathetic story which have ever been painted. In the Louvre at Paris there is a bas-relief by an old Greek sculptor of the incident as the lovers return



ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE.

*Reproduced from a photograph by FREDK. HOLLYER.*



from Hades, led by Hermes. "Orpheus impatient strides before. Eurydice, not less impatient, has stretched out her hand—if she may but touch her husband. Oh, the infinite tenderness of that touch! Orpheus has turned but for a moment to the dear face; but the Inexorable has already laid his hand upon hers; there can be no delay, there is no hope; the beautiful vision shall dissolve again into the tenebræ of Hades; Orpheus shall go forth alone." Beautiful as this version of the old story is, Watts' two versions are even more dramatic. In the older one the embrace of Orpheus is not quite so close and passionate as in the more recent one; for with the one hand he holds the magic harp with its strings twisted and broken, while the other does little more than touch the bosom of the dear form dying away from life and love. But the newer version exhibits Orpheus with both arms around Eurydice, holding her firmly to the last and uttermost. The lovers, too, are more nude, as if they had left their earthly garments behind them on that dark Plutonian shore, from whence they have come to mortal view. The surrounding scene, too, is wilder, with the gloomy rocks around the mouth of the weird entrance to the realms of the dead. The harp of Orpheus is ruder, made up of the skull of the antelope with its straight horns forming the framework, and only a solitary string stretching from end to end among the ravelled wire. An owl blinks from a hole in a tree above, and a bright lily gracefully holds up its pure white cups from the ground, into which the light of open day is casting its transparent radiance.

It is the most difficult of all things to imagine a

human being who had been translated by death to another world, and yet is restored and living in this world. How will such a being act, and look, and live? The tendency to exaggerate in such a case is exceedingly great. The supernatural overpowers the feeling of the natural. We have a being painted wholly of the next world, or wholly of this. It was this difficulty that was solved so completely in the appearances of our Lord after His resurrection. The balance between the two worlds is perfectly preserved in His case. The past is linked with the present in the most natural manner; and we realise to the full that it is the same Jesus whom we knew so well in the familiar scenes of His life on earth, who meets us from beyond the grave, and yet withal is strangely transformed, the mortal love putting on the immortal. As near as possible to this sublime example, the picture of Eurydice impresses us with its harmonious reconciliation of the eternal world and this vain show of fleeting shadows. All is natural and human, while we feel that there is over the whole scene the strange mystery of death. Wordsworth has given a vivid representation of the restoration of Protesilaus to "the paths of upper air" at the entreaties of his heart-broken wife Laodamia; but the picture is wholly human and of this world. Protesilaus speaks as one would do who had never left the confines of earth. His look and tone are the old familiar ones with which we had been intimately acquainted, but they do not bring with them any of the larger, freer atmosphere of the world beyond. During the three hours' space that he was allowed by inexorable fate to remain with his wife, we have not put before us the best use of the occasion



by the blending of heaven and earth as we should have expected. It is simply a conversation such as might have taken place before he was parted from her at all.

Wordsworth has indeed written a beautiful poem, and the sentiments are apt and appropriate ; but he has not described the communion of mortal with immortal love, in such a way as to show that the mortal has actually put on immortality. Perhaps the brush can express what words could not and Watts, working with his beautiful colours and forms, has presented to the eye what he could not have conveyed by any other means. The moral of the pathetic myth could not have been more strikingly taught—that we are so constructed that our loves and joys fall from us when we endeavour to make them too exclusively our own. Like some subtle, illusive fragrance that powerfully affects us when we suddenly and unexpectedly catch it, and vanishes when we endeavour to get a firmer hold of it, so the essence of our dearest things eludes us when we come too close to them. Only brief glimpses, transient foretastes are we permitted to have here of the fulness of joy that is at God's right hand.

There is more in Watts' "Orpheus and Eurydice" than the pathetic sense in Greek art of the elusive fading of life, the passive acquiescence in the universal doom. It seems to us so remarkable that the old Greeks should have meekly accepted this universal sentence, without protesting and fighting against it. Perhaps this was only the monumental calm appropriate to their marble sculptures. One stele at Athens reveals the real struggle that must have been made in actual life, in the straining gaze and arm

outstretched to retain that which death is snatching away from the grasp of love, carved upon it. Watts adopts this view, which must have been the real state of the case. He adds to Greek art the element which it lacked; "begins at the point where the Greek left off"; and makes us hear the mournful wail, and see the hopeless struggle with which love relinquishes that which it loves, to fall into the dark abyss of nothingness, and feel that there is no acquiescence in the stern decree—but only a bitter rebellious sorrow. For to the Greek there was no hope, such as the Christian has, of a blessed resurrection and an eternal reunion—where love is love forevermore.

Into his paintings illustrating the Greek myths Watts has thrown his whole heart. These subjects had always a peculiar fascination for him. He was born, he tells us, with a deep passion for Greece and for Grecian things. From his earliest boyhood the name and thought of Greece thrilled him as nothing else could do; and to the present day he has a more intense sympathy with classic Greece than with any other country. That love was greatly increased by his visit to Halicarnassus, and by all his subsequent wanderings over sites renowned in the pages of the great poets and dramatists. We are reminded by him of Keats, who had the same intense love for Greece and everything Greek. But we notice this difference, that whereas Watts abstracted his art from all the common-places of modern life, in order to construct an ideal picture of ancient Greece, Keats on the other hand loved to familiarise his mind with all that seemed common to the ancient and the modern worlds, and

his conceptions taken from the actual life around him were cast into a Greek mould, in order to give them an air of finished beauty, and a far-away feeling of romance. Throughout his whole life Watts has striven in his own productions to enable people to realise the Greek ideals of art, and to give them a sense of the beauty and sacredness of things. His pictures are removed immeasurably from the class of paintings which usually have the old myths for their subjects, which merely reproduce Greek imagination, and appeal only to an æsthetic taste, by an infusion into them of a modern spirit, a mystical Christian suggestion, as if he saw in them prefiguring types of Christian truth, which the fathers had often sought in Pagan mythology.

In his rendering of these lovely classic myths, Watts' work is entirely unconventional. There is not a line that reminds us of the way in which other artists have treated them. All is original and arresting. And we feel in looking at his pictures that this is natural art—that nothing is done for effect, nothing for itself—that this alone has a satisfying peace in it. In these informing myths he has simplified life, and made it earnest, and therefore his treatment yields a rich harvest not only of pleasure but of suggestion. We feel that his strength is in his sympathies, outside of himself, as heat is outside fire, and the fragrance outside the flower. These characteristics are abundantly shown in his painting of Daphne fleeing from the pursuit of Apollo, and almost caught in his embrace. Some painters have represented this conception in a very literal and gross way, picturing Daphne actually undergoing the process of metamor-

phosis, and changing by degrees into a laurel bush, the hands and feet becoming branches and producing leaves. But Watts with finer genius leaves all this to be suggested by the imagination, knowing it to be much easier to picture to the mind ideas which cannot be expressed in outward form without glaring incongruity. He represents instead the form of Daphne in its lovely roundness of contour and virginal purity and beauty, standing out in beautiful relief against the background of the laurel tree, shrinking from the embrace of her relentless pursuer, and yet fixing upon him a look of injured innocence and indignant remonstrance.

“ Let nature’s life—no love beyond—  
Make all the marriage of the maid.”

This classic myth is a lovely idealisation of the elusiveness of nature. In her solitudes we are forever haunted by a presence, a soul of things, that lives and breathes in all we hear and see, and which we seek to embody in some palpable, tangible outward form, but which evades our reason, spurns our philosophy, and scorns our boasted science. It flits before us, and refuses to be tracked; and when we come to the end, we find nothing but dead structure, and dust of fact. The goddess changes into the laurel tree, and underneath the conception is the profound thought that the laurel tree is a transformed human figure. We recognise in its form and structure the type of life which is wrought out perfectly and consummately in the human body; the midrib of the leaf corresponding to and prefiguring the spinal column, and the veins that ramify over its surface the multitude of blood-vessels that traverse the entire

surface of the human body and nourish its tissues. The human form is a modified leaf, and it helps to convince us of the absolute unity of nature alike in her highest and lowest productions. That the dim personal mystery, which shrouds the forms of nature, should appear to us only as a tree, is therefore consistent with this absolute unity. "We know so much, who nothing know." The matter-of-fact individual is brought in all his pursuits to find nothing good, save what is touched, seen, handled and comprehended. But to the child-heart, and to the poet-soul, nature whispers something of the great secret hidden in trees and human forms, which the Greek mind portrayed in its lovely fauns and dryads and nymphs.<sup>1</sup>

No brighter personification of the rainbow could be given, even by the most youthful fancy, than our old artist has embodied in that aerial dream entitled "Iris." As the swift messenger of the gods, as the bridge between earth and heaven, she seems to combine in herself all earthly and heavenly beauty; the cloud that arises from the earth, and the sunshine from heaven that irradiates it, both uniting to form the radiant vision of life and joy. It is a wonderful study of atmospheric effects, misty and yet luminous, serene and yet with garments ruffled by the storm. With her wind-tossed vesture, lit up by the sunshine, and her smiling face, and hands outstretched in blessing, she pictures the cessation of the tempest and the delightful freshness and revived beauty that come to the face of nature after having passed through such an elemental trouble. Or we may picture her standing in the spray at the foot of a waterfall, sharing in the motion of the descending flood, and yet fearless and

calm in the midst of its wildest fury. The opening of this blossom of light amid so much darkness, of such tranquillity amid so much turmoil and confusion, is a lesson taught us in a sportive play of fairy colours, that we may gaze upon it with profit. And the blessing of the outstretched hands may suggest to us the blessing that comes through the cascades and waterfalls of earth, how they purify the waters by their violent motion, and grind from the everlasting rocks the soil that forms the green pastures below, so that "the stream we hear among the rocks shall fertilise some future plain."

In "Uldra, the Spirit of the Rainbow," and in the "Foster-daughter of the Nixies," Watts depicts in human form the diviner life that pervades all nature, and proves the truth of the old Hebrew belief that nature in essence is not inanimate but living. The ancient Jews, like the ancient Greeks, lived in a world peopled with spiritual existences. The winds were angels, and the flaming fire the minister of God, and mountains august presences, and there was a spirit in the pathless woods. It is the feeling of our childhood still, which is Hebrew or Greek, and not materialistic or scientific. There are times when we sympathise with Schiller's longing in his "Hymn to the Gods of Greece," for the realisation of the invisible world, of which the forms of nature are the embodiments and the vesture, and with the feeling of Wordsworth that it is better to be "a pagan suckled in a creed outworn," so that we might be in tune with this living nature, rather than a cold man of science who had no glimpses of this ever-living world to make him "less forlorn" in a dead material world.

Watts is a serious painter. He has looked so long

at the sad side of life, that he is apt to forget that it has another and a pleasanter side. He has felt so deeply what Matthew Arnold calls "the Virgilian sense of tears in things," that, like Lazarus, who is said by the legend never to have smiled again after Jesus raised him from the dead, he has forgotten what it is to be joyful. But while this may be his prevailing mood, he occasionally breaks out into sunny experiences; and these are all the brighter by reason of their rarity and contrast with more melancholy musings. The mediæval architects found relief from their graver work of cathedral-building in carving some passing fancy or grotesque idea on a gargoyle, and so Watts finds relief from the strain of earnestness with which he engages in his solemn work, by indulging now and then in a lighter vein, and turning aside to paint a gay or a humorous subject. That in his granite nature, the outcome of titanic powers, there are sweet wells of sparkling laughter to refresh the soul, he has given abundant evidence. His sympathies with the joys of humanity are as great as his sympathy with its sorrows, and a heart that can throb as his does to the woes that overshadow creation, and make of life an unintelligible mystery, can also thrill to the happy influences of the things that bubble up with rainbow hues to the surface. There is a refrain of hopefulness that runs throughout all his sadness; and he feels that this hopefulness is with young life. Children are the rejuvenation of the world. As Lamech said of his son, so he says of each member of the new generation, "This same shall comfort us concerning the work of our hands, which the Lord God hath cursed." The old and sere world grows

young again with each new child that is born into it ; and God, in sending another troop into the field, is meaning us to carry on the perpetual war against evil, of which we are apt soon to grow weary. And in spite of appearances to the contrary, and individual forebodings, the world is growing better. Each generation carries on the good work a step or two further before it is arrested and stereotyped ; and the very shortness of life is a means of keeping it ever at its highest and best point.

Watts has a peculiar pleasure in painting figures and scenes of happy childhood. He has represented all the fine youthful bloom of Greek nature in his lovely picture of Ganymede, with his large eyes of wonder open upon the brightness of life, and his hand pressing from ripe grapes the first sweet wine of the years into his cup. That beautiful boy is indeed worthy to hold the cup of nectar to the lips of the gods. His figure seems illumined with an inner light ; it has imparted to it the radiance of the diviner atmosphere in which he moves. The natural sunshine flashes upon his curly head, shines upon the fair, rounded shoulders of childhood, and catches a joyous brightness from the frank eyes, full of the entrancing laughter of innocent joy. There is no shadow upon his brow ; he is brave and fearless in regard to the future, and sufficiently immortal to lift his mortal life into kindred sympathy with the skies. He is the beloved of Jupiter, who transforms himself into an eagle to carry him off to the celestial heights ; the rape of the beautiful boy being a favourite subject of artistic representation among the ancients. The head of the eagle is visible on the left of the picture. When gazing upon it you cannot help remembering the



extremely beautiful piece of sculpture by Thorwaldsen, in which Ganymede is represented as giving the eagle drink out of his own bowl; and the other fine antique statue in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, which Shelley said was one "of surpassing beauty," one hand embracing the eagle, and the other holding a symbol of the thunder, though both hands are so delicately formed that they seem made more for pleasure than for such powerful things. In Watts' Ganymede the draperies are of a rich red, and the colouring throughout is admirable.

Another chubby boy called "Promises," is more a type of English childhood. There are wings on his shoulders, and his hands are full of roses, and roses and other flowers are creeping on their sprays behind and before him. He is "young love among the roses," to whom his innocence is what godliness is to the tried saint, the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come. Life is full of promises; it is indeed all promise to him. He has the promise of all the good that can come from the unfolding and activity of all his faculties, and from the harmony between himself and all other beautiful and sinless things in the world. His happiness is to him what the warm bright air of a summer morning is to the birds and flowers. The promises of life do not deceive him. They yield to him in the enjoyment all that they held out in the promise. He does not need his wings to bear him away from scenes where he meets with grievous disappointments and to say, "Oh! that I had the wings of a dove, then I would flee away and be at rest." That is a later experience. He has wings now like the butterfly to bear him from flower to flower, from one scene and experience of happiness to another.

In connection with this subject of childhood may be mentioned the "Boyhood of Jupiter," one of the most charming of Watts' classical pictures, a subject which allowed free play to his vivid fancy and love of brilliant colouring. It was exhibited at the Academy in 1896, and was much admired. Gazing upon it we feel how much he has come under the sway of Titian's marvellous colouring, and see the richness and mellowness of the old master more nearly reproduced than in any modern painter. The scene is laid in a dell in one of the Ionian hills, commanding a lovely view, with gardens of olive and almond and lemon trees extending in fair, shimmering light and shade to the purple horizon. Behind there is a light-foliaged wood with the sunset shining through its boughs, and starred with beautiful large-eyed flowers. In the foreground is a group of white-limbed nymphs, playing with a sturdy, curly-headed boy, who takes all the caresses he receives calmly as his due, and on whose young brow there rests an air of dignity prophetic of his future eminence as the chief of the gods. The golden hair of one of the nymphs is beautifully relieved against the naked figure of young Jupiter, "with all its glow and warmth of palpitating childlike flesh." Musical instruments lie around which had charmed the air; a goat with crooked horns, resting on the sward, gives a pastoral repose to the landscape, and clusters of grapes and luscious fruits are the gifts of nature poured at his feet. The idea of Jupiter growing from boyhood to manhood gives an interest to the august life of the god, which takes him out of the awful abstractions of the divine, and brings him within the range of human sympathies. He knows the experiences of human life

from the beginning and altogether, and the contrast between the terrible thunder of Olympus and the little child playing on the Ionian hill, amid all the sweet, quiet beauties of the summer landscape, is very impressive. It reminds us of the childhood of Him who linked His own life with the innocence of the young, as well as with the wisdom of mature years, and who passed through all human experience.

Another Greek idea which captivated the imagination of Watts'—

“Who in our monstrous London dwelt,  
And half remembered Arcady”—

was named “Arcadia.” It personified the natural loveliness of the fairest region of Greek landscape, and combined grace of form and charm of colour in a maiden figure, whose purple hues harmonised with the purple irises that grew beside the marble fountain at her side. Gazing at this impersonation, we do not wonder that the Greeks had such a passionate love for their native land, which was indeed a Hephzibah, married to its sons and daughters in a way in which few lands on earth have been. Nature and human nature, under its serene blue skies, and on its uplands, which are a vast sun-dial for the sun to play upon all the day, and reckon its hours in softest shadows, correspond with a harmony so close that they seem as if made for each other. Greek character and Greek landscape are the counterparts of each other. There is nothing terrible or sorrowful in all the scenery, which is adapted with nicest suitability to all man's circumstances and wants; and the struggles and convulsions of its eventful history have passed over it like the shadows of thunder-clouds on a mountain-side,

when the tempest has passed away, and the fields that have been deluged with the blood of its freedom-loving people are flowery and "sun-trodden," as the fields of Sicily of which Theocritus sang. Living in such an Arcadia, we understand why the people should love their lives, and endeavour to make them as bright and beautiful as possible. The conditions of life are sure. There is no doubt that every autumn the vineyards will yield their purple grapes, and the orchards their glowing fruits, and there will be abundant ease and leisure for the culture of all the gayer arts of life. The Greek is indeed the son of the soil, the artist and the poet of the human race, for whom nature has formed a great picture gallery of snow-crowned hills, and embowered valleys, encircled by a blue zone of halcyon waters, in which every sound is musical, and every sight a dream.

Another impersonation of a similar kind represented the "Genius of Greek poetry" as a young man in the full flush of his strength and beauty, seated on the sea-shore, and surrounded by all the fairy forms of nymph and dryad and nereid which peopled the solitudes of nature, and made the world not a mass of dead matter drifting on in obedience to dead laws and inorganic forces, but a living whole pervaded with deity and informed and supported by a living will. Greek poetry breathes of the beauty of the land and the spirit of the people. It is the romance of Greek history, and the drama of heroic personal life. It cures the blindness caused by the familiarity of everyday material uses, and enables the most prosaic to see men as trees walking, and the woods and forests, hills and valleys full of divinities, glimpses of which make the loneliest feel less forlorn. Æschylus and Sophocles and Euripides have invested

every part of Grecian soil with a divine interest, and made the glorious memories of the past part of the ever-haunted present, so that not a moment of it is barren and commonplace. Watts has summed up all these influences in a personality that is informed and glorified by them.

One of the most interesting of the Greek studies is "Olympus on Ida."<sup>1</sup> This forms two pictures, but they both belong to the same subject. One shows us the solitary shepherd on the summit of the classical hill, and the other shows us what he saw there, the mount transfigured with the glory of heaven—the shepherd with one knee bent on the ground, and his rapt countenance gazing upwards at the lovely vision which opened among the illumined clouds, and the three goddesses, each exhibiting a different style of beauty, draped in the lightest and most diaphanous robes, and surrounded with the most delicate haze of aerial hues. The atmospheric effects are wonderful and greatly enhance the splendour of the vision. The goddesses are without their distinctive symbols. Athena has no shield or ægis, Aphrodite no love-begetting magic girdle, Hera has no peacocks at her feet, and no pomegranate in her hand. There is no extraneous sign by which the shepherd might know the one from the other. They all appear precisely alike, adorned only by their native charms of person. Each claims for herself the golden apple which Eris the goddess of discord cast into the assembly with the inscription "To the fairest," and then referred by Zeus to the decision of Paris. The Trojan youth who had been exposed since his birth on Mount Ida,

<sup>1</sup> See note at end of chapter, page 140.

and who had been brought up by the shepherds of the sacred hill, decides in favour of Aphrodite, who had promised him the most beautiful woman on earth as his wife. From this fatal choice arose the terrible evils of the long Trojan war. The three goddesses in this picture may be compared to the fine antique group of sculpture of the same name in the Cathedral of Siena. Raphael translated this group from sculpture into painting in the picture he made from it in the collection of the Duc d'Aumale. But while Watts' picture is sculpturesque in its character, as nearly all his pictures are, it is from beginning to end thought out and wrought out in paint and in paint alone. While he is often dubious as to whether the real bent of his mind is towards sculpture or painting, he has never technically expressed his visions and conceptions by the methods of sculpture, but "as one who has to paint in colour, and produce on a flat surface the illusion of relief." Mr B. Clark has executed a fine etching of the "Three Goddesses,"<sup>1</sup> which fully interprets the original picture, and gives no small share of its beauty.

Another of the classical myths which Watts has painted is "Psyche," a very frequent subject of art, though this picture is entirely different from all other representations. It was exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1880, and eighteen years afterwards at the Winter Exhibition of the New Gallery. It is a large picture, and shows Psyche standing beside her curtained bed, in a listless attitude, looking sadly down at two feathers that have fallen, one red from the wing, and the other downy from the breast of Eros

<sup>1</sup> See note, page 140.

who has flown away. A lamp flickering in the darkness on the floor at the same time catches her attention, and is emblematical of her own expiring hopes. The grey morning light is beginning to define the objects around her, but it has no consolation of a new day of brighter prospects for her; for she knows how deeply she has loved—and how greatly she has sinned against the object of her love. This is one of the most beautiful of the Greek myths. A king had three daughters, of whom the youngest, Psyche, excited the jealousy of Venus on account of her surpassing beauty. The goddess sent her son Cupid to awaken a passion in the girl's heart for some mean, unworthy husband. But Cupid falls in love with her himself, and visits her at night, and makes her happy by his company, and departs unseen before the daylight comes in. But he annexes a condition to this privilege that she shall not look upon his form whatever may betide, nor listen to the curious questions of her sisters, who assure her that her husband is some hideous animal shape. But the restriction only intensifies her curiosity, and the forbidden pleasure makes her long all the more to see her lover's features clearly revealed. One night she brings her lamp while he is sleeping, and ventures to scrutinise his countenance, and is lost in admiration of its wonderful beauty. But by accident she lets a drop of the hot oil of the lamp fall upon his shoulder, and the sharp pain instantly awakens him to find that she had broken her promise, and distrusted his word. Immediately he flies away in sorrowful anger, leaving behind the feathers dropped from his wings and breast as the tokens of his presence; and Psyche, who cannot live without him,

searches for him all over the world in vain, having realised too late the value of what she has lost. This archaic myth, in some shape or other, is one of the oldest and commonest of the folk-stories of the world, and has been dear to many generations in many lands. The essential incident in it is the prohibition imposed by the husband on his bride, which Apuleius, who tells the story, assumes to be a mere device of Cupid for making love surreptitiously without offending his mother, but which is in reality founded upon a nuptial taboo well-known among all primitive races. Among the ancient Spartans, husbands for a long time after the marriage could not visit their wives except in the darkness of night; and similar restrictions on the conduct of married people, which seem quite arbitrary and absurd to civilised modern nations, used to be common enough, not only in Greece, but in India, Africa, America, and even Europe; and probably the bridal veil may be a relic of this peculiar ancient custom.

The universal character of the myth, which makes it more human, and which artists following the poets have striven to depict, Watts has told in the child-like form of his *Psyche*, which appeals strongly to us because of its profound air of loneliness and sadness. It is one of the loveliest nude figures ever painted, as she stands conscious of the ruin of her happiness by the indulgence of her curiosity. It illustrates what M. Chesneau said of "The Three Goddesses" and "Orpheus and Eurydice"—that Watts was the only Englishman who combined an appreciation of the nude in art with the ability to portray it. He has painted the nude without any self-consciousness,



but with the overpowering feeling that the human body is the divinest material thing in the world. There is a remarkable impersonal air about her, which belongs more to sculpture than to painting; every detail that would identify her with a particular woman being eliminated from her face and form, and only the general impression of the picture allowed to remain. In the figure of Psyche there is not only the beauty of flesh, but as it has been well said, "the inner awakening of love—illumining the body—as with an inner light," like a lamp shining through a transparent alabaster shade.

The moral of the myth, apart from its origin, is not difficult to read. Love must learn to trust what it cannot trace. Often it is not safe to allow it to see everything. "To see all is, in many cases, to lose all." You obtain beautiful vistas of the surrounding scenery half-way up a hill; at the top you imagine you will obtain a grander and more comprehensive view—when the trees and knolls that limited and obscured your survey are surmounted. But when you reach the summit, you have lost all that made the glimpses on the way up so enticing. In the boundless survey, the charm of the bounded landscape is gone. And so with many things in life. You gain wealth—but lose the power to enjoy. You can buy everything—but you can truly possess nothing. You obtain knowledge—but it kills the interest of things. Psyche, sad at heart, is ever searching for what she has lost in obtaining her fondest wish. Science reveals all and destroys our faith. It dissects the organism and the soul vanishes. Who can by searching find out God,

who can find out the Almighty to perfection? A God who could be comprehended would cease to be God. A religion without mystery would no longer be a religion. Not by any lamp of our seeing, not by any of the means of inquiring and knowing that we possess, but by the vision of the soul, by the experience of the heart, can we see and hold that which alone can be our true portion, our abiding possession. Always, the feathers on the floor represent our vanished joys, when we bring the vain lamp of curiosity to obtain a clearer and fuller view of that which cannot be seen and known except to our detriment, and strive to be wise above what is written, and to walk by sight and not by faith.

“If thou would'st taste each dear surprise,  
Tear not the bandage from thine eyes ;--  
Within the heart Love's vision lies.

Dim there the groping, mortal sight,  
Ere doubt can blind, or fear can blight ;—  
Love's arrow is his spirit's flight.

Lest thou shalt lose the dear surprise,  
And seek to probe each mood's disguise,—  
*Tear not the bandage from thine eyes.*”

Another Greek picture of the same type seems to revel in the glowing beauty of sea and land. Arion, the famous musician and lyric poet of Methymna in Lesbos, is rescued from drowning by a dolphin, and is coming to the shore riding on the back of the lovely fish which he has charmed by the sweetness of his music. Rejoicing in his narrow escape, he is looking up to the dazzling sun with outstretched hand, and sea-nymphs are disporting around him, with the sunlight flashing on their backs. The purple

Mediterranean is laving the long-fingered capes ; and the dark headlands are shaping themselves out of the azure light in the distance. On the beach the sea is emerald, breaking into peacock blue, and becoming a drift of mother-of-pearl on the sand. The whole picture is eloquent of the delight of the artist in visions of supernatural beauty, and forms of supreme landscape loveliness.

“Dawn” is one of those airy figures that show Watts’ skill in managing atmospheric effects. The personification is very effective. The beautiful female form is seen in profile, with no part of the countenance except cheek and brow and chin visible. One hand hangs down holding the graceful drapery that clings to her person, ruffled into many folds by the wind that always comes in the early morning before the sun has risen ; the other is laid upon the top of her head, and is an expressive gesture of anticipation—of eager expectation of some coming event to which she is looking forward. She stands with one foot resting on an elevated mountain top, and the other raised on tiptoe ; while an eagle with outstretched wing, prepared for flight, looks eastwards towards the rising sun. It is a calm, quiet scene. There is no noise, no theatrical display or startling effects. It is a true picture of the gentle stealing of the morning light over a summer landscape, which is casting off the vast impressive dusk that lay upon it, and awakening to the joys and duties of a new day. Its kingdom cometh not with observation.

And then there is the fine picture of Prometheus chained to the rock, torn by the eagle, with the horrors of nature around employed to increase his

terror and to intimidate him, but his proud spirit still unquelled as he defies the gods. He ventured into the heavenly places to obtain that fire which is the symbol of vital spiritual force for the quickening of man; and the sufferings which he endured in consequence are a dim shaping in the pagan mind of some prophetic image of the true redemption of the Cross.

Watts has made use of the Minotaur, the old Cretan legend, to illustrate the degrading effect of vice, which is always associated with cruelty in its most hateful form. It changes the man into a beast, and puts all his higher faculties under the dominion of the sensual and brutal ones. Probably the Minotaur was a representation of the Phœnician sun-god Baal, which had the form of a bull, and to which human sacrifices were offered. Its destruction by Theseus is a symbol of the triumph of the higher Greek civilisation over Phœnician barbarism, and consequent abolition of human sacrifices. Watts in his terrible picture does not pursue the subject to this happy triumph. He presents to us the hideous bull-headed Minotaur alone, leaning over the battlements of the Palace of Knossos, looking out to sea, awaiting the bringing of his prey, the nine youths and maidens that Athens had to furnish to satisfy his dreadful lust, and crushing in the very wantonness of his rage a little bird under his hoof. The artist acknowledged that this picture was painted after reading Mr Stead's gruesome articles in the *Pall Mall Gazette* on "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon." Watts was deeply impressed with the urgency of making these revelations, shocking and repellent as they were in

one sense, as the only means of drawing attention to the dreadful evil and remedying it. And he felt constrained to further the cause by presenting to the eye the embodiment of the cruelty and power of vice in this horrible form, so that every one who saw it might not only abhor it, but seek to remove it off the face of the earth, in the spirit of Theseus, and slay it. It is questionable, however, if such a monstrous presentment is a legitimate subject of art. The painted form is permanent, while the lesson which it teaches is passing; and the horribleness of the form itself, and not the abhorrence of the vice which it represents, is what is apt to remain with us. The law of Thebes which was against the permanent reproduction of any ugly or disagreeable form, is applicable here with its appropriate warning. Watts leaves the rest of the story to our own fancy, and suggests that the only Theseus that can destroy the Minotaur and rid the world of its baleful tribute of youth and beauty—is love pure and unselfish. The fairy story of "Beauty and the Beast" is a charming illustration of the way in which true love changes the beast in man into the noble human form, and purifies and elevates all his powers.

Connected with the same series of Cretan legends, Watts chose another subject for his suggestive pencil, the desertion of Ariadne by Theseus. Notwithstanding the great services she had rendered to him by providing him with the means to slay the Minotaur and escape from the labyrinth, he took her away to the Island of Naxos and there abandoned her to her fate, either of his own accord, or because warned by Dionysus, the god of the island, in a

dream. The subject of Ariadne has been a fertile one for artistic representation, and various monuments have come down to us. Every one knows the lovely marble figure of the sleeping Ariadne in the Vatican Museum, and a modern sculptor, the famous Danacker at Frankfort-on-the-Main, has embodied his conception of her as riding upon a panther full of energy and activity. Watts has departed widely from all these conventional models, and has given us Ariadne in the moment of awaking out of her sleep and finding herself alone and abandoned on a foreign strand. Her figure is expressive of deep anguish and consternation. Seated in her white robes, which gleam out from the dark rocks of the sea-shore, with her golden hair falling in curling ripples on her shoulder, and with large startled eyes, and listless hands hanging by her side, the wavelets breaking with a sad moan at her feet, and the gloomy hills behind shutting her in, she looks indeed a forlorn spirit. Her handmaiden is with her stooping over a fire which she has made of the wrecked wood on the shore; but Ariadne is altogether regardless of her, lost in her own grief. The type of face is not Grecian but English, and therefore implies a larger interpretation of the old fable. The awaking of the sleeping Ariadne by the kiss of Dionysus symbolised the return of spring, whose flowers awake from their winter sleep by the touch of the warm sunshine — at all times and in all places a joyful festival; and Watts has caught the transition period when nature passes from the desolation of winter to the joyful surprise of the spring season of the year. Born out of love, and nursed in storm, Ariadne is a messenger of grace divine to the

waiting earth. The subject of Ariadne engaged the attention of Watts at an early period of his life, and the work thus described is a later and larger reproduction of the original conception. In some respects the earlier version is to be preferred, for it is softer and sadder, and has an air of greater refinement about it. Her own attitude of grief is more expressive; and her handmaid is seated by her side pointing with outstretched hand to the brightening east, as the region from which renewed blessing is to come to her. Four huge panthers play with each other by her side, symbols of the strong latent forces of nature, waiting to be excited to fullest energy. Instead of a chain of desolate hills imprisoning her horizon, she is surrounded with soft woodlands, showing the first budding and unfolding of the foliage of spring, casting their freckled shadows upon the sunny ground; while the shore of the island in many a winding bay and headland stretches its ample space of freedom before her eyes. Madox Brown said of this "Ariadne" that she was as fine as a fine Etty.

And here it may be remarked that Watts' artistic genius is decidedly constructive and cumulative. His pictures have not a mechanical symmetry, but the spontaneous living symmetry of a tree or a flower, unfolding from a germ, every part of the structure being correlated with every other part, and therefore perfectly homogeneous. With all his love of Greek beauty, there is nothing like the formality and monotony of Greek architecture in his style of painting. It is not finished once for all, with a perfection in which no after change can be made, and to which no new charm can be added. Rather

is it like Gothic architecture, which is never perfect, but always is about to be; which admits of indefinite expansion and addition. Watts is fond of developing an idea that has taken possession of him. He gives us different versions of it. He enables us to trace its growth and evolution by presenting it at different stages. He retains a large proportion of his paintings in his own hands, in order that he may have an opportunity of retouching them, and bringing them up to his latest and most matured conceptions. In his private gallery and studio in town and country are a good many pictures which, admirable one would think at first, have been made still more so by a mind that has never lost its freshness and creative power, and is ever ready to profit by the lessons and suggestions of experience, and a hand which is always deft enough to carry out the purposes of the intellect. Intending these elaborated works for the National Gallery, he has endeavoured to make his gifts as worthy as possible of their permanent grand destination.

A picture full of pathos is that which is entitled "Among the Ruins." The elements of it are simple, but they touch the heart. Before you is a beautiful Greek temple, built in the Corinthian style, with one fluted pillar standing upright; its richly foliated capital, battered and defaced, supporting an architrave; another column of the same kind, with its shaft broken off a little above its pediment, by its side, both evidently forming part of a magnificent portico. Fragments of pillars and entablatures lean on every side and strew the ground, and around is the fresh verdure of the spring, representing nature's eternal vitality triumphing over the fall of human greatness. It



is somewhat like the famous temple of Minerva on "Sunium's marbled steep," but is more ruinous and wasted. A solitary figure sits in the shadow, on a prostrate column, with his head bowed to his knees, wrapped in deep thought; while the full moon, partially hid by dark clouds, flecks a path of light across the sea to the place where the old temple stands, and illumines the sides of the marble column with a ghostly radiance. The spectator personates the solitary figure, and feels that what he is thinking of in the impressive spot is the lesson which the scene reads to every one, human grandeur and human decay—the glory that was Greece, and the grandeur that was Rome, now a lonely trophy of the dust.

Continuing these Greek studies, attention may be drawn to "Neptune's Horses," which represent the white billows of the stormy sea breaking on a lee shore in the shape of snow-white horses, with fierce eyes and flowing manes, a combination of fact and fancy which only a poet's mind could form. Watts has not in this picture adopted the expedient of Walter Crane, who has introduced into his picture of Neptune's Horses the figure of Neptune himself, as the personal embodiment of the motion and sound of the waves. To him the vast surface of the solitary sea without any figure to sum up and idealise in human form its attributes, was enough. He has made the bounding waves themselves, as they dash to land, assume the appearance of horses, reined in and driven on by an invisible power. In this way there is nothing to detract from the sublime unity of the artistic impression. The sea becomes a living force, a magnificent personality. There are not two

incongruous ideas represented at the same time—the lonely monotonous sea and the god that rules it, each taking away from the grand simplicity of the other—but only one vast element, hurling itself consciously as it were, with more than the power of thousands of horses, against the barrier that defines and limits it.

The "Wife of Pygmalion" is one of the noblest of his Greek pictures. Its beauty is of the highest Greek type, and recalls the Venus of Milo. It enables one to realise the myth that she was indeed the statue which her husband, the great-grandson of Belus, made, and of which he became so enamoured that Venus at his entreaty gave it life, that he might marry it. Watts' picture suggests comparison with Burne-Jones' "Pygmalion," which depicts the whole scene of the fable, and shows us the actual endowment of the marble statue with life, and the adoration of it by its creator, with the appropriate surroundings. But Watts with a noble simplicity takes the whole myth for granted, and places before us the splendour of the animated statue itself, leaving it to tell its own wonderful tale to the imagination. What her maker and lover was to her, every one that gazes upon that lovely countenance is compelled to become. The eyes are dim with thought, and the band round the golden hair gives a touch of simplicity to the majestic head; while the white lilies around her bring into comparison the fairness of her skin, and the stainless purity of her character. In the youth of the world, when the joy of living and loving had the first fresh bloom of the morning upon it, it was held that the goddess had conferred upon the creation of Pygmalion's art the highest of all blessings, in endowing it with life. But in our own sad days, when life is worn

with over-thought, and pressed down by the weary weight of all this unintelligible world, and men are asking in the very satiety of enjoyment, if life is worth living—it seems as if the gift of life were of doubtful value, and indeed that it were better upon the whole that the marble should be left in its changeless, passionless beauty, than be turned into a frail, perishing mortal. Murger has expressed the same sorrowful sentiment in his "Scènes de la Vie de Bohême"; and Watts' picture echoes it back. We seem to see on her divine countenance this half regretful look :—

"Nor quite was sure if life were best,  
And love till love with life had flown,  
Or still with things unborn to rest,  
Ideal beauty, changeless stone."

This beautiful myth may represent a very common failing of human nature; for Pygmalion was not the only person who fell in love with his own handiwork. On the other hand, a feeling of depression and self-depreciation is that which the artist most commonly experiences, when he has finished a work that has called forth his greatest powers, so rarely does it come up to his own ideal. Only God can behold His finished work and say of it that it is very good.

"Ill hap hadst thou, Pygmalion, when thy love  
Stepped from the marble world where she did dwell  
Remote, beyond thy most adoring word,  
In Art's fair regions inaccessible,  
And on thy human level came to move,  
By laws of life and love thereafter bound,  
Responsive to thine eyes, by thy touch stirred,  
The Goddess lost, the tender woman found.

Since, answering to thine ardent adoration,  
Thy statue and thyself together grew,  
Why wert thou not by Art's divine creation  
Into the world of marble born anew,  
Ever to stand in perfectest relation  
By her whose beauty thro' thy genius grew?

So should thy fate to all men's eyes be proving  
That love immortal to immortals clings :—  
Only the changeless counts on changeless loving,  
Only the dead love cannot use his wings."

Note to pages 125 and 126. Mr Watts notes with regard to this passage—"There are two pictures which should not be confused : (1) Olympus on Ida, painted in 1886, exhibited in 1887, as described by Dr Macmillan ; the other (2) painted some time before, and included in the collected exhibition at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1881. It was this picture which was etched and is known as the 'Three Goddesses.' It has a leafy background."—ED.

## Chapter IX

# Scenes and Incidents from Hebrew Story

VERY precious is the group of pictures which illustrate the Hebrew story, and form a special gallery of their own, which, if Watts had done nothing else, would have conferred immortality upon him. Few have drunk deeper of the spirit of sacred Scripture than he has done, or assimilated its teaching more thoroughly. In the Bible, as might have been expected, he recognised an inspiration of the highest kind. There are no dramas like those which it furnishes; and its scenes and incidents became in his hands the themes of great epic poems, only not in words, but in colours and forms. It is a remarkable circumstance, that the Bible, which seemed to the Jews to prohibit art, should nevertheless have inspired the highest art the world has known—the seers and prophets, the Madonnas and Christs of the old masters. The Jews were forbidden to make any image or outward likeness of God; and they wrongly included in this prohibition sculptured representations of living creatures, animals and human beings. They were not allowed even to lift a tool upon the stones of their sacred structures, which were to consist entirely of unhewn and unpolished boulders. Nowhere but in Jerusalem

could there be a legal sanctuary. As Renan says, "In ten centuries the Jews had only three temples to build, and of these two were certainly erected under the guidance of foreigners." Even on their coins there were stamped no portraits, but only geometrical and plant-patterns. In consequence of this want of art among the Israelites, there is an almost complete lack of such monuments and personal relics of the people in the Holy Land as we find among other nations of equal antiquity—such as Egypt, Assyria and Greece. The contrast is very striking. In point of fact, the Israelites never ceased to be a pilgrim nation. They lived in the Land of Promise as strangers and sojourners with God. Even when settled in walled towns and cities they preserved in their annual Feast of Tabernacles the memory of their early pastoral and nomadic life; and their war-cry in times of national revolution was, "To your tents, O Israel." Their national life was meant to be an example or object-lesson to all other people of the pilgrimage of faith, of sitting loosely to the things of earth and setting the affections upon spiritual and eternal things. It is on account of this inherited tradition of many ages probably that the Jews, who have attained the highest excellence in many other departments of literature, science and philosophy, have never in all their annals produced a sculptor, painter, or architect, who has achieved in art what Spinoza has done in philosophy, Heine in literature, or Meyerbeer or Mendelssohn in music.

In recent times, however, the old ancestral feeling towards art seems to have given way before the tendencies of western civilisation. We have living in our own country men like Solomon I. Solomon, A.R.A.,

of Jewish lineage, who are in possession of great artistic gifts. In his beautiful paintings, "Niobe," "Samson," "Cassandra," and "The Judgment of Paris," Mr Solomon has shown remarkable powers, akin to those of Watts himself. And in the founding of the Maccabean Society, of which he is president, he has striven to unite professional Judaism in London with the art culture of the day, and to dispel the ancient prejudice.

Watts' Biblical pictures were painted at different periods, but the series may be said to commence with the paintings which illustrate the birth, temptation and repentance of Eve. The story of the Garden of Eden has always had a great fascination for the artist, as it has for every thoughtful mind, seeing that it is a wonderful picture of man's experience, clothed in the poetic garb in which all truth has come down to us, for poetry is the celestial dress of truth. The "Creation of Eve" was exhibited about ten years ago in the Academy, under the title "She shall be called Woman." For twelve years Watts brooded over this conception until it matured into its present form; "a figure of opulent and barbarous vehemence, blossoming up among a tumult of blossoms, as if the spirit of the earth had taken a new form more wonderful than the form and colour of the flowers." This painting is one of the vaguest and least obvious of his pictures; this vagueness, which is a cause of offence to many bewildered spectators, who want everything to be immediately comprehensible, and will not take the trouble to think about anything, is nevertheless full of poetic suggestiveness. It appeals more to the imagination than to the eye; and its

apparent crudeness of effect, so far as colour and form are concerned, is skilfully intended to draw away the thought from mere technical accuracy to the ideal or spiritual meaning. It is not the bare literal fact of the creation of woman, the physical side of it, to which he wishes to direct our attention, but to the great principles that underlie it. We are induced to consider why woman was created. "It is not good for man to be alone. I will make an help-meet for him." It is not enough that he has the high communion of God and the angels. He is still alone in spite of the august fellowship. They are not on his level. He requires one of his own flesh and blood, one with him in heart and mind, but of a somewhat different nature, who should be his other self, who should fill up and round his inequalities, share his work in the world, and cheer and refine his spirit. The human race flowered literally in Eve. She was the first fair blossom of humanity, by which all its beauty of form and colour, all its sweetness and fragrance and fruitfulness was revealed. Out of this blossom came the seed of the race, for Cain and Abel were the first-born of mankind, the joint-offspring of Adam and Eve, Eve herself being the prior offspring of Adam.

In this wonderful way, divine and human, our first mother took upon herself the main burden of that part of man's mission which bids him multiply and replenish the earth, in order that he might be left free to fulfil the other, viz., to subdue it. And in fulfilling this mission woman elevates the race of man by exercising a mother's influence over their common offspring. The birth of woman seems an after-thought of God; for we are told that the work of creation was finished,



and God saw everything that He had made, and behold it was very good. Man had been formed from the dust of the earth, and he was put into the Garden of Eden, where he dressed it and kept it all by himself, we know not how long. But it was not in reality an after-thought, for God has no after-thought. The interval of loneliness was allowed to transpire, in order to show that there were higher considerations in the moral nature of man that led to the creation of woman.

Basing his conception upon this primary significance of woman's creation, Watts wishes to show in his wonderful picture what is still constantly taking place, the awakening of her from the sleep of ignorance and contented inferiority to the consciousness of her true nature and power. The proper function and mission of woman is one of the great questions of the age; and the painter enables our eye to see it. On his canvas is a beautiful female figure, with the glow of creation fresh upon it—the light falling full upon the upper part of it, as if to bring out prominently the nobler parts of the human being, the heart and brain located in that region, and another light shining on the feet firmly planted upon the solid realities of the earth. The central part of the body is veiled with a modest cloud, whose ministry of purity and innocence is emphasised by the tall, snow-white annunciation lily that grows up to her waist. The flowers and doves at her feet represent the world of ordinary beautiful and harmless things in which woman's life is spent, the charms of her everyday existence. The bed of crocuses on which she treads, reminding us how Tennyson and Watts had a special

love for this flower, suggests the spring-time of her higher life ; and the misty rainbow that floats indefinitely over her figure, symbolises the smiles and tears that make her life like an April day. While hidden among the flowers and doves, we see the gleam of the serpent's folds, showing that danger to the higher life lurks among innocent things, and that those affections that are meant to bless life may often ensnare the soul to its ruin. By painting her head above earthly levels, the artist shows how her womanhood rises up to all lofty attainments, and lifts the hands and the heart up to God ; and by half-hiding the uplifted face in shadow, he shows how her noblest qualities come from a darkening trust and the gloom of pain. Adam's address to Eve in Mrs Browning's "Drama of Exile" is "the best commentary" on whatever may seem obscure in this suggestive picture. The painter has broken away most completely from rules and traditions, and yet he has kept in view the purest ideals in art, the union between originality of design and perfection of craftsmanship. How much more delicate is this suggestion of the birth of Eve, than the grossly realistic carving of the same incident on the façade of the Duomo of Orvieto—where Adam is seen asleep with a great gash or opening in his side out of which Eve is issuing !

The second picture of the great trilogy of Eve represents the Temptation. It shows Eve with her face buried amid a profusion of leaves and flowers and fruit in the bowers of Eden, her hand touching the shell-like apple blossom, her nostril inhaling the fragrance of the fruit, and her mouth taking the fatal bite. God made man innocent and upright, and placed

him in a world of beauty and brightness. Eden was the work of God, the pattern of His thought and purpose for man. And the remembrance of that fair Eden prevents man from forming dark thoughts of God regarding the origin of evil. The root of sin is in man, not in God's world ; and the evil that blighted Eden came from him and not from God. The temptation of Eve contains the germ and pattern of all temptation, and reveals the method by which it invariably carries on its baleful work. It shows how Satan succeeds by half truths, when falsehoods on the one hand, and whole truths on the other, would be sure to fail. He insinuates a doubt as to whether our first parents understood aright the Divine prohibition regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. "Yea, hath God said—ye shall not eat of every tree?" It is as if he had said, "Surely it is not possible that a wise and gracious Being could forbid so innocent an indulgence, and issue a prohibition for which no kind of reason can be given." He thus makes an indirect reflection upon the character of God, and causes the woman to think that He is not so good and wise as she had supposed Him to be, seeing that He so seriously restricts the liberty of herself and her husband. She gives way to the temptation. She waxes bold enough to stretch forth her hand, to pluck the fruit of the forbidden tree and to eat of it. Sensuality, vanity, ambition lend their aid ; doubt and distrust pass into open unbelief ; and when her husband joined her, seduced by her example, and saw further than she saw at first, that Eve did not die from eating of the fruit, everything conspired to that fatal act of disobedience and ingratitude which,

as Milton says, "brought down all our woe with loss of Eden."

The third of the trilogy is the finest. It places before us Eve in the attitude of one overwhelmed with remorse. Too late she has found out the falsehood of the serpent; found that within the sphere of God's commandments all the true good of the human being is found; while the desire for a good beyond that sphere breaks up the beauty and harmony of Eden, "like an image in a mountain lake which rains disturb." She has her back to the spectator, and is treading under foot a white lily, symbol of her innocence, while a magnificent cascade of golden hair falls to her feet from her head, which is bent in grief. There is no demonstration of cunning craftsmanship in the picture; and yet the bowed head and beautiful limbs are delicately painted, and show the marvellous directness and ease of the painter's method. The hand that has made the figure to live upon the canvas has concealed its own skill; the artist is merged in his creation, which is the ultimate test of all artistic effort. We think of the bitter repentance and unutterable sorrow of Eve, not of the power of the mind that conceived, and the hand that brought out her story so vividly before us. As an interpretation of a great human tragedy it has a haunting power. Watts is possessed himself so wholly with his subject, that he has expressed it with that inevitableness of spontaneity which makes a really noble picture. Eve, the would-be god, moaned like a lost child in the darkness, and prayed to be taken home again into her old paradise. But her repentance and grief have highest hope. It is not all misery. There is a

curse on the serpent, on the ground, everywhere, but *not on man*. There is no curse to the man or woman who suffers in hope. And thus what might have been a judgment unto death had Eve continued impenitent, became a moral discipline unto life when she saw her sin in its true light, and turned away from it to God.

For dramatic effectiveness the picture of the "Death of Abel" is most impressive. We see Cain in the first moment of awaking from the passion which led him to do the dreadful deed, overwhelmed with remorse. His dark form stoops over his brother's prostrate figure, whose ghastly pallor is brought out by the light which casts Cain's body into shadow, and his hands cover his face in an agony of despair. Above him the clouds open, revealing the heavenly host in various attitudes, all expressive of their mournful concern for this new thing in the universe—the first death—the wonder and fear which this awful unknown fruit of human sin had produced. And following up the story of Cain, the artist has made a powerful epic poem of the world's first tragedy. He shows the first murderer coming back from his weary wanderings in search of rest, to the rude, earth-built altar on which his brother had offered up his acceptable sacrifice. His sufferings have deepened his repentance and purified his character, and haggard and worn-out he throws himself on the altar, recognising the justice and righteousness of his doom. With true insight the artist has painted the angel of sympathy hovering over him in pity; the curse is removed, and the forgiveness of God calms his agitated spirit as the light of heaven illumines his worn-out frame.

The situation reminds one irresistibly of the Orestes

of Æschylus. The poet describes the Furies seizing him immediately after he had slain his mother. These personified terrors of an accusing conscience pursue him in all his restless wanderings, and penetrate even into his dreams of the other world. At length, driven by the scourges of remorse, he fled to the Oracle of Apollo, acknowledging his sin and imploring divine pardon and protection. While he prayed to the gods the Furies slept on the altar steps, and he was bidden by celestial counsel to go to Athens, to submit himself to the tribunal of the Areopagites, and there to make atonement for his sin. From this ordeal he returned pardoned and purified, in harmony with heaven and with his own conscience, and the Furies troubled him no more. The importance which Watts himself attached to this picture of Cain may be judged by the large size of it, and also by the fact that he chose it as his diploma picture on the occasion of his election to the membership of the Royal Academy. The picture of "Satan" is a half-length figure of heroic size, altogether nude. Its head is turned away from the spectator, and one cannot see the expression of the face, and so cannot tell whether it is of the type of Mephistopheles, of the Biblical Satan, or of the mediæval devil. This mystery in which the Evil Spirit, embodied in such a massive and gigantic form, is involved, adds no doubt to the grandeur of the painting; but it might be urged that a subject of such size should be full-length, and should have its countenance clearly revealed in order to be intelligible and impressive.

The themes connected with the Deluge have found in Watts a worthy expositor. He has painted no less

than five very remarkable pictures representing some suggestive phase or incident of it. In the first picture we see the Ark in the process of building. Noah, a very fine, venerable figure, with thoughtful eyes and floating beard, is carrying several huge planks in his arms; his stalwart sons are kneeling or sitting down hard at work, shaping the wood or fitting it to its place in the structure; while his daughters are ministering to them, either bringing food, or the lighter materials which are required in the building. In the background are the cities and homes of the inhabitants, while in the distance is the sea with its billows rising, and over it is a sky that is darkening with clouds, all prophetic of the doom that is hanging over the world. The whole scene is waiting, expectant. It preaches righteousness indeed to those who have eyes to see; and we do not wonder that the Ark was so many long years in building in order that it might be a silent Bible, a picture-book, warning the simple inhabitants of the world to turn from their wickedness, and encouraging the righteous family of Noah to perseverance in their saving work. It is no myth or parable that we see in this group of figures. They are all too much in earnest. The coming catastrophe seems suspended like the sword of Damocles over the world ready to fall. The air is ripe with the signs of its approach; a sense of dread seems to brood over every living thing, and the threatened doom is kept back until God's gracious purposes are accomplished.

Another picture of the Deluge represents the dove returning to the Ark, over the wide waste of waters, carrying in its bill the olive leaf—symbol of a world emerging from the awful disaster to begin a new

course of higher and purer development. The desolation is made all the more dreary that there is no sign of the Ark visible in all the horizon—nothing to remind one that there is any life in all the world, save that green leaf and the gentle bird. The far-extending parallel lines of water, without any waves or broken surfaces, speak of a shoreless ocean, whose long wash increases the monotony and loneliness. It is an aimless tide forever restless and formless, accomplishing nothing by its ceaseless movement, surging on with resistless power and impressive fixedness of purpose and pitiless majesty over the grave of a perished world. There is sorrow on that sea, if ever there was on any sea in the world.

In the third picture of the Deluge group we see the dove in the fork of a tree that rises above the waves, returning no more to the Ark. The only feature of the scene is this tree, bearing evident traces of having been bruised and battered by the pressure of the waters. Ivy wreaths, much torn and dishevelled, with here and there a leaf appearing on the long, naked, twining roots that climb up the tree; and at its foot, a folded cloak of richest material and hue, with strings of pearl that had encircled the neck of some fair dead form on it, floating by from a drowned corpse, is caught by the tree, and exhibited as a most significant survival of the appalling catastrophe. It is most suggestive that the green leaf should be presented on the dead tree, for it is literally as well as figuratively the creator of all life. It is by its agency alone that inert inorganic matter is changed into organic matter, which furnishes the starting-point of all life. It is by the green leaf, that the order and beauty of



nature are formed, that the air is purified and rendered fit to breathe, that the seasons and zones are formed, and the world made a suitable home for man's habitation. All these were destroyed by the universal wreck of the Deluge. They are all brought back by the green leaf, which alone of all nature's objects conserves and creates. All else consumes and destroys.

The fourth picture of the Flood represents the forty-first day of the great cataclysm. The waters are abating, though the mighty Deluge still asserts its destructive force. But there is hope and promise. The Ark is barely visible on the heights of Ararat, surrounded by clouds which become more luminous as they mount to the zenith. The whole sky is taken possession of by the Bow in the clouds, formed by the power of light and heat, dissipating the darkness and dissolving the multitude of waters into vapour, and consisting of a succession of circular rainbows, one beyond the other, with rays of light passing through and uniting them, lighting up all the dark remains of the storm. Attention is thus directed to the one thing only, the sign of the great world covenant, that seedtime and harvest, summer and winter, cold and heat, day and night should never cease, opening its blossom of light out of the very bosom of the gloomy tempest. It is a very striking representation; but it may be questioned if it represents fairly what Noah actually saw. Is it not more likely that the first rainbow was what every rainbow we have seen ever since has been, half a circle, with its feet resting at opposite points of the earth? It is only half a rainbow that we can see in a world so full of trouble and storm as this is, emblematical of the partial and

temporary cure of the world's sorrow. Only in heaven can we see, when this fleeting dispensation is ended, and all things are finished and perfected, a rainbow *round about* the Throne, in sight like unto an emerald, emblem of the completeness of the peace of heaven.

And then comes, appropriately concluding the series, "The sacrifice of Noah," as beside the stranded Ark on the shoulder of Ararat, that becomes first a fair green island in the sea, and then as the waters lowered a lofty mountain peak grim and black and desolate, he offered on the altar of primitive boulders which he erected, a burnt-offering in gratitude to God for the preservation of himself and his house, and dedicated himself and all his possessions to His service. He took possession of the new world by an act of religion, acknowledging the rights of Him who is the universal Proprietor, and sanctifying his own right to have dominion over every living thing under God. Questions of the authenticity and of the extent of the Flood do not trouble Watts. He finds in this story as in the others, a great moral lesson. The Flood is a type of the great revolutions which appear to be necessary in the history of the world, which come ever and anon to destroy a society that has become effete, and to establish out of the universal wreck a higher and happier state of things.

Another Old Testament subject whose fullest teaching Watts has succeeded in catching is the "Meeting of Jacob and Esau." No one gazing on that picture could convince himself that the story of the patriarch has no historical truth. The incident has none of the vagueness and uncertainty of myth. No myth ever

existed such as this, so natural in occurrence, so artless in feeling, so harmonious in colouring. If we cast away its Biblical explanation, the story becomes incomprehensible to us. On the right hand we see Esau, apparently the stronger nature of the two, taking the initiative, leaving his armed retainers behind, and stepping forward to welcome the brother from whom he had been so long separated, and from whom he had last parted in an anger so bitter, that he threatened to take his life. Esau behaves with a splendid generosity. He forgets everything but that he is Jacob's twin-brother, who had often played with him in the same tent, and around the same mother's knee; and yielding to the overpowering feeling that has taken possession of him, he falls on his neck and weeps.

We are apt to fancy that Esau suffered an irreparable injury when he was deprived of his birthright and the blessing of his father; and our sympathies go out therefore more to him than to the brother who had so meanly supplanted him. But if he sustained any loss, he soon got over it. He obtained in place of the patriarchal birthright, that which he really cared for, the birthright of worldly prosperity. He became a chieftain of the desert, rich and strong and renowned; and he appears before us, at this touching meeting of the brothers, without the trace of any shadow on his life. Watts has admirably depicted his true nature, as the big, burly hunter, with his quiver full of arrows, warm-hearted, loving, and chivalrous, though of hasty passions—a better and more lovable man, a more simple and rounded character to begin with. But there are subtle marks which the artist

has laid hold of and depicted graphically, which show why he was passed over in the Divine selection. He lived upon impulse and had a feeble perception of the unseen, and a narrow capacity for anticipating the future. He had not the spiritual insight which was required in one who was to be the founder of a new dispensation of grace to mankind, and the head of a covenant race. All this is made manifest in the very way in which he greets his brother, in his very attitude, treading firmly upon the earth, as if belonging to it and taking possession of it as his heritage.

That figure of Esau in Watts' picture is a powerful commentary upon the Bible representation of him. He has caught the spiritual likeness in the most admirable manner and transmitted it on his canvas in such a way that we see it at once. It is a clear, full, satisfactory explanation of St Paul's single arbitrary statement, "The elder shall serve the younger, as it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." On the left hand of the picture Jacob comes before us, and we are greatly struck with the contrast between himself and his brother. His very dress is different. Instead of being wrapped tightly round him as in the case of the strong, agile hunter Esau, his robe is that of a "plain man dwelling in tents." It wraps his head and falls around him in loose folds, proclaiming that he is a pilgrim seeking an inheritance which the world cannot give him. He almost shrinks from the embrace of his brother, as if ashamed of the great injury he had done him, and feeling himself unworthy of his generous goodness. There is no passionate impulsive demonstration, but only a quiet feeling of satisfaction, as if

thankful that this crisis of his life, which he had looked forward to with such foreboding of evil, was safely over. On his countenance there is the softening and hallowing influence of the mysterious conflict with the angel at Peniel, and we see how his shame, his banishment from home, his misery, the Divine discipline in all these trials, has ennobled him, while it has left its traces on his pale drooping face, and sad closed eyes. He seems awestruck with the thought that the unexpected success that attended his meeting with his brother, was the open answer of the day to the secret prayer of the night—that his reconciliation with man was the result of his previous reconciliation with God. The relation between him and God which he had strained by his sin was first re-constituted; and then the relation between his brother and himself which he had broken off by his wrong-doing, was renewed with deeper tenderness and truer trust.

The heavenly visitant of Jacob at Peniel continued to the last unknown. He refused to tell His name. Jacob saw not His face, or His similitude. But he saw the face of Esau, and in the face of Esau the Divine image and likeness revealed themselves. The face of man became to him the face of God. That was the dial on which human eyes could read the mighty workings of the powers unseen. We cannot see the sun at midnight; he has set behind the dark hills of time, and there is no sign of him in all the vague, dim horizon; but there on the face of the moon, in the lone waste of the midnight sky, we see his image reflected. His rays pass over our heads in the darkness, unseen and unknown, and come back to us in the brightness of the moonlight that is irradiating heaven.

and earth. And so in the darkness of Jacob's night of wrestling with the angel at Peniel, mortal vision could not behold Him who dwelleth in light which is inaccessible and full of glory, but His rays passed over him in the darkness, and he could see the shining of God's face in the changed aspect of his brother's face on the morrow. That was the revelation which God gave to him of Himself. That was the answer to his request, "Tell me thy name." The Sun of Righteousness rose upon him with healing in His wings; and in the healing of the deadly breach between him and Esau, he could say of Esau, "I have seen thy face, as though I had seen the face of God."

Is it not a wonderful expression, full of rich meaning and suggestion? And where could Jacob have seen the face of God in a more clear and convincing manner at that moment, than in the generous face of his brother, from which every trace of evil passion had passed away, and love reigned alone? That was the most beautiful sight in all the world to him. Where could there be a truer incarnation of God's forgiving grace than in his brother's gracious forgiveness? Where could there be a more satisfying revelation of God's love than in the whole-hearted love of his brother? Not in the face of the starry heavens in all their magnificence, not in the face of the flowery earth in all its beauty, could Jacob see God's face so adequately represented as in the face of Esau, beaming with tenderness and love, and shining with those highest qualities which exalt man and bring him into closest likeness to God. "I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and

persecute you, that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven." The most God-like thing in man is pardoning love, and Esau with his earthly affections lifted into the heavenly, was at that moment, whatever he might have been before, and whatever he might be afterwards, truly a child of the Heavenly Father.

There is meaning in every line of Jacob's figure. The painting of the prominent leg which bends forward, with its shrunk sinew and halting step, wounded by the awful touch of the Angel, shines with the idea which it expresses. It satisfies the spiritual view. The whole aspect of Jacob, thoughtful, sad, emaciated, brings him before us as being indeed a pilgrim in the world, who saw something beyond the world's hopes which filled his soul with awe, and made his life a constant aspiration. The birth-right which he filched from his brother so meanly, brought him hard service, stern warfare, constant struggle and endurance. He got the privilege of the blessing easily, but he had to win the reality with much toil and sorrow. By a severe discipline the Angel redeemed him from the evil of his lot, and the deadlier evil of his nature. He sinned and suffered as few have done ; he wrestled as few have had strength to wrestle for power with God and man as a spiritual Prince. Halting painfully on his thigh, he went on his pilgrim way, ennobled, purified, saved. The wonderful painting of the meeting of Jacob and Esau which expresses all this, is one of the most suggestive pictures which the poet-artist has given us. Nowhere have we anything like such graphic portraiture as here. He has entered into the very soul of the

early Scripture characters, whose sayings and doings have a broad human significance, typical of what men will say and do under the same conditions to the end of time. And he has painted Jacob claiming open brotherhood with all humanity, and enabled us to realise that the God of Jacob is indeed the name of our own God. It is a work indeed full of felicities in every feature.

In Samson, that strange Hebrew Hercules, whose character and life are altogether unlike the other heroes of sacred story, he has depicted a type of man such as the Hebrew tradition probably commemorates and had as its original Samson Agonistes. We think of him as light of heart, and full of sportive mirth, but Watts paints him in his picture in serious, thoughtful mood, with a far-away look in his eyes that yet seem to see nothing, feeling how far short he has come of his great consecration; how the Spirit's power has been to him a gift endowing him at times with supernatural strength, but not a sanctifying grace always abiding in him and transforming his nature. And perhaps this was a more common mood with him, though he does not give way to it, than the joyousness which overflowed in mirthful tricks and plays upon words, which is associated with him. His story, if we rightly consider it, was pathetic and tragic in the highest degree. The young knight of God sits down on a rock after his terrible encounter with the Philistines, whose dead bodies lie in heaps around him. The jawbone with which he has slain them lies white and polished at his feet, its blood-stains having been cleansed by the stream that flows from it to quench his burning thirst. He is weary and worn-out with



his stupendous exertions. The Spirit of the Lord that had come upon him and given him the prowess of a thousand men has departed, and he suffers the sad reaction of such high excitement. He feels the weakness of his will to hold his strong passions in leash. He feels that though he could wrestle with and rend asunder the young lion, with no weapon but his naked hand, he cannot wrestle with and subdue his own wild, ungoverned desires. The chains of his own easily besetting lusts bind his spirit stronger far than the withes and cords of the Philistines round his mighty thews. There was splendid promise in his opening manhood. He had the perfection of youthful beauty and strength. But he fell very low and dragged his honour in the mire. And yet he has still upon his bare head the shock of untouched hair which is the sign of the Nazarite vow, the pledge that he is upheld by God and endowed with power above his own, and consecrated to the Divine service from his mother's womb. And this gives him an inward strength to go through his dread probation, deprived of strength and eyesight, in the lowest deeps of darkness and wretchedness, till his hair begins to grow again, and he feels some mysterious stir of returning power, and is nerved to the supreme effort, the tremendous self-immolation, in which he avenges his own hapless fate, and delivers his country. Through faith he obtains in the end that gleam of hope, from beyond death, which rests upon his grave.

A very effective picture is "Jonah preaching in the streets of Nineveh," exhibited in the Royal Academy in 1895, and destined to be given to the nation. At first sight it repels. The fierce fanatical face with

disordered hair and "eye in fierce frenzy rolling," lifted to the lofty buildings between which he threads his slow way, and with outstretched naked arms, and palms spread out and bent downwards in deep shadow—shocks the superficial observer. But as he gazes this first feeling passes away, and a sense of the prophet's power gains upon him. It is a most realistic picture, and enables one to understand how the preacher made so great an impression upon the Ninevites. He is in mortal earnest, and seems to be on fire with his message. On his gaunt, lined countenance there is all the terrible experience of the entombment in the sea-monster's maw, during which he cried to God out of the depths. In the background is skilfully represented in three parallel friezes—after the manner of the Ninevite sculptures on the walls of Nebuchadnezzar's palace—the great typical sins to which the heathen were addicted, and of which they were warned to repent, gambling, drunkenness, and especially greed and covetousness as embodied in a number of figures on the floor, crawling up to the money-bags scattered over it. There can be little doubt that these are the prevailing vices of our modern Babylon; and therefore it needs that a new Jonah should go through our streets, and with even more than the fiery energy of the old, denounce them.

The "Daughter of Herodias" graphically tells the familiar story. Her beauty, the fatal gift with which her house was so richly endowed, is of a bold and sensual type. Such a face, with its fierce, unflinching hawk eyes, indicated a character which hardly needed any prompting from her mother to ask for such a vindictive reward for her immodest dancing. The

executioner has brought the charger to her, but the ghastly head of John the Baptist is not shown in it. It is concealed by some arrangement of the napkin ; and thus our senses are not horrified by the actual spectacle, while our imagination is excited by what we do not see. The grim Herod standing by and looking on, appears as if he were heart-stricken with regret, feeling that he has paid too dear for his pleasure, in the loss of the one man whom he respected, and who kept him, so far as it was possible, in the paths of righteousness.

No one has made the "Good Samaritan" so real to the soul's eye as Watts in his picture of that name. It ceases to be a parable ; it becomes a vivid incident of daily life. The naked, dead-alive condition of the Jew who had fallen among thieves, clinging with a despairing grip to the supporting arm of the stranger who has come at the last extremity to his help ; the benevolent face of that stranger and alien—so full of pity, so capable to save, so prompt to interpose, could not possibly have been presented in a more graphic way ; while the lonely, desolate region, half-way between Jerusalem and Jericho, is depicted with a magic touch which adds immensely to the pathos of the scene. The whole story is seen as by a lightning flash, and it makes its appeal to the heart in a manner which cannot be resisted. "Go thou and do likewise" is felt with irresistible power by every one who gazes upon that moving sight, and the selfishness that would make one pass by on the other side, and disclaim all connection with a human brother in distress, whose creed and conditions of life are different from ours, becomes impossible. This picture was

painted in 1850, and presented by the artist to the City of Manchester, as a tribute of admiration to the noble philanthropy of Thomas Wright.

The whole attitude of the young man who made "the great refusal," is so painted by the artist as to express the genuine sorrow of his soul. His face droops and is turned aside, so that we do not see any features, but we imagine that we can read in it the sharp conflict between the command of the "Good Master," to sell all that he had and give to the poor and then follow Him, and the covetousness of his heart, for he had great possessions. His rich dress and fur-lined cloak and massive gold chain tell us of his wealth. But it is incapable of satisfying the craving of his soul for some good which is still beyond his reach. He is conscious that all his efforts have failed to obtain for him the blessing of eternal life; and he comes to Jesus in the hope that He may advise him. The wealth of Christ's poverty stands out against the poverty of his wealth; and the self-emptying humility of our Lord in His repudiation of the title "good," contrasts curiously with the boastful self-confidence of one who had kept all the commandments from his youth. The rich man obtains in his interview with Jesus a glimpse of higher and nobler things than he knew before—the grandeur of a self-sacrificing life. He comes into contact with realities instead of semblances with which he had previously been satisfied. He sees for the first time the vast difference between the wealth of the soul and the wealth of things. But in spite of it all, the heart cannot abandon its old love. It cannot give up the love of the world, the distinction which great possessions

confer upon him ; and he goes away grieved because the price asked for the goodness for which he craves is too much, and his grief is seen in the listless look of the arm hanging down by his side, and in the twitching of his jewelled fingers, suggesting uncertainty whether to open or shut them.

Watts, when painting this graphic picture, said of it, "Now I am doing a man's back—little else but his back to explain, 'he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.' Fancy a man turning his back on Christ rather than give away his goods! They say his back looks sorry. I don't know. It is what I meant his back to express." The command addressed to him to sell all that he had, has no "Go thou and do likewise" in it to others. For many men, for most men, differently situated, with other duties and responsibilities attached to their possessions, it would simply be the wrong thing to do. It was right only for him with his ideal longings, the easily besetting sin of his covetousness, and the burden and care of his wealth—the only way to perfection. Did he turn his back forever on Jesus? Surely there is no foundation for the vivid picture which Dante in his "Inferno" presents of him as blown about like an autumn leaf on the borders of the other world, rejected by heaven and despised by hell—

*"L' ombra di colui*

*Che fece per viltata il gran rifiuto."*

Christ's own words in connection with his departure may be looked upon in the light of a prophecy of his return.

How admirably, too, has Watts represented the "Prodigal Son" as an example of the larger liberty which sin offers to the deluded soul, and which ends in

destitution and in the company of the swine. Unlike Albert Dürer in his famous picture of the same subject, who places the prodigal son in the centre of a village, all whose doors are closed upon him, surrounded by the swine who are feeding upon the garbage, Watts depicts the prodigal, with a true appreciation of the situation, as sitting alone, far from the abodes of men, cast upon the cruel mercies of nature in her mountain solitudes. He is resting at the foot of a huge fig-tree whose leaves overshadow his nakedness from the scorching sun, in a woe-begone attitude, feeling to the full the wretchedness of his position, with a most expressive countenance full of sadness and remorse, bethinking himself of the bread enough in his father's house and to spare, while he perishes for lack of food, and there is no one to pity or help him. His forlorn, destitute look, shows the ruin of a nature so noble that it cannot be content with its circumstances, but recalls a happier and worthier condition. The contrast between the two natures, the human and the swinish, is brought out with subtle power. The swine lying in indolent sensual enjoyment on the ground, show the satisfaction of creatures that are at home in their circumstances, whose wants are bounded by their nature, and supplied in the wilderness where man finds nothing suitable for him. Man has a larger nature than any husks of the world's good things can feed—which nothing that God can give—no creature good—nothing but God Himself can satisfy. And therefore he is miserable even when worldly things are most favourable to him, until he has come to himself, and resolved that he will arise and go to his Father, and to the true home of his spirit.

## Chapter X

# The Artist as Interpreter of Italian and English Poets

THE varied genius of Watts has found congenial expression in themes borrowed from the English and Italian poets. He has taken some of his pictures from Boccaccio, Dante, Shakespeare, Spenser's "Faery Queen," and from the poems of Tennyson. These pictures are, however, much fewer than those from the Greek poets and from the Bible; but they are not inferior in originality of conception and beauty of execution. The pathetic episode of "Paolo and Francesca" in Dante's "Divina Commedia," which has been a favourite study with every poet and painter, which inspired the Abbé Liszt's orchestral music to the "Inferno," and which Carlyle said was "woven in rainbows on a ground of eternal black," never had such exquisite justice done to it as in Watts' famous picture.

"Quali colombe, dal disio chiamate,  
Con l' ali, aperte e ferme al dolce nido  
Volan per l' aer, dal voler portate."

It is unique among his works in this, that it is the only picture which expresses the ideas of another mind; but though it expresses them it renders them in a different way, and is a striking illustration of the

fact that it is the individual conception and not the subject itself that makes the picture, for the one may be old, but the other is new. He has put into visible form the very conception of the poet in all its power and tenderness.

It is a picture of dead passion, long over and gone, which makes the mournful story of the two ill-fated lives live over again before our eyes. It is further a wonderful illustration of the poet's terrible words:—

“What if this passion fleeting hence,  
Be fixed and frozen in permanence?”

It reveals the eternal perpetuation of the weariness of the senses, the endlessness of the swoon that follows desire fulfilled, but not satisfied by fulfilment. The memory of their love has indeed become immortal, but the glow of the romantic past is all extinct. What we see are the grey ashes of a fire that has burnt out, the shrivelled skin of the cocoon out of which the butterfly has emerged. All this is graphically depicted in the pale sheeted figures with shaded countenances, clasped in each other's arms, and yet separate with unclasped hands, Francesca still living in her terrible sorrow, and Paolo wailing his unceasing woe for the misery he has brought upon his love. In the half-closed eyes, the shrivelled lips, the hollow cheeks, the listless hands that have almost lost the sense of touch, the languor that is seen not only in the ghostly bodies, but in the very folds of the drapery that envelops them, we see the sad eternal consequences of a passionate attachment which in happier circumstances might have been as blessed as it was beautiful. Watts' picture in the estimation of most competent





PAOLO AND FRANCESCA.

*Reproduced from a photograph by FREDK. HOLLYER.*



judges is much finer than the far better known one by Ary Scheffer. It is the sublimation of human passion, in which all the earthly elements are purified and the mortal love is immortalised; whereas Ary Scheffer's conception still retains in the Fifth Circle of Hell a large measure of the old carnal experiences. There is too much of the flesh, and too little of the spirit. The loveliness of the woman makes one lose sight of the higher things that made their love the most moving thing in all literature; whereas the spiritual which predominates in Watts' masterpiece lifts one above all such gross associations, stirs a depth of sorrow and pity, which enables one to understand why Dante, pierced to the heart with unutterable suffering when gazing upon the hapless pair, swoons and "falls as a dead body falls."

Round the frame of Ary Scheffer's picture, designed no doubt by himself, runs ribbon-like the famous passage which Tennyson has immortalised in "Locksley Hall," "*Nessun maggior dolore, che ricordarsi del tempo felice nella miseria*";<sup>1</sup> and that is the sole lesson which his version of the tragedy teaches. But Watts' version enables us to see what Dante saw, and we are impressed like him with the irresistible conviction that the lovers were purified by truth and sacrifice, and that while their doom of eternal torment could never more be changed, they had mixed with it consolation unspeakable, for their very doom made them forever one, "one heart, one soul, one agony of recollection, one fathomless despair, but over all triumphant, one eternity of perfect union and of

<sup>1</sup>

"This is truth the poet sings,  
That a sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things."

perfect love." The same feeling is created by Stephen Phillips' magnificent tragedy, which one of the most sagacious of critics said, "had passages that moved with the footfall of the immortals." Paolo is made to speak thus :—

“ What can we fear, we two ?  
 O God Thou see'st us Thy creatures bound  
 Together by that law which holds the stars  
 In palpitating cosmic passion bright ;  
 By which the very sun enthrals the earth,  
 And all the waves of the world faint to the moon.  
 Even by such attraction we two rush  
 Together through the everlasting years,  
 Us, then, whose only pain can be to part,  
 How wilt Thou punish ? For what ecstasy  
 Together to be blown about the globe !  
 What rapture in perpetual fire to burn  
 Together ! Where we are is endless fire,  
 There centuries shall in a moment pass,  
 And all the cycles in one hour elapse !  
 Still, still together, even when faints Thy sun,  
 And past our souls Thy stars like ashes fall,  
 How wilt Thou punish us who cannot part ? ”

Bianca Capello, the unhappy wife of Francesco I., was a favourite subject of the Italian contemporary painters. Bronzino painted her portrait twice at least. One of the portraits is in the Uffizi Gallery, and the other in the Pitti Palace. In this artist's picture of the "Descent into Hades," Bianca is figured as Judith ; and Ruskin says of it, "that it is vile in colour, void in light and shade, vacant in invention, a heap of cumbrous nothingness"; and in this condemnation the portrait of Bianca shares. But Watts' portrait study is of an entirely different order. Its inspiration may be traced to Venice of the golden time, while its

actual execution was suggested by Rossetti's model. In this picture the artist has reached the highest point of technical accomplishment. It has a wonderful subtlety of flesh hues. She faces the spectator in the full-blown splendour of her beauty, a charming blonde of full outline and sensuous type. She is clothed in a black velvet dress with white lace; and she holds in her hands crimson and white roses. The background is a green curtain, concealing a grey and cloudy horizon, emphasising the beauty of the face.

An Italian superstition of the Middle Ages engaged with wonderful success the pencil of Watts while he was sojourning in Florence, and in it he who had been the pupil of Phidias in the study of the Elgin marbles at home, became the worshipper of Tintoretto in Italy. The *Fata Morgana* which Boiardo in his *Orlando Innamorato* imagined as a siren, fleeing from the pursuit of a knight, he embodies with singular deftness. She is depicted as having reached a thicket of dense foliage, and the knight has almost grasped the hem of her crimson robe when she flees still farther from him, and looks back at him with a mischievous glance which mocks all his eager efforts. It was a superstitious notion among the Italian peasants that this mystic being could only be effectually caught by having the lock of her forehead seized with a firm grasp. What is this but virtually saying in finer form, what time and every opportunity which it brings is preaching to us in loud tones, to seize it by the forelock and hold it fast, otherwise it will escape, and we shall lose it forever? So much had this idea, which is the commonplace of life, seized hold of Watts' genius, that he imaged it in two somewhat varied pictures:

one of which he presented to the city of Leicester, the birthplace of Thomas Cook, who originated the well-known system of travel which has since become world-wide, as a token of admiration for his services to the public. One might see a subtle appropriateness in this presentation, as indicating that one might change one's sky, but not one's nature, that the *Fata Morgana* of real contentment might evade the most arrant globe-trotter.

A finer conception of the subject became the property of Mr George M'Culloch and has been engraved with much success. The attitude of the outstretched arms is more rhythmic in the later than in the earlier version; they are beautifully rounded and moulded, and the figure altogether is much fuller and more voluptuous. The whole witching, laughing face is revealed, instead of being partially hidden by one arm. The pursuer is also a nobler type of man, with an open, eager look, and his helmet instead of being a close-fitting round casque, increasing the swarthy and ugliness of the face, is an open head-piece, winged like that of Mercury; and his arm outstretched to seize hold of the temptress is clothed with a fine sleeve of steel-chained armour. The other baffled figure that has failed to secure the lovely vision, relegated to the left of the picture and retreating in dark shadow, is entirely banished from the later version of the painting, and only two objects remain to fix the attention of the spectator; while beyond the flying temptress the dense maze of wood opens up, and a bright sunset glow shoots across the space, and illumines pursuer and pursued alike with a mystic light from the regions beyond. The Daphne

of Watts represents the baffling of our efforts to catch the personal source of nature's secret, leading us only to things that are seen and may be touched. The Fata Morgana represents the elusive character of earthly happiness, escaping us when we are nearing it most, deluding us by its fair appearance in the distance only to disappoint us in the reality when we come up to it. Watts has lavished upon this picture a richer warmth of invention, and a greater luxury of colour than usual.

The Italian Fata Morgana differs widely from the Celtic counterfeit of it, who was the sister of King Arthur and the daughter of Pendragon. In the Arthurian legends she figures as an enchantress who dwells in the Isle of Avalon, where she holds her court of fairy attendants, where flowers bloom un-fading, and golden fruit is continually ripening in the tranquil autumn air. The sailor sometimes sees her beautiful realm with its golden palaces rising into the still blue sky, and hears the music of lutes and singing voices charming the listening breeze. But as he approaches it all vanishes into fairy mist. He may indeed behold the mystic country, but he may never hope to land upon it. With King Arthur passed away the fairy Morgana; but it is fondly believed that she still dwells in her enchanted isle in the West, watching and waiting while her brother's wound is slowly healing, and then she will some day come back with him to the world, to redress the wrongs and cure the evils of the kingdom he once ruled so wisely and well.

A very popular picture which usually holds the spectator spellbound is taken from the Arthurian Epic. Riding through the forest, with its tangled vegetation

graphically painted, Sir Galahad has suddenly caught a glimpse of the mystic Sangreal, which was concealed from all ordinary vision.

“The times  
Grew to such evil, that the holy cup  
Was caught away to heaven and disappeared.”

The knights of King Arthur had gone in search of this hidden treasure. At the same time and in the same place, one could see it and another could not. The knights had the vision of the Grail in proportion to their purity. To some of them who saw it, it appeared veiled with a luminous cloud. But Sir Galahad, the knight of pure heart and unselfish living, who lost himself to save himself, beheld the glorious thing itself, clear and distinct. It is at this supreme moment when the heavenly vision appears to him that he is painted by the artist. He dismounts from his white horse, and stands bareheaded with fascinated eyes gazing upon the glorious vision revealed to him in the luminous sky through a break in the trees, and lighting up his face and armour. He listens with his whole soul for the voice, “Follow me.” Some of Arthur’s knights, when they had once caught a glimpse of the mystic cup, were so entranced by the sight that all other pursuits faded into insignificance compared with this holy quest, and Sir Galahad when he saw and obtained the sacred cup, sailed away to be crowned a king—“in the spiritual city.” The sword by which he conquered all difficulties “was as the sword of ten because his heart was pure.” The sermon which this beautiful picture of Christian knighthood teaches is painted upon an opaque canvas, but its hidden meaning



shines through a diaphanous veil. We deeply feel that any art-criticism of such an ideal representation is a very unsatisfactory thing. It dwells upon technical details and allows the truth to escape. Instead of lowering its bucket to the depths of the cool sparkling well, it hardly reaches beyond the surface and comes up empty. We prefer to enjoy such a picture rather than search for the reasons of our enjoyment. We are content with the impression which the picture itself produces, believing that it is when we are thus wisely passive that we receive revelations which we should *never* get by active search. The inner meaning of the subject will come to us as the view of the Grail came to Sir Galahad, when our eye is single and our heart is pure, suddenly and unexpectedly; and we shall find that the idea which underlies the whole picture, and makes it lovely with a loveliness far surpassing that of hue and form so vividly delineated, is an intensely modern one, and as applicable to our day as to the far-off times of King Arthur. The painting has found an appropriate place in the chapel of Eton College, where it cannot fail to be an inspiration to the young minds that are trained there for the high places of the field, teaching them like the famous hero to wear in all temptations and trials the white flower of a blameless life.

Watts took special pains to think out the meaning of the poems of Spenser,—the “Poet of Beauty,” as Ruskin called him, who required some considerable space in order to do himself justice, and might therefore be supposed to be a little tedious, but whose works abundantly reward a careful and earnest study.

There is no finer comment than Watts' upon some of the obscure points of this great writer, which few people take the trouble to understand ; and nowhere do we find a more wonderful union of the romantic and allegorising genius of Spenser, with the vivid illustration of it in hue and form by an artistic genius of the same kind of mind as his own. Watts found in his masterpiece, the "Faërie Queene," several pictures of fancy which called forth his inspiration. With charming skill he depicts Una, that personification of natural or instinctive holiness, and her bold Red Cross Knight, setting out on their adventures together. The Red Cross Knight is clothed in armour, with his shield on his back and his truncheon in his hand, mounted on his noble steed. Una by his side is riding on a mule, with a downcast face and modest expression, her mantle falling from her shoulders, and her dress disposed about her person in graceful folds. With much delicacy of insight Una is represented in the poem. Her holiness at first is of the untried kind, innocent, simple and sweet. It is an Edenic experience. And this is the look which Watts has managed to give to her countenance. Afterwards she is made to pass through sore trials in search of her lost knight, all of which had the effect of bracing her faith, sanctifying her love, and making her nature stronger and more enduring. Her holiness became ultimately that of the tried and disciplined saint, enriched by what she had passed through ; not a sentiment merely but a conviction, not a bloom on the surface of the soul but its very centre and substance. Most skilfully at the end of the poem she and her devoted knight are wedded, as partakers of a higher nature than either

of them possessed before they had started on their troubled course.

“A lovely lady rode him fair beside,  
 Upon a lowly ass more white than snow ;  
 Yet she much whiter ; but the same did hide  
 Under a veil that wimpled was full low ;  
 And over all a black stole she did throw ;  
 As one that inly mourned, so was she sad,  
 And heavy sat upon her palfrey slow ;  
 Seemèd in heart some hidden care she had ;  
 And by her, in a line, a milk-white lamb she led.  
 So pure and innocent as that same lamb  
 She was, in life and every virtuous love.”

The legend of Britomart has one very fine illustration from Watts' brush. The martial British maiden is indeed a most beautiful impersonation of chastity—"that first virtue, far above the rest." Minos vainly pursued the Cretan maiden who first bore the name with his love ; and at last to escape him she leaped into the sea, and was changed by Artemis into a goddess. Spenser modelled from her the likeness of his heroine, whose varied and severe fortunes brought out the strength and purity of her chastity in high relief against their dark background. It is remarkable that the poet chose not a nun or a vestal virgin as the impersonation of chastity, but a strong young woman, to whom love came as an imperious passion, when, with her nurse, she gazed in her father's house into the magic mirror and saw the countenance of her future lover, and was inspired to do doughty deeds. No cloistered virtue was hers, devoted to perpetual virginity, but a virile passion glowing in a fearless heart. The artist paints her as the poet imagines her, tall of stature, powerful of limb,

fashioned for the wielding of spear and shield, and disdaining to "finger the fine needle and nice thread" like other ladies. Watts gives a picture of her in a pillared hall, hung round with splendid tapestry. She is lying on the tessellated marble floor, turning over the leaves of a sumptuous book of landscapes. Her countenance has a thoughtful expression as if she listened to what deeply interested her. A jar with a long stemmed lily in it and at the top four large white flowers, stands before her.

The well-known story of Godiva has also deeply impressed the imagination of Watts. He contrives to give to her painful and naturally abhorrent sacrifice of herself, a high consecration from which all base suggestions are swept away as from a sacred shrine. You think only of her motive, to save her people from tyranny and oppression, when you gaze upon her act. The physical has no self-consciousness, and is best seen transfigured into the spiritual. Nowhere by pen or pencil has the story been treated so delicately and suggestively as in his lovely picture. He does not represent Godiva riding on her steed, but at the end of her heroic self-sacrifice. She has reached her home, dismounted from her horse, which is nowhere visible, and reached her own private room; and there the lofty purpose, which sustained her through this dreadful ordeal, yielded to the weakness of her feminine nature, and she fell into a deadly swoon. Her faithful female attendants rushed to her assistance. And it is a beautiful touch of nature that the old nurse who watched over her from her infancy, is pictured by the artist as casting a robe around her, with a face in which admiration, pity and tenderness are wonderfully blended.

Godiva was herself doubtless a historical personage, but her celebrated ride was an ætiological myth, which in the course of ages became attached to her, in the unaccountable way in which such myths get associated with some hero or heroine. Mr Hartland, in his "Science of Fairy Tales," shows that the essential points in it have many interesting parallels in the folk-tales of other countries. The legend may have been derived from the religious rites of the Bona Dea, which were performed in ancient Rome by women alone, and which men were forbidden under the severest penalties to intrude upon. This rite the Romans may have introduced into Britain; and the singular fact that in the cavalcade of a similar procession at Southam in Warwickshire, there are two Godivas, one of a fair white colour, and the other of a black colour, may be a link of connection between the fair complexion of the Roman matron who brought the custom into this country, and the native woad-painted British woman who adopted it. At St Briavels in Gloucestershire, instead of a procession among the municipal pageants of the town as at Coventry, there is a quiet annual distribution of bread and cheese to the congregation at church on Whitsunday. Tradition says that the privilege of gathering firewood from the wood at Handwells, was granted by the Earl of Hereford, the lord of the Forest of Dean, to the villagers on the same hard terms as those on which Lady Godiva obtained their privilege for the citizens of Coventry from her husband. It is impossible that Lady Godiva could have ridden through Coventry, for it was not in existence at the time, and had no streets, and consequently no tolls, until Godiva had been dead

at least a century. The only foundation for the myth was that she possessed vast wealth, with which she founded and endowed an abbey. This she did in the exact words of the chronicle, "stripping herself of all that she had." These words formed the basis of the popular legend.

The study of Ophelia, the pet dream of Helen Faucit's girlhood, the "Rose in May," who lived her whole life as a bud and not a full-blown flower, touches deeply by its mystic sadness and beauty. It is a perfect embodiment of Shakespeare's tender ideal. Millais' Ophelia is in quite a different style. Millais painted his picture when he was twenty-three, at which age the greatest painters, even Raphaël himself, were under the influence of their masters. But the young artist emancipated himself from all the influences of his teachers, and struck out a new line of art for himself; returned from old conventionalities to close and living contact with nature. In many respects this is his most beautiful picture. He has painted the drowning figure of the distraught maiden, carried gently along by the waters so soon to overwhelm her, amid a tangle of water-lilies and aquatic vegetation, breathing forth her swan song; all exquisitely painted, the woman, the leaves and flowers and reeds, just as Millais saw them in nature, but not idealised. But Watts paints the inner nature of Ophelia, not copied from a living woman or a lay figure, but seen only in the imagination, a perfect idealisation of woe. She has lost her memory, and with her memory all the remembrance of the dreadful things she has passed through, her ill-fated love for Hamlet, the tragic death of her father, and goes back to her unconscious childhood. She is

bending over a willow that overhangs a stream, with the willow leaves around her; and the utterly sorrowful look of the closed eyes, and the significant patient gesture of the lovely long-outstretched arm resting upon the bank, make a picture of the utmost forlornness.

## Chapter XI

### Allegories

WATTS is *par excellence* the painter of ideas put into symbolic form.<sup>1</sup> In this respect, as Ruskin has remarked, he differs widely from Burne Jones, who otherwise most closely resembles his style. Burne Jones paints the myths which are the perennial forms in which the thoughts of a people are embodied; Watts paints the allegories which are invented for the very purpose of expressing their thoughts at the time. Burne Jones finds his forms ready-made for him, and he pours his modern thought into their ancient moulds; Watts provides both the thought and the form, and "not only interprets but creates." Allegories differ widely from parables, the other mode of illustration often used by teachers, with which they are apt to be confounded. By none was this mode of instruction so frequently employed as by our Lord, for without a parable He spake not to the people. Parables veil the truth in material illustrations, and require to be afterwards unveiled by an interpretation from without, like writing with sympathetic ink which needs the application of heat to bring out its characters. Allegories on the other hand contain within themselves their own explanation, the lower object being put directly for the higher. It is not necessary that the allegory should

<sup>1</sup> Watts expresses the aim of his work thus: "An endeavour to put into visible form the ideas of the present age."—M. S. W.



be interpreted to us, because the thing signified is interpenetrated with the sign ; the qualities of the one being attributed to the other, and the two thus blended into one form of speech.

Parables belong more to the outer realm of nature and deal with the phenomena of daily life ; whereas allegories originate in the inner region of the imagination, and are explained by the processes of the mind itself. In some instances it might seem as if Watts pictures might properly be designated parables, for standing before a picture which puzzles us, when we are asked, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" we reply, "How can we unless some one teach us?" In his Palace Beautiful we now and then need the Interpreter to reveal to us the deep things we see around us. But for the most part his pictures are true allegories, which contain within themselves their own explanation, and are self-obvious to every one of understanding. Watts has made large and beautiful use of the immortal myths of Greece, as well as Burne Jones ; and he puts upon them, as Burne Jones does, a modern interpretation ; while Burne Jones on the other hand has allegories which interpret their own story with direct and wonderful impressiveness. But it is nevertheless abundantly clear that the distinction between the two painters is, that the one takes the old legend and interprets it for us in his own inimitable way ; whereas the other makes a legend for us to find out its meaning ; so that Burne Jones is a truly mythic painter, and Watts truly allegorical.

The works which Watts loved best to paint are allegories of this nature. He has a remarkable power of impersonating abstract qualities. He gives these not

merely flesh and blood in his creations, but breathes upon them by his genius until they become inspired with the noblest life. They become persons whom we can know and love, and admit into closest fellowship. His power in this respect is like that of Bunyan, who could make his allegorical abstractions live and move before us, so that each has a distinct individuality. They are not spiritual types or effigies or lay figures, but have a real personality, and act in character. A striking example of this happy faculty may be seen in the painting called "Aspiration." The idea was evidently suggested by the portrait of Mr Arthur Prinsep, which he drew in charcoal with long wavy hair, standing out from his head, like the mane of a fierce mænad.<sup>1</sup> It is not a portrait of the young soldier, though there are features of considerable likeness. It is a suggestion or a memory ; for Watts always avoided introducing the copy of an actual portrait into a picture which was designed solely to represent an idea. In this instance he painted without a model as was his custom, and tried to forget realities as much as possible ; and the resemblance to an actual face is so to speak accidental—a mere reminiscence of a friend, which could not help—Watts being the painter he is—being a good likeness. The picture of "Aspiration" represents a young soldier with large frank eyes full of guilelessness, bareheaded except that his long wavy hair, like that of Absalom, standing out round his brow, forms a bright halo which transfigures his face. He is clothed from head to foot with bright steel armour, and a chain shirt appears beneath his cuirass and breastplate. One hand is touching the hilt of the

<sup>1</sup> Afterwards General Arthur Prinsep.—G. F. W.

sword by his side, and the other carries a standard with the flag falling down unfurled from the staff. The earnest, lovable countenance, on which high hopes and generous aspirations are visibly imprinted, as well as the front of the armour, is lit up with the morning light of youthful endeavour. He has realised that life is a battlefield. He hears the heavenly voice that bids him overcome all hindrances in himself, and in the circumstances of life, and offers to him the noble prize of victory. He goes forth, dedicating his life when it is at its best and fairest to his high vocation. He can make much of it if he seeks noble ends only. But he has to sacrifice the world and the flesh and to resist the devil. If he toils not only for Christ's sake, but in Christ's spirit, he will realise what Browning said, "How very hard it is to be a Christian." But he will learn from Christ the lesson, and catch from Him the habit of endurance. Sporadic virtue is easy and cheap enough. It is a poor life that never stands above itself in some supreme moment of aspiration. But to live a life of aspiration—to stay on the lofty level, to breathe the keen air of the upper heights habitually—this is the strain of life. It is learned only by constant effort, and by many failures. But if we persevere, there is an end which will fulfil all our hopes and aspirations.

In the companion picture of the "Happy Warrior," we see what that triumphant end is. He is pictured as slain in battle. He has fallen in the thickest of the fight. Like the greatest Life ever lived, he failed as the world counts failure. But he succeeded in achieving the high end which he had set before him, beyond the range of most men's touch and sight. And out of his saddest experiences had come the

purest joy known to humanity. And now in the article of death, the pain vanishes, the darkness disappears, the fear subsides. There is a great calm in his soul. His helmet falls back from his head; and an angelic form, the fair symbol of his aspiration, as the shining heaven above him opens to receive his parting spirit, bends over him and imprints the kiss of everlasting peace upon his brow. It is a beautiful conception, carried out in the loveliest manner. No wonder that when exhibited at Munich some time ago, it was immensely admired by the Bavarian artists: it is now the property of the Art Gallery there. It has been exceedingly popular since the South African War began, among the relations of those who were engaged in or had fallen in the deadly strife. They found something in it that appealed to their deepest feelings, and comforted them in their anxieties and sorrows by showing to them the nobler side of war. Watts sent a copy of it to Lord Dufferin, as a special message, when his eldest son was killed at the Modder River; and nothing gave more consolation to the stricken heart of the venerable diplomatist. Lord Dufferin wrote to the present writer regarding his chivalrous son, who might himself have stood for the Happy Warrior stricken down in one of his first battles, and reaching in the article of death his own ideal: "It is a great calamity, for everybody loved my boy; he was so bright and kind and modest. But it is only his mother and I who can know what a good son he was, how loving, tender, dutiful and considerate."

"Or he must fall to sleep without his fame,  
And leave a dead unprofitable name—  
Find comfort in himself and in his cause ;



*G. & Maus*



And while the mortal mist is gathering, draws  
His breath in confidence of Heaven's applause :  
This is the happy Warrior ; this is he  
That every man in arms should wish to be."

A kindred picture is the "Eve of Peace," one of the artist's most finished works. A bareheaded, middle-aged warrior, with white streaks in his hair, of noble aspect, at the close of a battle, weary with victory, is looking down sadly into his helmet while the afternoon shadows are deepening around him. Beneath his upper garment he is wearing a suit of very fine chain armour. One hand holds his helmet, and the other a sword of antique design. All the details of the picture are profoundly symbolical. His age signifies that he has got beyond the hot, impetuous ambition of youth, and has acquired the sober, calm experience of life. His under-dress of armour, with a civilian's mantle flung over it, is indicative of peace supervening upon a time of war. The sword of ancient pattern is an object-lesson in the long history of human strife, in which the dread arbitrament of the sword has settled the disputes between nations and men. And the helmet of burnished steel, decked strangely with plumes of peacock's feathers, seems a mockery of all the pomp and splendour of war. It is all vanity and vexation of spirit ; and this is the reflection, the shadow of which passes over the countenance of the warrior.

Another abstract theme which Watts has impersonated is "Conscience," or the Dweller in the Innermost. At a first glance, one is very much perplexed about this picture. One must gaze for a long time at it till its meaning begins to dawn ; and even then one is not

sure that the correct meaning has been reached, or *all* the meaning which the picture was intended to convey grasped. A female figure with stern gesture and eyes like a flame of fire, is seen in the centre of a luminous mist that ripples round it to the edge. There is a radiant star in the middle of her forehead, and on either side are doves with soft plumage and half-outstretched wings. The breast is covered with a downy, loosely-fitting mantle, out of which at regular intervals protrude large dark feathers, which form a strange kind of halo around the face and neck. One arm is laid across her bosom, and the other supports her head in an attitude of meditation. In her lap are the arrows with which she pricks the hearts of men into conviction, and the trumpet which shall ultimately summon to the judgment seat all mankind, there to be tried for the deeds done in the body, whether good or bad. The star on the brow may mean the eternal light of truth of which conscience is the presentment ; the doves that surround the head, the innocence and purity that characterise all her thoughts and ways ; and the feathers in the mantle may remind us of the rapid flight and the keen vision of birds, with which the quick decisions, and the all-discerning, all-penetrating insight of conscience may be suitably compared. Conscience is thus light, is winged, dwells in the heart of life, is armed with avenging weapons, and looks into the unseen. The picture seems fantastic, but it is certainly impressive and original, and cannot fail to arrest the spectator, and make him pause to inquire its meaning.

We ask ourselves when gazing upon that mysterious Being with the fiery eyes and the sharp arrows and the trumpet of judgment, why it is that the Dweller in



the Innermost has not a more complete control of our lives. Why is it that it enables us to see what is right, and yet we care little for it when we have seen it; that it gives us the knowledge of what is wrong, and yet we are not pained in doing that wrong? As conscience is constituted, it is never what it ought to be in the best of men, and it is never without some witnessing power in the worst. The conscience of one who falls into grievous sin, to use a striking phrase of Mr Brownell's, "is doubtless readjusted, rather than repudiated altogether; and in the greatest villains there are sudden relapses into grace, swift and sudden yieldings to a gentle emotion, or a noble aspiration, which attract us by the very force of their evanescence; but thorough regeneration is a stern, slow process, and does not belong to the emotional side of our nature altogether." Such pathetic transient glimpses into fallen human nature's brighter side are compatible with continued persistence in an evil course.

Another most striking impersonation of an abstract quality, exhibiting originality of thought and unusual power of imagination, is the picture which Watts calls "The All-pervading." This subject is more difficult to comprehend even than the last one. It is a repellent picture, from which we are at first inclined to turn away with impatience and even dislike. Judged by such a picture as this, we do not wonder that he should have received such scanty encouragement to persevere in the creation of such ideal representations. Those who wanted everything to be obvious and plain the first moment they looked at it, and could not be troubled to exercise thought over any theme, would naturally turn away with indifference,

if not with a stronger feeling, from a work such as this. Watts' pictures often mystify persons unacquainted with art. They find in them no suggestion or information that has its counterpart in their own mind. They judge paintings not by their knowledge of other paintings, but go back directly to their own remembrances of nature and of ordinary life; forgetting that these remembrances have, in the first instance, been derived from a very unintelligent understanding of nature and of the circumstances of life—that their acquaintance with these has been wholly superficial. They do not realise that seeing is a fine art; that to see truly and deeply what is in nature requires as much training as the comprehension of a chord in music. So far as difficulty of understanding, combined with deep thoughtfulness is concerned, we might compare Watts' paintings with Browning's poems, whose meaning is not always obvious, but well worth the trouble it costs to understand him. We admire the pictorial art of the one, as we admire the poetic art of the other, in proportion as our knowledge grows. We should not grudge the same amount of study to comprehend a picture of Watts' which at first baffles us, that we bestow upon a clearer comprehension of some passage in the *Sordello* or *Paracelsus* of Browning. It has been said that a truly great painting, which has taken long months if not years to think and work out, can no more be expected to reveal its profounder aspects to a hurried and superficial gaze, than a work of philosophy which absorbed an equal amount of time and mental toil to compose, can reveal its inner secrets to the careless student who listlessly turns over the pages. A book, the same

writer goes on to say, should take the same time to read as it took to write ; and a picture, which is only a more open book, should inspire the spectator with some equivalent endeavour to see as wonderful things out of it, as was evolved in the painting.

A close, attentive study of the picture of "The All-pervading" will throw some light upon its meaning. All the immeasurable expanse of space is pervaded by a Divine Element, which Watts depicts as a figure with great encircling wings, seated and holding in its lap a globe, representing the stellar universe. Nothing could be more impressive and awe-inspiring than the sense of the overwhelming vastness and ubiquity of this Divine Element throughout the world, which is given in this picture. It penetrates to the essence of everything ; it holds everything from the largest to the smallest within its mighty grasp. "It is more than the Erdgeist of Goethe that wove the living garment of the Godhead, more than the mother of the gods, the ever-present eternity that holds creation in its hands." It is a sublime conception that a Personality is seated on the throne of universal empire. How much more ennobling is this conception than that of the material origin and existence of all things ! We must postulate Spirit and not a thing as the first formative causation. The universe is not self-created and self-upheld. A thing cannot originate a thing. Law is a necessity of things, but law is an expression of will. It is not eternal, self-enacting, self-executing. The laws of the universe presuppose an agent, since they are only the modes in which the agent operates. They cannot be the cause of their own observance. The All-Pervading is Spirit, which includes, but is

not limited to Personality. The Creator and Upholder of all things is not a mere metaphor for force. And thus we are brought back to the magnificent generalisation of the artist in his most original picture.

This picture is a good illustration of the difficulty of giving a spiritual conception an outward form. So long as we hold that conception in our minds, and see it only with the inner eye, it does not strike us as in the least degree incongruous. Spirit within interprets the meaning of Spirit without. But when we attempt to embody the conception outwardly in form and hue, no skill of delineation can prevent its want of harmony from giving offence. There are some symbols that ought always to be preserved as mere unembodied signs of an idea, on account of their unsightliness when judged by the standard of taste. And we can understand why the Hebrews were prohibited from making external representations of such symbols ; for produced in this form they would violate all sense of dignity and propriety. There might be no incongruity in giving outward form to the Cherubim, and they might be carved in gold above the mercy-seat in the Holy of Holies of the Tabernacle, so as not to appear monstrous objects to the eye. But there were many other Hebrew symbols which would destroy all feeling of beauty and reverence if they were pictured to the eye, and therefore they were never meant to be conceived otherwise than spiritually. In Hebrew symbolism the most important thing was that the figure or combination of figures should exactly represent the religious idea which it was meant to express ; and therefore whether it would be harmonious and satisfy the sense of beauty if it appeared in artistic shape, was never

taken into consideration at all. In Greek symbolism, on the contrary, the religious conception was intended to pass outwardly into art, and the embodiment of it in outward form was of the first importance. The conception was modified until it satisfied the æsthetic sense. Everything was sacrificed to outward beauty and harmony. In a good many of his pictures of abstract or symbolic subjects, Watts may be said to follow the Hebrew mode of symbolism rather than the classical. And therefore the mental conception which underlies the picture, while it is very powerful and sets forth the idea of which it is intended to be the vehicle in the fullest manner, does not at the same time satisfy the æsthetic sense. In such works as these Watts is apt to confound what is the lawful function of speech—which speech can easily fulfil—with the function of art. Art can hardly be made a symbolic speech without a good deal of sacrifice of its beauty and harmony.

A picture of a somewhat similar character is called "Chaos." It shows us how the Spirit that pervades all space brings light out of darkness, order out of confusion and life out of death. Under the control of an all-wise and all-powerful Being, everything is arranged to make a universe of beauty and blessedness. A vast unseen Personality is holding the forces of nature in leash. Our earth passes through fire and water and is devastated by both, but both help to mould its shapeless features into the beginnings of scenic loveliness. A confused range of extensive hills tipped with snow is rising out of wide valleys; a medley of lights and clouds is casting a weird radiance over all the prospect. Some spots are bright, others are left in dark-

ness ; and numerous human figures, male and female, are scattered in all kinds of attitudes on the slopes, some lying down and others sitting up—giving a wild grandeur and sense of animation to the whole scene. We see the earth in the process of making. The age-long process by which our world has been formed and peopled out of the huge shapeless mass of chaos, until a magnificent nature becomes contemporaneous with human nature, is thus made visible to our eye and comprehensible to our minds in this splendid picture. "Intended," says the artist, "to be the introductory chapter of a general history of mankind," which he meant to carry out in a series of great designs round the walls of some vast gallery constructed specially for their reception, this pictorial preface has a melancholy interest. It speaks to us of the baffled hope, the great regret of his life—that out of the chaos, as it were, of his conceptions, he was not suffered to evolve a fuller and more perfect scheme of development.

Very powerfully has he embodied his idea of Mammon as the god of this world, in that telling picture which exhibits him to us as a king, sitting on a scarlet throne ornamented at the top with two skulls. His head, Midas-like, is encircled with a crown fashioned of a broad band of gold—with round golden coins standing up from it in imitation of the balls or strawberry leaves of a coronet. There is something indescribably mean and repulsive in his face, with square massive jaws—sordid, selfish mouth—flat nose and bleared, dead-blue eyes, full of cunning and deceit and all hardness, rising above a neck that wrinkles into gross folds like the skin of a rhinoceros. On

each side above his head his hair rises up like a pair of assinine ears; and he is clothed with a gold tunic embroidered with patterns taken from the pursuits of wealth. One hand is grovelling among the money-bags in his lap, and the other grasps the long tresses of a beautiful woman who has sold herself for gain, and whose green robe of freshness falls away from her. His foot, covered with blood-red hose, rests on the body of a naked youth who has been a devoted slave, and has been stamped into the mire by his bondage. In the background of the picture a crimson curtain falls down concealing the distant view, but disclosing immediately underneath it a smoking fire, emblematic of the fiery danger to which the lust of wealth exposes the soul that cherishes it. The commercial world is only too full of illustrations of the destructive flame which this spark of inward fire kindles, for no one can be covetous at heart without his covetousness finding outward expression in his life.

The undraped figures of the young man and woman are a good example of the reason why Watts paints the nude, not to please the eye by the mere beauty of the human form, but to appeal to the imagination and the heart in order to kindle what is good and noble. He also wished in this way to generalise the principles which he embodied in human form. "Why," he says, "have I painted these victims naked? Because they are types of humanity; and had they been clothed, the force of my meaning and teaching would be altogether gone. They would cease to be types." Photography even at the best is an imperfect medium for representing the peculiar qualities of such a picture as this. Mr Hollyer has done his work

admirably, and brought this most instructive painting within reach of the poorest person. For it would be a solecism, if a painting intended to be a scathing rebuke to the spirit of covetousness, and dedicated by the artist to all the worshippers of Mammon, should yet be placed beyond reach of the multitude, and valued at a price which none but a rich man could pay. It must be made accessible to the general public by some cheap medium ; and Mr Hollyer, by his photographic reproduction of it, has furnished this cheap medium. But one needs to see the original in order, not only to admire the picture, but also to truly read its lesson. Photography hardens and coarsens the flesh-painting of the figures. It makes too prominent points of the picture which the colour-scheme softens down, and in the absence of all colouring the relative values of the picture are made false.

But we are thankful to have such an impressive picture, even in a form which cannot adequately reproduce the original, for its lesson is greatly needed in our day. More than anything else the greed of gain destroys the affections of the heart. While the heart remains in a person there is hope of his being moved ; but nothing tends to deprive a man of all heart like Mammon worship. The old Hebrew prophets denounced Mammon worship with the most passionate vehemence. And perhaps never was there an age and a people that needed to be more warned against the hatefulness and the moral dangers of it, than an age and a people so distinctively commercial as our own, in which money is supposed to answer all things. Watts in his picture has expressed his whole abhorrence of this evil. It might have been thought impossible



to make a human face so unutterably repulsive, and the picture haunts one like a nightmare. "To me," he says, "the eager desire for wealth, the evils of which are suggested in 'Mammon' and 'The Minotaur,' is horrible. Napoleon truly said that we were 'a nation of shopkeepers,' but commerce dignifies if carried on legitimately. The mere acquisition of gold is demoralising. To get it without doing anything, and at the expense of others, seems a present-day characteristic. Gambling in its effects is worse even than drink, and unfortunately pervades the whole community." His picture powerfully and effectually preaches a lesson which the pulpit preaches too often in vain, that selfishness and worldliness may develop if indulged into forms of hideous cruelty and brutal passion, which carry within them their own Nemesis, and need no waiting for the future judgment.

A most original and suggestive companion picture is that of an oak tree overlaid by a heavy golden cloth like a pall, weighing down and breaking its massive branches and twigs. Underneath its folds, as it falls down below the tree, is a collection of dead men's bones, and the title of the work is taken from that circumstance, "The Valley of Dry Bones." The tree represents the oak of England, which is a time-honoured proverb for strength and endurance. The defenders of our country are called "hearts of oak." The oak is the most hospitable of all vegetable productions. It is not a tree only,—it is a garden, a country, for innumerable living things find refuge and food on its trunk and among its branches, or on some portion of its surface, or beneath its shade. It extends a welcome to all; and in this respect is an admirable

symbol of our country with its free institutions and its grand hospitalities to all who seek refuge upon its shores. How dreadful then must be that modern luxury which, like a heavy golden pall laid over the oak, shuts out all the gracious influences of heaven, wastes the strength of our country and hinders its noble generousities, making self-indulgence the ruling principle of life. An undue amount of the energy of the vast middle class in our land is absorbed in money-getting, and from this cause has come that love of material prosperity, that passion for wealth which destroys originality of character, and wraps the soul in a comfortable ease which makes it incapable of doing noble things, and is destructive of all the true interests of humanity. Such a torpid and slothful comfort, produced by an abundance of the good things of this life, is as fatal to the imagination as it is to the spirituality of our being. Nothing heroic can live in its atmosphere. It is like a pall of gold over the branches of a growing tree, with dead men's bones at the root of it.

In his graphic picture of "Vindictive Anger" Watts depicts this evil passion as a vulture-headed human form which breaks through all bonds of reason when once aroused, and whose feet tread down with remorseless fury his victims. The conscience of him who enters into the teaching of this painting cannot pass over this passion lightly. He will seek to repress the worst excesses of his own ill-temper, and to keep it under some sort of control. He is made to feel that nothing gives such severe and useless pain as the display of such temper; nothing turns true affection to such bitterness, and kills the warmth of the human

charities, and makes all duties hard, and all life miserable, as vindictive anger. That kind of anger cannot purify the soul or uplift it above all that is base and unworthy which is itself subject to the violence of personal feeling; and instead of bringing men to a sense of right, itself violates the sense of right, and seeks to inflict pain and loss, instead of bettering the man who has done the injury. "Be angry and sin not" is the precept which is loudly proclaimed by a display of anger that is only sinful.

Another picture called "Greed and Industry" gives a vivid contrast between the miser who vainly seeks to relieve his misery by clasping his money-bags more closely to his bosom, and the artisan who goes forth to earn his daily bread by his own honest work, carrying his tools in his basket with a cheery face lit up by happy thoughts. The moral of this picture it is not difficult to read. In the one case we see how honest labour is its own reward, and on the other how the hoarded coins that have been got without labour bring a curse with them. Money that is not earned makes the nature greedy; money that is the fruit of industry makes the nature generous and free. In a picture called "Progress," Watts teaches his generation wherein true advancement consists. We boast of the progressiveness of our day, of the enormous advances we have made in every department of human economy; and the artist shows to us that there are three modes in which man may manifest the spirit of progress. There is the getting of gold from the dust in the manner of the man with the muck-rake in the "Pilgrim's Progress," with face looking only on the ground and sordid soul partaking

of the earthliness. Then there is the intent perusal of an old book by the light of a single candle, symbolic of the much study of the age which is a weariness to the flesh. This is a much higher pursuit than the former, but it is apt to produce a selfish spirit, occupied only with acquiring knowledge, while ignoring altogether the claims of our fellow-creatures upon us, and the active benevolent duties of the world. And lastly there is the man who advances with his face lifted up to the luminous skies, who seeks the things that are above, and puts his trust in the guidance of the heavenly powers. This last is the only right way in which to make progress. The man who sets his affections only on the highest things, and who seeks help in his difficulties and distress from the highest sources, is great because he understands that his human greatness lies in his relation to the things above, and feels assured that the highest of all belongs to him though he is only reaching after it, and may not yet have attained it, or even feel sure of ever attaining it.

Perhaps the most popular of all Watts' paintings, which has been most frequently reproduced, and which is seen in photograph in many homes, is that which is entitled "Hope." There is nothing conventional about it. It departs widely from all other impersonations of this quality. Pandora's box with all the ills of life heaped into it, and Hope lying at the bottom, offers no suggestion to the artist; nor does Thorwaldsen's statue of Hope, which he regarded as the finest of all his sculptures,—indeed it is said to have filled him with sadness, because it completely satisfied his ideal, whereas all his previous works were



*Hope.*



only partial and imperfect realisations of his conception, and seemed therefore a proof to him that his genius was decaying. But in Watts' Hope all is fresh and original. Indeed it would be difficult at first sight to guess that it was meant for Hope at all. Some from a passing superficial glance might imagine it to be a picture of Despair, so bowed down and overwhelmed does the figure seem. The whole attitude is woe-begone, and it has none of the animation or expectancy which we should imagine a figure of Hope would exhibit. But the more we gaze, the more do we enter into the profoundness of the artist's idea. Its meaning begins to dawn upon us through the dark shadows. We perceive that while the attitude is woe-begone, it is not so listless as it appears. There is a great deal of latent energy in it. It is beginning to revive, to be stirred up with fresh strength, and though the eyes are blindfolded to indicate ignorance of the shape which Hope may assume, and the circumstances in which it may appear, the white bandage is not so tight that the eyes are altogether hidden. They can be faintly seen below it, trembling as if the least ray of light might open them, and reveal the soul of joy which shines through them. The light is so arranged as to fall upon the neck and profile, and bring out all the features of that side of the face into bright relief against the dark shadow of the breast. The colour of the flesh is of a pale, warm, carnation tint, harmonising with the sentiment of the subject. The lips have a sweet sadness about them inexpressibly touching, as if she could not utter all the sorrow that is in her heart. Her countenance is not turned upward for heaven's direct light, but

downward to the earth, as if to catch what reflected light it can give. The twilight is around her, a hazy darkness of dusky blue, against whose background the light green nebulous robe which she wears comes out in charming distinctness ; and one star shimmers in the dimness, prophetic of that morning star into which Hesperus will be changed, and which will yet lead her to the cradle of a new birth of joy and light and blessedness. The fingers of one hand are tightly clasping the frame of a simple lyre of primitive construction, all the strings of which have been broken and wound in the centre around the upper limb, with the exception of one solitary string.

How expressive is this feature of the hopelessness out of which hope arises ! One string is always left, however empty and desolate may be the lyre of life, on which the still sad music of humanity may be played ; and from this the other strings are to be tuned in happier circumstances. That solitary string is like Paganini's, when he deliberately broke all the strings of his violin, one after the other, until only one remained, out of which he drew the most enchanting music. The Psalmist said that he would praise God upon a ten-stringed instrument. It is easy to praise when all the chords of life are present to be played upon. But it is difficult to do so when one by one they disappear, and at last only one abides. Hope stoops and strains to hear the note of the one string in her lyre—the concentrated music that can come from the remaining chord. Not in her own soul alone is that note, which she can only subjectively hear. It comes from nature, from the outside circumstances, and tells her that there is a responsive



chord from the great world upon which she sits waiting. Speaking of the vague uncertain music of this lyre, we are reminded of what Watts has often expressed, that the effect which he wished his pictures to have upon the eye, resembles that which the performance of some melodious piece of music would have upon the ear. We deeply feel that the delicate refined colour-harmonies of his picture of Hope awaken in us the same emotional response which the rise and fall of the wind-drawn tones of an Eolian harp, with their vague musical tenderness, would excite.

We might suppose that by placing the figure of Hope on the summit of the globe Watts meant to indicate the universality of the grace. It is one of the qualities that belong essentially to humanity. Wherever man dwells, there hope dwells with him. There are hardly any circumstances, however desperate, in which it vanishes. But we may presume that it is more the hope of the *race* than the hope of the individual which he wishes to represent in his picture; and that the attitude of the figure sitting on the globe, with the whole round world beneath, is meant to convey very impressively that idea. Looked at as a personal feeling Hope might be depicted in brighter colours, and with a more cheerful aspect. To the individual it comes with new inspirations and a lifting up of life's horizon. But as a social feeling it has to struggle with difficulties and darkneses. It is a thing of slow and painful growth. How many things are there in the world that looked at alone would generate despair! The world is blindfolded by its own ignorance and unbelief and prejudice. It is bandaged even by its knowledge, and moves in

blinkers. It cannot or it will not see the things that belong to its peace. Agnosticism is the end of its researches. "Behold we know not anything" is its creed. But the figure of Hope on the top of the world—on the top of all achievements, of all abilities and successes—is an eternal protest against such scepticism. If Watts has not the cheerful optimistic spirit of Browning, and cannot fully say with him, "God's in the heaven, all's right with the world," still he does not believe that the world is coming to an end by its own decadence. He has still a hope, though with broken lyre, that can change all the wailing into song. He has the sadness born of the doubt and the deep unrest characteristic of these days—the experience of the vanity and unsatisfactoriness of all earthly things. No man is more sensitive to the physical and moral confusion that lies on the very surface of man's life. But no man feels more than he the consolations and hopes that abound amid the darkness and despondency. His is a gospel of hope and not of despair. He sees that there is more day to dawn upon the world. The sun is not setting but rising. Behind every cloud the serene blue is spreading. The child of Cosmos, he sees a grander and higher Cosmos, more order and unity, more life and beauty and blessedness rising out of all the chaos and confusions of the physical and moral world. The revealing of the sons of God in the men born of the Spirit, is the consummation of the story of the earth groaning and travailing together in pain until now.

Not so well known is Watts' figure of Faith, which is among the latest of his paintings, and therefore has had the benefit of his longest and deepest thinking.

There is nothing mediæval or even sacerdotal about this picture. It suggests nothing of the asceticism or dogmatism in which this grace was long supposed exclusively to manifest itself. The picture is novel in conception, and yet true to the ideal of faith that has been cherished in all ages, as the conquering principle which overcomes the world, and is the cause of all true progress. Its sentiment was as appropriate to the age of the patriarchs as it is to ours. The artist with true insight shows that faith, even Christian faith, may be seen not only in religion, but also in common life; for it is a thing not apart from our nature, and imposed upon it from without, but the spiritualisation of a natural quality. We need it in the things of our daily life as much as in the things that concern our highest welfare. In the lowest form of it, clothed in its household dress and engaged in common duties, it has been a conquering power; but made divine by being exercised on divine things, it overcomes and inherits all things. Watts has embodied in his picture the ideal which the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews has presented in his gallery of hero-saints, which shows that faith was the virtue most conspicuous in the history of the past, as it would be the most conspicuous virtue in the history of the future—which united all the ages and all the dispensations. From the very first it was what God most required from man, and what He chiefly honoured. It is the glory of common and of saintly life. It is the common characteristic which all faithful men possess whatever their business. It is not by offering sacrifices, performing ceremonies, or professing a religious creed, but by a firm, steadfast trust in God,

that men have always won and always will win greatness.

Faith is presented dressed in a long flowing robe, girded resolutely at the loins for work, with massive sleeves folded back from her hands and a face looking steadfastly up to heaven. She sits on the bank of the clear stream of truth, and laves her blood-stained feet in the crystal waters. Watts does not represent faith as a warrior, armed cap-à-pie, as though its only function were to be an opposing force in the world, which is meant to triumph over and finally to exhaust all the hostile forces of the world, but as a young woman. But she has still the sheathed sword in her lap, and in the picture we see her loosening it and putting it aside, implying along with her blood-stained feet the victory out of which she has come triumphantly. She has left behind her the field of battle, and all nature is reposing peacefully around her, and she is giving herself up entirely to the enjoyment of its soothing charms. The thought which it is meant to suggest is that though faith needs a sword to overcome its enemies and to triumph over all forms of error and evil, it is not by the sword that its greatest victories are to be won. The gospel of peace was to change human society into a household of faith, a kingdom of heaven, not by a great single revolution, but by the distress and disturbance of the sword which would cut deeply and wound sharply. The most tremendous wars that have shaken the world have been the conflicts in which the standard of the Prince of Peace has been carried in the van. This is the victory that overcometh the world, even your faith. Is not the root idea of the figure that

the life of faith is all conflict—the battle of the Spiritual against the Material, ending in inevitable victory? And this use of the sword has been caused by the eager desire of men at all times to work out personal and social salvation by the wrath of man, rather than by God's method of righteousness and peace. They have endeavoured to set up their own kingdom by force and self-will rather than by submission to the quiet law of love by which God is seeking to draw men to Himself. The beginning of the vital processes of true faith must indeed ever be by the sword, but its death-pains become birth-pains through which a happier future is born. And the more we gain the bloodless victory of faith over all the selfishness of our nature, and realise our common trust in the Fatherhood of God, the more tolerant of the convictions and experiences of others we shall become; the more we shall feel the oneness of the spiritual experience of mankind, and understand that God has various ways of leading men to Himself and getting them rooted and grounded in love. The force by which we shall seek to conquer will not be any physical or material power, but the force of our faith, our liberality, our love, our brotherly-kindness and charity. The whole spirit of Watts' picture breathes the tolerant Christian spirit of a man who knows in his own experience what true faith is. A different version of this subject may be seen in Watts' own studio, in which Hope and Love are standing by the side of Faith, each of which is whispering into her ear the sum of all religion—not dogma, but an unswerving trust in the eternal God.

Watts about the same time completed the group

of the graces by adding his picture of "Charity." This picture is in the manner of the old Italian masters, and might well have been painted by Correggio or Andrea del Sarto. Charity is a calm modern Madonna, the homely motherly love which is a constant revelation of His heart who comforts us as one whom his mother comforteth, robed in richly-coloured vesture, and tenderly encircling three bright chubby-faced children with her arms,—an attempt to picture the "motherliness of God." It is evident that the painter has a different and higher idea of charity than merely that of one who ministers to the poor, for in that case he would have represented the mother with a look of profound pity on her face, and the children with attenuated frames and gaunt, hungry countenances. The conception which he has of this virtue is that of St Paul. Charity is more than the love that exists between man and woman. It has none of its excitement and passion. There is no selfishness or exclusiveness such as tinges even the most disinterested love between the sexes. It is more than benevolence, for it makes the rich as well as the poor the objects of its regard. It is not pity and a desire to help that it feels, but a longing for their true happiness, for their attainment of that which is highest and best and most lasting, for those who are well-off as well as for those who are unfortunate, irrespective of condition. It is this realised identity of interests resting on the invisible union of souls. You see on the countenance which the artist places before you the patience of love, never in a hurry, but always waiting to begin. A meek and quiet spirit of love looks out of those thoughtful kindly eyes, suffering long, bearing all

things, believing all things, hoping all things. She who seems so serene has learnt much of her wisdom by self-sacrifice, and much of her happy thoughts for the future from the trials and disappointments of the past. Humility reigns upon the brow, sealing her lips, so that she speaks not of, and tries to forget the good she has done and goes back from the world from her lovely act to the shade again, hiding even her love from itself.

We see at once that such a character is guileless and transparent, thinketh no evil, looks at the brightest side of everything, and puts the best construction upon every action. In the trustfulness of the atmosphere she diffuses around her your nature unconsciously expands, and you show yourself at your best. Believing in you, you begin to believe in yourself, and to be and do all the good she imputes to you. There is no greater secret of personal influence than this, for it is a well-known fact that in society those are most thought of themselves who think most of others. Such a disposition is a benediction and a stimulus that elevates all who come within its spell. The charity which is shown in Watts' picture is not a thing of emotion, an impulse, a wave of the soul that lifts one nearer to heaven and then subsides, but the rich expression of the whole character in its fullest development. It is immortal in its very nature, for to love forever is to live forever. The three round, rosy-faced children, well-loved and well-cared for, are not the destitute children which she takes up into her pity and ministers to with sympathetic tenderness, but her own children. They are the graces to which she has given birth, the outcome

and perpetuation ever in a youthful state of her own loving and lovely nature. She "moves with inward glory crowned," because she is the mother of such a fair progeny who bless the world because of their resemblance to their mother. She reflects her beauty in them, and they reflect their loveliness upon her.

In the large picture representing the "Spirit of Christianity," we see a woman surrounded with luminous clouds, and clothed in scarlet vestments, with face looking up to the heavens, and one hand resting on her bosom, and the other pointing downwards to a group of children of different races and colours, over which she spreads the skirts of her mantle in tender pity and protection. Her figure is strikingly expressive of her interest in all the wants and woes of humanity, and she pleads with High Heaven for their relief with an earnestness of soul that has left its deep imprint of sadness on her uplifted face. In this picture Watts endeavours to paint his ideal of the Christian consciousness, its upward look, its confidence in God, its tenderness towards man, its efforts to relieve the sorrows and sufferings of the world, and to labour unweariedly and unselfishly for the progress of the race. The law of Christ is not the natural selection of the strong to extinguish the weak, but the supernatural selection of the weak that they may strengthen and save the strong. This is the higher law of love which knows no distinction of creed or race, or sex or circumstance; according to which the best endowed stoops to help the least favoured of fortune. It is a law that has no ends of its own to serve, which rules not for its own selfish objects, but for the good of the ruled. This is the grand God-given power and



grace bestowed upon it—the right and power to bless and help the world. Watts dedicated this striking picture to all the Churches, as a lesson in Christian charity and Christian unity ; for the purpose of healing the schisms and divisions of the Church, and inducing it to bring all its powers to bear upon the carrying out of the one great object of its existence, the establishing of the kingdom of God upon earth, which should embrace all classes and conditions of men and should subserve only the high and lasting purposes of righteousness. At the time that it was painted, party spirit ran very high in the English Church, and caused much alienation and strife. Men were forgetting why they belonged to the Church at all ; and this was Watts' dignified rebuke to the narrow and bitter spirit which animated them. He wished them to see on his canvas a more excellent way.

Though Watts never painted a devotional subject, or produced a distinctively religious picture, "The Spirit of Christianity" may be regarded as an exceptional instance of what may be called at least an approach to religious art. In this he may be said to have followed analogous instances in Roman Catholic countries. We are reminded of Murillo's famous pictures, similar in design and character, of the Assumption of the Virgin in the Louvre and at Seville, in which, like Watts' picture, a noble woman with pathetic eyes full of love is seen seated on clouds, and clad in ample drapery, embracing in its skirts a group of infants nestling at her feet—types of all the Churches. It also suggests Fra Bartolommeo's famous Madonna di Misericordia at Lucca, where the Mater Dolorosa is the sympathetic protector of all her wor-

shippers, and lifts up to heaven on their behalf her serene though worn and sorrowful face. Like Albert Dürer's "Assumption of the Virgin" at Vienna, Watts' picture has a landscape below the clouds which wrap round the mother and her children. This admirably carries out, as is the fashion in all Watts' landscapes, the sentiment of the great design. It represents a calm sea dimly lighted by the bars of light from an unseen moon, on whose shore the land stretches for a distance, with dimly shining rivers flowing through it, and the numerous spires and roofs of a large city emerging half-revealed through the subdued radiance. "Here at least," says Ruskin in his notes on the Royal Academy of 1875, when Watts' picture was first exhibited, "is one picture meant to teach; nor failing of its purpose, if we read it rightly. Very beautiful it might have been, and is, in no mean measure; but as years pass by, the artist concedes to himself, more and more, the privilege which none but the feeble should seek, of substituting the sublimity of mystery for that of absolute majesty of form. The relation between this grey and soft cloud of visionary power, and the perfectly substantial, bright, and near presence of the saints, angels or deities of early Christian art, involves questions of too subtle interest to be followed here; but in the essential force of it belongs to the inevitable expression, in each period, of the character of its own faith. The Christ of the thirteenth century was vividly present to its thoughts and dominant over its acts, as a God manifest in the flesh, well pleased in the people to whom He came; while ours is either forgotten; or seen, by those who yet trust in Him, only as a mourning and departing Ghost."

“The Rider on the White Horse” is Watts’ jubilant picture proclaiming the same unfailing faith, the same unwavering confidence. The ideas to which he has given expression in that wonderful composition have been gradually evolved. We see an earlier stage of it in the “Bowman on the White Horse”; but the matured conception sets before us the faithful rider in the full plenitude of his powers, with his radiant brow crowned with the victor’s crown, and his wide-opened wistful eyes gazing forth into the far future as if seeing things we cannot see; the white horse on which he rides exhibiting the perfection of animal beauty and grace. Rejoicing crowds follow in his train, each person with a star of hope shining on his forehead, and illumining the way. With his quiver full of arrows by his side, and his bow ready to be bent, he is armed to conquer all opposition; while the vulture flying above his head will feed upon the bodies of his enemies that fall slain behind. It is a triumphant picture, which makes you feel as if you heard a glorious roll of drums. The heart exults touched to quick joy, as one realises that all the world’s depressions and despondencies measured from the heights to which exultation has raised you, are no more than the valleys of the earth as seen from a star. The soul will outlive them all, for it is larger, grander than them all!

## Chapter XII

### Realism

NOT often did Watts take subjects for his paintings from the stern realities of everyday life. But there is a small group of pictures in which the sorrows and privations of those who have been worsted in the battle of life, or have been less fortunate than their fellows, are portrayed with unusual power, and show how wide is the range of his sympathies. Nothing human is alien to him. The pencil that could give a glow of vivid colour to the mystic visions of fancy, could paint in sombre hues the painful experiences of the poor. He has combined as it were the two capacities in the humorous picture entitled, "When Poverty comes in at the door, Love flies out at the window." To this popular proverb he has given a realistic and yet an imaginative charm. The picture at once impresses the mind and makes its meaning plain. One side of it is illumined with a bright light emblematical of the happiness that has been but is now passing away. The room is poorly furnished, and yet exhibits traces of former abundance that redeems its squalidness. The secret of the change of circumstances in the household is revealed in the laziness and slovenliness of the mistress. Instead of diligently attending to her domestic affairs, she is absorbed in

caressing a pet dove, and lounging on a bed, whose disordered clothes exhibit the careless housekeeping of many days. Her work-basket is overturned on the floor, and its contents are scattered. Doves make their nests in pigeon-holes above the bed, with all their litter of confusion, and from the open window the untended sprays of roses, returning to their wild condition through neglect, creep in. The housewife is young and beautiful; but whatever pleasing impression she produces, is at once removed by the contradictory character of her slovenly habits. She cannot make a happy home; and therefore the door of the room on one side is represented as opening, admitting the sordid figure of Poverty, dressed in rags, and accompanied by the gaunt wolf of Hunger, and letting in at the same time the cold inclement wind outside, which blows before it a drift of withered autumn leaves that strew the floor, and speak eloquently of the hostile forces of nature which inevitably work havoc where there is no principle of order and industry to keep them in check; while through the wide-open window the winged Cupid, no longer a boy but a grown-up mature youth, is in the act of taking flight over the sill. Every detail of the picture tells, and enhances the effect of the whole; and no one can gaze upon the startling contrast between the dark forbidding figure of Poverty, and the bright affrighted look of Love, without reading the moral which it so forcibly teaches. Watts could not possibly have taught a more impressive lesson to all who are inclined to act the part of the young woman, whose own improvident ways have made her the subject of experiment by two such antagonistic

powers, Poverty approaching to overwhelm her, and Love abandoning her to its horrors.

In "Life's Illusions," the horse is splendidly painted, and the old man comes out vividly from a beautiful background. The picture seems in the manner of Ety. Watts himself has designated the picture "An allegorical design, typifying the march of human life. Fair visions of beauty, the concrete embodiments of divers forms of Hope and Ambition, hover high in the air above the gulf which stands as the goal of all men's lives. At their feet lie the shattered symbols of human greatness and power; and upon the narrow space of earth that overhangs the deep abyss, are figured the brighter illusions that endure through every changing fashion of the world. A knight in armour pricks on his horse in quick pursuit of the rainbow-tinted bubble of glory; on his right are two lovers; on his left an aged student still pores over his work by the last rays of the dying sun; while in the shadow of the group may be seen the form of a little child chasing a butterfly." This picture was painted in 1849, when the artist was in his thirty-second year, and is perhaps less sculpturesque and more pictorial than almost any other of his works. It is a painting pure and simple and only. It exhibits like Tintoretto a luxury and harmony of colour, and is a proof of the unconscious influence of the great master upon him. And while its execution, glowing with all the bright atmosphere of youth, and the strength and passion of opening manhood, fills us with admiration, we are struck at the same time with the wonderful forethought and far-reaching experience, with the maturity and solemnity of its moral lesson, considering that he stood at this

time only on the threshold of life, and must have thought far more of life's illusions, than he could possibly have felt of them.

Stern and sadder still are some aspects of life which Watts brings before us, with the avowed object of creating pity in our minds for the wants and woes of humanity. The poverty of the housewife is caused by her own indolence, but in the picture of the "Seamstress," there is the utmost industry, accompanied by the utmost poverty. The surroundings are sordid in the extreme, with nothing to relieve their ghastly grimness; and the painting of Watts is in all respects a representation to the eye of what Hood so powerfully called up before the imagination in his "Song of a Shirt." So, too, Hood's companion song of "The Bridge of Sighs" has never found such an interpreter as Watts has proved in his most pathetic picture of "Found Dead." One cannot look without the profoundest pity upon the fair young girl, "fashioned so slenderly," rushing madly from life's history to precipitate herself into the dread mystery of death, in the dark waters of the Thames at Waterloo Bridge, with the palatial buildings of Westminster rising up under the star-lit sky to emphasise the contrast between her forlornness, and the abodes of luxury and the temples of law and religion near at hand—"near a whole city full, help there was none." The startled impression which Hood had produced upon a careless community, when he published these two poems, has been deepened by the illustrations of the consummate artist. Watts must have been in one of his darkest moods of moralising, when he painted an old woman seeking shelter under a dry arch at

night from the pitiless drenching rain, increasing the gloom of the London streets. She had no other home to go to, no other bed on which to lie. The situation is the acme of human desolation, and Watts declared that he painted the picture with the avowed object of "arousing pity for human refuse." Many cases of a similar kind are found nightly in the streets of London, and the pre-occupied world heeds them not, till the artist and the poet bring them before it in forms that compel attention, and so prepare the way for some remedy. In a similar mood Watts has enabled us to realise the horrors of the Irish famine, when the potato crop failed, and thousands died of actual starvation. He embodies the whole terrible story in a group of starving peasants painted to the very life.

From this tragical side of human life Watts passed without any sense of incongruity to the minor troubles that occur in every lot. The picture entitled "The rain it raineth every day," represents a sorely-disappointed girl watching at the window the leaden sky, and the unceasing rainfall, which has put an end to some happy holiday or bright excursion, on which the mind was set. In our uncertain climate, such disappointments are of common occurrence, and they are often more vexatious than any real trouble. Nothing comes out of them but a petty trial of temper and discontentment, which irritates more than it educates; whereas some great trouble creates an atmosphere around it which calms and ennobles the soul. There is no image more hopeless and barren than a rainy sea; and even when the dull, continuous rain at last ceases, and the sun shines out of the



grey skies, and the trees sparkle in the light, and all the happy world laughs again, and nature retains no memory of what has marred its beauty and blighted its joy, the rain that has made our life dreary still seems to fill and darken all the view, and the ghost of all our vanished happiness pursues us everywhere, and we live as much in all that we have lost, as in all that we possess.

“And there cometh a mist and a weeping rain,  
And life is never the same again.”

Not only with human beings in suffering or want has Watts the keenest sympathy, he feels deeply for the sufferings of the lower animals, who may be called “our poor relations.” What a human pathos he has infused into the picture called “A patient life of unrewarded toil,” in which an aged white horse is standing in a field bounded by a woodland, at the foot of an old tree, as if meditating on the long years of hard work he has lived through. His head droops, his dim eye looks down on the grass, and his thin, worn-out frame shows the bones protruding through the skin. He is almost too tired to eat, and his whole attitude is expressive of the infinite patience that comes at the close of life to man and beast, and that awaits the inevitable end without regret. The lot of this horse is exceptionally favourable, for he is allowed to end his days, free from labour, and left to feed in the quiet green meadow unmolested; whereas so many aged horses are obliged to labour to the last, beyond their strength, and when they die in harness, are carried immediately to the knacker’s yard, and made to yield a pitiable return in the com-

mercial value of their skin and hoofs and bones. We are reminded by this picture of some touching things about animals in the "Anthology," which reveals to us what the ancients felt regarding the rustic life of the Greek peasants of their day. We realise that they had the tender love for all the lower creatures which is supposed to belong only to modern times. They began at that early period to have doubts of the necessity and acceptableness of animal sacrifices—to think that it was unfair as well as cruel to lay upon the altar the ox that drew the plough, and that the gods were nobler as well as kinder who were satisfied with offerings of milk and honey. One of the poems by Addæus of Macedon, holds up to the admiration of the ages, the goodness of the farmer Alcon, who, "when his ox was worn out by the furrow, forebore to lead it to the slaughtering knife through respect for its labours, but turned it into a meadow of deep grass, where it showed its content by lowing, on account of its freedom from the plough."

In a different vein is the large picture of animal life called "The Mid-day Rest." It may be as well to state here that, owing to Watts' habit of sending his pictures to be exhibited without annexing to them the title of their subject, they were often arbitrarily designated by the cataloguers, without a true understanding of the artist's design. Names of pictures bestowed in this way without authority became popular by being often repeated, and it is now difficult to alter them without leading to confusion. The present picture is an instance in point. It is now universally called "Mid-day Rest," whereas it was originally called by the painter himself "In the Suburbs."

A small replica of it was afterwards painted, which was frequently engraved. It shows the meeting of two carts laden with beer-barrels in a London suburb coming from opposite directions. The sleek, well-fed horses caress each other under the cool shade of chestnut trees overarching a red brick wall; and the stout drayman of one of the waggons leans idly upon the shaft, and watches some pigeons picking up the grain which he has thrown to them. The sun shines fully upon the grey horse that occupies the foreground of the picture, and brings out its fine proportions. It is life-size, and has a look of well-being and content about it. The London dray-horse, with its large luminous eyes and smooth shining coat, is a noble specimen of his race. It is a curious fact that it is the nearest living successor in form to the Norman horses upon which the heavy-mailed knights of the Crusades rode to battle, and which won success in the great struggle with Islam. He is admirably adapted for the use to which he is now put; and every one who cares for the beautiful in its own line, whether he be touched with the true hippic passion or not, must take an interest in the handsome horses Watts depicts as attractive and pleasant to look upon.

Carriage-horses, and especially race-horses, that are a superfine result of human ingenuity, and have lost the glory of nature, are inartistic; whereas the cart-horse is a common and appropriate figure in painting. His own form and all his trappings are picturesque. Turner has made effectual use of him in his well-known picture in the National Gallery, where we see a stout grey cart-horse eating hay from a well-filled rack above his head, and standing in a wide

stall heaped up with straw, whose golden hue is illumined by a flood of sunshine. Of all equine pictures, Rosa Bonheur's "Horse Fair" gives us the finest representation of cart-horses in the world. And one of the commonest incidents depicted in English art, is the watering of a number of cart-horses at some leaf-shaded stream, on their return at evening from their day's work, with the harness still upon their back, and their riders idly bestriding them. This is a picture of equine pleasure and repose which is delightful to the eye on account of its suggestions of contentment, as well as for its harmonies of beautiful colouring.

But it is not for that purpose alone that Watts has painted his picture. He exhibited it at the Grosvenor Gallery, and presented it as a gift to the National Gallery of British Art in 1897, with the motto attached to it—"Of the order of things fast changing," as if it belonged to a condition of things that was passing away with the advance of modern improvement, and soon would no longer be found anywhere. Wealthy London brewers prided themselves upon the excellence of their cart-horses. These had a world-wide reputation. They were chosen to match each other in colour; black being the original dray-horse hue, from which teams of a brown, roan, chestnut, or, as in the case of Watts' painting, a grey colour, were produced; and brewers had a special pride in keeping them up to a certain standard of height and appearance of well-being. The dray-horse and the waggoner, both of a peculiar race specially adapted for the service in which they are employed, and to be found nowhere but in London, are

fast disappearing from suburban haunts, before the encroachment of the traction-engine ; and though every lover of dumb animals may rejoice that the sufferings of such fine creatures in carrying their heavy loads, the heaving flanks, the tortured mouth, the nervous eye, the slipping and clashing of iron-shod hoofs on the pavement are over, being replaced by the senseless electric current, still we shall miss the picturesque sight of the old dray-horses that were pleasant to look upon merely as animals, apart from the fact that they expended their strength at the will and in the service of man. The life-studies which Watts made in connection with this picture have been of the greatest use to him in all his representations of the horse in his allegorical paintings. Every one must be struck with the admirable way in which he has depicted the noblest characteristics of the animal. The horses of Revelation seem to have undergone a wonderful exaltation in passing across the river of death to the green fields beyond the swelling floods. We see them in higher, purer light. Rosa Bonheur's "Horse Fair" has no such noble style of animals as Watts delights to picture.

The cruelties done to the lower animals, not so much from want of heart as want of thought, are strongly denounced in Watts' powerful picture of "The Shuddering Angel." The angel is touchingly represented as covering his face with his hands, and with black bands of mourning upon his wrists, in great distress, as he bends over an altar on which lie the feathers and wings of birds which have been stripped off to adorn the bonnets of fashionable women. Those who know how much havoc this monstrous caprice of

fashion has wrought amongst the most beautiful of God's creatures, cannot but be filled with indignation, when they gaze upon this picture. Thousands who worship at the altar of God do despite in this manner to the fair humanities of the blessed religion which teaches that the Father of all marks the fall of every sparrow to the ground. And the altar of fashion at which they bend the knee is the altar of Moloch stained with innocent blood.

Very charming are Watts' pictures of child life. He is an eternal child himself, an illustration of the Scripture proverb, "the child shall die an hundred years old," and so though old in years, he can enter fully into the innocent joys and sympathise with the happy experiences of children. To the ever delightful nursery tale of "Little Red Riding Hood" he has given a new interest by his popular picture of the captivating maiden with wide open eyes of wonder, dressed in her scarlet cloak and holding firmly in both hands her basket, along with a bunch of wild-flowers, which she has gathered by the way, going unsuspectingly to the fatal house of her grandmother. There is no sign visible of the approaching tragedy; the wolf does not appear. Everything is left to the imagination. Only a rank thistle growing by the path, with its downy head, suggests thoughts of evil. A broader landscape than usually appears in Watts' pictures, for his symbolic subjects scarcely lend themselves to scenic effect, gives the contrast of its calm tranquillity to the thoughts of dread which the subject suggests. Jill, of the familiar nursery story, is made to appear in the dress of a little peasant girl, with the comely features of English girlhood, such as

one may see anywhere in the country districts in the neighbourhood of London. Several pictures of Cupid fascinate us with the quaint humour and grace of treatment. Very arch is the look of the naughty boy, as invested with the long robe and cowl of the monk, which do not hide his winged form and laughing mischievous face, he is about to pull the latch of the monastic door; for no building, however sacred, can keep him out, and no business, however grave and remote from the world, is beyond his interference. "It is not," indeed "the cowl that makes the monk." In the picture called "Afloat," we see a winged child lying on its back on a wavy sea rippling out to the sand, partially upheld by his wings. It is a creation of the sea and air. He has submitted himself passively to the caprice of both, to do with him what they please. The mischievous quiver, full of arrows, is floating harmlessly by his side; and there is on the chubby face such an air of artless enjoyment, as usually takes possession of a child when it is allowed to play in shallow water, on the margin of the shore without any danger or risk. Another picture of the same character represents Cupid kneeling on the spray-washed rocks, so intent on his fishing in a rather troubled sea, that he has turned away his face from us, but we see in his shady profile, how anxious he is to secure a large haul. He usually fishes in an uncertain sea, and one cannot but echo cordially the painter's wish that he may have good luck to his fishing! This is a fine picture with a fresh breezy atmosphere about it, sufficient to encourage the brightest of hopes. Another representation of Cupid introduces us to a bower of tangled bushes mixed

with roses, which were sacred to him, in which the divine boy, having reached the stage of youth, is playing all kinds of mischievous pranks with a fair female figure who is gaily laughing and evidently enjoying the sport. Still another picture of Cupid, called the "Idle Child of Fancy," is seated on the globe of the earth and causing it to whirl round in space, symbolising the great fact that love is the motive power of the world's revolutions. He has several other charming pictures of the happy world of childhood, which so soon vanishes from our experience — such as that which he calls "Trifles Light as Air"—wherein a cloud of wingless babies is represented in all kinds of attitudes, floating in the air, a remarkable specimen of the painter's power to show the lightness of solid objects, all of them chubby little naked figures, made to be clasped closely to the bosom.

"The child-eyed wonders with which life began,  
 The prattling voice of joy, the heart of glee,  
 Have followed out the footsteps of the man ;  
 A world more sorrowful it is that he  
 Must battle with, and fearlessly explore :  
 For fades the gleam of life's once purpled sea  
 When youth was ours—the youth that comes no more.  
 Those happy shores retreat which once we knew ;  
 The well-beloved voices hushed and still are they ;  
 Lost halcyon years, with skies of deepest blue,  
 Dear hearts that vanished some sad yesterday  
 Leave our life's journey dark. Alas, how true  
 This deep world-sorrow shadows all our way !"

Nor is Watts insensible to the sadder aspects of child life, such as have found expression in Mrs Browning's "The Cry of the Children," and is brought under our notice by societies for the pre-



vention of cruelty to children. No form of the misery of mankind is more dreadful than that which touches at its roots,—which affects childhood. Happiness is the right of children, and if those early years of life which ought to open in sunshine and joy are clouded over with gloom and despair, what hope is there for humanity? And yet how much sorrow there is among children, arising from sordid surroundings, ill-treatment, or neglect? Children are often made the victims of the accidents of life. The reverses of life fall heaviest upon them. How many are left orphans, or cast helpless upon a heedless and self-centred world? Institutions for the upbringing of the waifs and outcasts of society are necessary, for individual benevolence could not overtake the vast amount of distress of this kind that exists and is constantly created among us. But such institutions are not natural means of curing the evil. They take the children out of their natural surroundings, from the friends among whom they might grow up, and the conditions in which they might best flourish; they herd them together, and create whole communities of one character, living together and exercising a depressing influence upon one another. No man is more alive than Watts to the sufferings of poor and outcast children, or is more sensitive to right ways and means to alleviate these, and bring them up to be happy and useful citizens.

One noticeable picture exhibited about seven years ago in the Academy, called by the somewhat inadequate name of "Goodwill," disclosed a little forlorn girl whose state is truly pitiable. Abandoned by father and mother and all who should have protected and cared for her, and sent out to forage for herself, she is watch-

ing a butterfly flitting to and fro; emblem of her own condition, driven by the cold winds of misfortune hither and thither for shelter from the storm. Another picture of the same character which shows great inequalities of fortune has been called by the painter "Weiss nicht Wo!" a name suggested by Carlyle. Two boys are placed beside each other, one eating with much relish a luxuriant bunch of grapes, type of the comforts and luxuries of life, and the other watching him with an envious and hungry look, wishing that he too could be equally favoured; while on his open palm a butterfly has alighted for a moment, suggesting the thought of green fields and bright flowers, which are beyond his reach. A more tantalising situation could hardly be imagined. The condition of the poor boy is immensely aggravated by the contrast between his own circumstances and those of the other prosperous child of fortune who has all that heart can wish. The poor most deeply feel the injustice of their own lot, when they see others not better or more deserving revelling in superfluous enjoyments, when they cannot provide themselves with the bare necessities of life. In a large city it is a most pathetic sight to see a cold, hungry child, clothed in rags, fed on refuse, looking eagerly in at a window full of dainties that can never be his. Human children are brought up like wild beasts and are kennelled at night like dogs; and these shops are full of things that are unnecessary for the true support and enjoyment of life. One would say with the author of "Thorndale" that the common wants of life, its necessary food and clothing and housing had been supplied before men took seriously to the production of such fantastic

articles. But it is not so. If all were well fed and well clothed, the superfluities of life would not be grudged. It is because thousands are in absolute want of the very essentials of a humanised existence, that the labour seems misdirected to the production of things that are not necessary. If one had enough to eat, and were warmly clothed, it would not matter though one's neighbour fared sumptuously every day and was clothed with purple. If one's own house were sufficient to give shelter from the elements, and to provide a comfortable home, there would be no cause to envy the rich man his marble palace. It is because the poor have too little of the essentials of life that they are apt to have a spirit of bitter discontent, when they see their neighbours revelling in luxuries which they cannot altogether use. "Why all this elaborate lace and embroidery of human existence, when multitudes are starving in rags? Why cannot our industries be directed into channels which shall first and foremost supply our elementary needs, before they go on to provide for the idle refinements of life? Instead of herding a whole family in one miserable garret, we should stop building and finishing a spacious house full of rooms for a man who hardly ever enters one of them, until we have decently housed the family. We can only hope that this misdirection of industry will vanish as the prosperity and intelligence of the whole community advance."

Watts has always had a strong desire to perpetuate the memory of those who, in any rank of life or profession, have sacrificed their lives in order to save or benefit others. It has been to him a grievous waste that such heroic lives should have no commemoration

of them, but be allowed to pass at once into oblivion. He did not refer to soldiers who are ready by the very nature of their profession to count not their lives dear to them, if they can by their deeds help on a national cause. It is these who are the salt that has redeemed the corruption of society in all ages; the Roman Empire in its decadence would have perished at once, but for the noble spirit of duty and sacrifice of its army. He had in his eye the unselfish actions of civilians, who have fallen in the common battle of life in succouring their fellow-creatures. And it greatly enhances our idea of the fundamental nobility of human nature to know that such actions are common, and usually pass without any species of recognition at the time, and without any remembrance afterwards. They seem to be deeds which human beings are expected to perform, and which are only part of their common duty. But Watts had a wish to put some public record of such obscure lives as near as possible to the places where their noble deeds were performed. What would have satisfied his heart most completely would be some painting of the heroic action, or some sculpture of the hero himself.

On the Pincian Hill at Rome, along the sides of the beautiful umbrageous walks, are marble busts of those who have won renown in war or in the history of their country, in its literature, science, or art, and the collection is most interesting and instructive. While one is enjoying the beauties of nature, and the different views of the Eternal City from this point, one feels the influence at the same time of such noble memories and associations. The one enhances the effect of the other. Watts would have such a gallery formed in

our places of public resort, and greatly extended so as to embrace those who had given proof of great bravery and generosity in private life, within the little sphere in which they moved. The world would be the better of knowing such personalities. Their example would have a most stimulating effect in inducing others to be followers of them, and common life would be raised from its appearance of dulness and uniformity. Such a Valhalla it would be difficult to form in our country; but Watts would be satisfied if the names of men and women who had done noble deeds in their obscurity, were inscribed on the walls of public gardens. It is gratifying to know that a start in this direction has already been made at Portman's Park, St Botolph's, Aldersgate Street, where panels in commemoration of heroic self-sacrifice have recently been set up. Four examples may be quoted:—

“Thomas Griffin, fitter's labourer, April 12th, 1899. In a boiler explosion at a Battersea sugar refinery, was fatally scalded in returning to search for his mate.”

“Walter Peart (driver) and Harry Bean (fireman), of the Windsor express, on July 18th, 1899, whilst being scalded and burnt, sacrificed their lives in saving the train.”

“Mary Rogers, stewardess of the *Stella*, March 30th, 1899, self-sacrificed by giving up her life-belt and voluntarily going down in the sinking ship.”

“George Stephen Funnell, police-constable, December 22nd, 1899, in a fire at the Elephant and Castle, Wick Road, Hackney Wick, after rescuing two lives, went back into the flames, saving a barmaid at the risk of his own life.”

Cases of a similar kind are constantly happening, not only in and around the Metropolis, but in all parts of England, Scotland, and Ireland; and it would be well if the admirable example of Watts, here given, were universally followed up.

## Chapter XIII

# The Cycle of Death

“ For many a year the master wrought,  
And wisdom deepened slow with years ;  
Guest-chambers of his inmost thought  
Were filled with shapes too stern for tears ;—  
Yet Joy was there, and murmuring Love,  
And Youth that hears with hastened breath,  
But throned in peace all these above,  
The unrevealing eyes of Death.”

AMONG the greatest of Watts' paintings are those which illustrate various phases and uses of death. Abraham did not complete the trials of his faith, as a pilgrim of God on earth, until he had passed victoriously through death, and showed in connection with the death and burial of Sarah that he had grasped the true idea of what death implied. Hercules did not complete the cycle of his superhuman labours till he had encountered death and wrestled with him, and obtained the victory. And so Watts could not be said to have gone the round of earth's experiences in his art until he had painted death, and shown before our eyes what he truly is. Never has the King of Terrors been presented to human eye in such sublime imaginings. He is robbed of all that made him the shadow feared of man, and appears in the most alluring form as the angel that cures all evil. The works of the old masters have surrounded him with dread

images of gloom and despair. Holbein and Durer, and the whole school of German painters have dipped their brushes in the most forbidding hues to depict his visage, and have clothed him in the most grotesque and repulsive accessories. And even the old Italians, such as the brothers Lorenzetti and Signorelli, have taken their ideas from Dante's "Purgatorio," and invested him with whatever they could conceive as most abhorrent to human nature. It is well known how our Protestant forefathers after the Reformation, in that terrible decadence that fell upon all art at that period, represented death in their carvings upon the tombstones with skull and cross-bones that make one shudder, and how churchyards in town and country were neglected and regarded as waste nettle-grown places, outside all consideration of living humanity. But Watts' conceptions of death are entirely different. Michael Angelo said, "If life be a pleasure so death should also be, for it is given to us by the same master." Watts shared these sentiments and has given to us in a dozen great pictures this comforting aspect of death. In a grand cycle of works which have Death for their subject he shows only beautiful forms and bright colours, where death is swallowed up in the higher life.

In that most wonderful and inspiring painting of the group called "The Court of Death," painted originally for a cemetery of the poor, the Universal Fate is represented as a thoughtful, sad-eyed angel with folded wings, seated on a throne exalted above the ruins of the world's pomp and pride. The grave-clothes are falling in white graceful folds around him from the knees down to the floor, and over his shoulders is a

green mantle lined with red. In his lap he fondles a new-born babe, reminding us that every ending is a beginning, that life comes out of death and every grave is a cradle. On either side are the two great powers Silence and Mystery which stand at the entrance of the unseen world and guard its secrets. They partially lift the veil that divides the world of the living from the world of the dead, and give us glimpses of the other side of death. We see like the apostle in Patmos a door opened in heaven, with eyes purified by the heavenly euphrasy and washed clean from the dust of the earth by our tears; we see a golden sunrise where all the shadows have passed away in a world of everlasting light. A most suggestive group of figures appears before the angelic throne and do homage to the majesty of death. In the centre is a mail-clad soldier surrendering his sword to one who breaks the arrows of the bow, the shield and the sword, and the battle. On the right hand a young woman, pale and worn-out with much suffering and grief, lays her weary head on the shroud that falls from the knee of the angel as if glad to be at rest. Below her on the same side is an aged woman who with face all saddened and wrinkled, bowed down with the burden of the years, ending wearily in want and wretchedness a life which had been one long unequal struggle with poverty and pain, comes up to the folds of the shroud and sees what the angels of God look upon as life ebbs away. And further down a little child plays with the grave-clothes with that innocent unconsciousness which is so pathetic; while crouching on the floor is a lion, emblem of the strongest forces of nature, and of the triumph of death



over them all. On the left hand side of the picture a king, with his vermilion mantle and chain of state, approaches and lays his golden crown at the foot of the throne. Below him a cripple, whose misfortune has prevented him from keeping up with his fellows in the race of life, and who is therefore poor from the very necessity of things, comes with his crutch to death to ease him of a load which he can no longer bear; and on the floor there is a huge volume in which all the wisdom and learning of the world seems to be summed up lying open, which the scholar has abandoned as no longer of use to him.

What strikes one most while gazing at this picture is that it is not only or chiefly the miserable, the outcast, who are glad to be hurled anywhere out of the world in which they have found nothing but wretchedness, that Watts shows in this picture. He does not depict unhappy beings "holding out their manacled hands to death for release like the figures in Ary Scheffer's picture, or the despairing forms that appeal to death in the Campo Santo at Pisa. He paints persons in the height of their triumphs and successes, to whom life has given all it possessed and promised, and who have found out the vanity of its experiences and illusions. They have nothing more to enjoy—or hope for—no dream unfulfilled—and the ennui is intolerable. Those we see at this court are not afraid of death. They meet it with a serious but not a flinching eye, because they are weary of life, and rest in such circumstances is sweet." This glorious picture which teems with infinite thought and suggestion, upon which twenty years of careful thought

and skilful work have been expended, was first exhibited in an unfinished state at the New Gallery in 1896. It was the largest work in the exhibition, and reached from floor to ceiling of the largest gallery. Some more touches were added to it on the artist's eighty-sixth birthday, and it is now hung in the Watts collection at the Tate Gallery. We are fascinated by this most impressive design. Never had any earthly monarch a court like that of this king of kings. But while the picture fills us with awe as we are so vividly reminded that death ends all here, we thank God for the uplifting of the veil and for the assurance that death is not a total eclipse, but that around the darkened orb is a rim of the light beyond which tells us of a sunlit world, where victorious love is beyond the reach of death and is pure forever from the stain of sin; where those who recover in death from the fitful fever of life drink of the fountain of immortal youth.

Another representation of Death, equally grand and impressive, is given in the picture, "Time, Death and Judgment," originally exhibited at the New Gallery when Watts' pictures were collected there, and given to the Dean and Chapter of St Paul's by the artist through Canon Scott Holland. At the top of the picture are the words, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might, for there is no work nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave whither thou goest." At the foot is the Scripture verse, "He that observeth the wind shall not sow, and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap." Death assumes the form of a fair young woman of gigantic proportions, her cheek pale with sorrow, and her eyes

fixed with deep tenderness upon the flowers she has gathered into her lap, and which are fading under her breath. By her side is Time, painted as no artist but Watts himself has shown him to us, no longer as the venerable, decrepit, conventional figure, with long, floating white hair and beard, leaning upon his scythe, but as a young man full of life and vigour, with proud, straight-forward gaze, and head covered with auburn hair wreathed with roses that prove his triumphant joy. Above the strange pair thus wonderfully associated by genius is the figure of Judgment floating in the air, arrayed in scarlet robes, the emblem of doom, bearing in his right hand the fiery sword of execution, and in the left the balance of eternal justice, in which human deeds and human character are weighed. His head is hidden by the outstretched hand that holds the balance, so that his face is not seen, and none may know the nature of the final sentence he has to pronounce. In the background of the picture the sun is setting in an ethereal sky, and the pale moon imparts its mystic light to the east. It is a beautiful conception that represents Time as endowed with perpetual youth. It knows neither past nor future, but is a constant present. The gathered wisdom of old age, and the innocence of childhood alike belong to it. All conditions are comprehended by it, and it makes all experiences possible. Time makes no one old. The mere lapse of the years effects no change in us. The blue sky is the same as it was six thousand years ago, and the April grass comes up every year with the same magic greenness as in Eden. It is not time that wrinkles the brow and glooms the face and shrivels the spirit.

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It is the withering action of evil passions, care, and malice and covetousness and worry. Youth under proper treatment of life may be preserved to the very last. There are persons in the sere and yellow leaf who have not numbered a score of birthdays ; and there are others whose head is grey, and whose backs are bent with the weight of the years, and yet who are as young in heart as when they were children. The tedium of a long journey is not in the journey itself, but in the temper of the traveller. There is no decline and degeneracy in things, but only in ourselves. Our life is mixed with death, and therefore time is old as the pyramids to us, and yet youthful as the sky.

The youthfulness of time teaches not only the commonplace truth that all ages and seasons belong to death, but also the far grander thought that death is meant to keep life always young and always at its best. Death is the renewal of life—the keeping up from generation to generation of life's high standard of beauty and vigour. Time in this association is the embodiment of the old primeval cult of the Lake of Nemi. He is the priest that slays the slayer, and shall himself be slain, representing the eternal youth and vigour of nature, the undecaying freshness of life on the earth. In the life of the individual, the powers of body and mind after a time decay ; life becomes monotonous and loses its zest ; the faculty of curiosity, research and study declines. But it is ordained that, instead of prolonging his useless existence indefinitely, man should reach the limit of it in three-score years and ten, and give place to a new person who will carry on his work with new power and

fresh interest. Thus the shortness of human life is the greatest help to the progress of the race, while it stimulates the individual to make the most of his time, each setting sun admonishing him to hasten in his task, and to do it with all his might. Paley, in his "Natural Theology," mentions as an example of wise design, that the old die off in order to make room for the young. But the better way to put it would be to say that the young are born to supply the lack of service soon to occur through the superannuation, and finally through the decease of the old. And viewed in this aspect, the birth of children is a prophetic intimation to parents and the race. It seems to say, "The little ones have come because the old ones have to go." Like the priest in the legendary worship of Nemi, "your successor will slay you as you have slain your predecessor." The new bud will cause the old leaf to fade and fall off. Every human birth implies and involves a human death. But there is consolation mixed with the prophetic sadness. We are assured that the work of the world will be continued with unabated vigour and freshness when we ourselves are no longer able to take part in it. We can say, like the older De Candolle, the great Swiss botanist, when his last fatal illness overtook him in the midst of his labours on his monumental work, the "Prodromus," "I die contented; my son will carry on my work." This constant succession of new existence secures for the race a higher maximum of activity and enjoyment than would otherwise be possible. In nature, the race is the chief consideration; the individual is subordinate. The plant in spring produces its

blossom before its foliage, or sends up its flower straight from the root before the leaves, as in the crocus and the primrose, because the blossom belongs to the race, the leaf to the individual; and in the capricious weather of spring when the life of the plant is in danger, nature hastens first to produce the part that is essential to the continuation of the species. This great principle of nature is admirably expressed by Tennyson in his most significant generalisation:—

“ So careful of the type she seems,  
So careless of the single life.”

Individual death is a painful and sorrowful thing; it is loss, and waste and woe; but death viewed in relation to the race means progress, work and happiness, and these are at the highest point always.

The conception of the youthfulness of Time and Death in this picture of Watts, sets before us the great truth that it is death that makes our world beautiful. Imagine our world without death, and how dreary would be its uniformity; how painful would be its monotony and unchangeableness. Death is the cause of the freshness of spring and the decay of autumn. It is death that paints the vivid greenness of the April fields, and the burning glory of the September woods. It is death that kindles the splendour of the flower. It is the dying plant alone that flowers. Blossoms are always caused by poverty of nourishment and feebleness of life. They occur at the extremities of stems and twigs where the vitality is at the lowest point. A flower is in reality nothing more than a leaf whose full development has been stopped, and the leaf is an arrested twig, and the nectary which secretes the honey is an altered stamen, and the fruit is a degen-

erate flower. All these metamorphoses are a kind of death. The gorgeous colours of blossoms are true autumnal tints due to fading growth ; and this striking association of highest beauty with the close of life and the fulfilment of its ends, which we see in the bright flower of summer, in the yellow leaf of autumn, in the hectic cheek and brilliant eye of the consumptive, and in the transfigured look on the faces of the dying, seems like a ray of glory falling from the opening door of heaven, a gleam of that light which never was on land or sea. The colours of heaven are assumed when the ends of earth are fulfilled, and the gold of the streets of the eternal city shines in each faded leaf that rustles beneath our feet. Surely we may believe that when decay is thus invested with a radiance surpassing the beauty of youth, it is meant to tell us that the day of death is better than the day of birth. We naturally wish things and persons to abide unchanged forever ; and their death and removal are the cause of much of the sorrow and suffering of the world. We speak of everlasting flowers and amaranthine bowers, and long for an earthly realm of eternal life. But we forget that it is the fading flower that is so wonderfully beautiful. Fix its beauty unchanged, and you make it an artificial flower, a dry mummy. It is the fleeting human blossom also that is so tenderly dear .We love each other more devotedly owing to the shadow of death that falls upon and consecrates our love ; because we must soon, we know not how soon, be parted. How destitute of poetry and feeling would the earth be without death. It calls forth all that is noblest in human affection, and sweetest in human sentiment. How cold and hard would human beings be in their intercourse with one

another without death. Surely one of the many uses of death is to make us more reverent and tender towards one another. Even in our homes we are tempted to say unkind words, and do harsh deeds ; but how easy it would be to resist the temptation, if we would only anticipate in thought the sad hour of bereavement, if love in life would try to imagine what "love in death" would be. Death thus makes the world more beautiful, and human life more humane. The woodruff when it fades, and the commonest grass when it is cut down, yield a fragrance which we did not know existed in them.

"Earth's gladness shall not satisfy your soul,  
This beauty of the world in which you live ;  
The crowning grace that sanctifies the whole,  
That death alone can give !"

It may be said that all this is fanciful ; that we read these thoughts into Watts' pictures. But if Watts himself had a simpler and more obvious interpretation in his mind when he painted Time as a youth in association with Death, then we can say that he, in common with every true prophet or seer, communicates more than he intends or even knows. If he himself did not intend the thought we find in his picture, we are safe to say that his genius meant it. In the particular it has hold of the absolute truth ; and everything that a picture suggests to one in harmony with its own manifest design cannot be called farfetched but is verily true. Watts wishes in all his pictures not too obviously to suggest a meaning. He would, as he himself says to a correspondent, in no way wish to trammel the thought of any interpreter of his works by defining too much. In this respect he resembles





LOVE AND DEATH.

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Sir Edward Burne Jones — who left his symbolic pictures to convey to the spectators the meaning and impression which they were capable of realising—giving no message at all to one, an inadequate conception to another, the full significance of the artist's own mind to a third, and telling their story to all, without any help of interpretation from the painter, as would be the case if he were dead.

But more touching is the picture of "Love and Death," which is one of the best known, as it is one of the most finished of Watts' paintings. It is easy to see that the artist has put the best of himself into the work, and has wrought at it with loving zeal. There is nothing superfluous in the painting. Each hue and curve tells its impressive tale and reads its pathetic lesson. The effect produced is the cumulative result of many exquisitely simple and natural touches. The occasion that gave origin to the picture, imparts to it an even more touching significance, and brings it nearer to our hearts. Watts was asked to paint the portrait of a young nobleman who had all that the world could give in the way of rank and fortune, and graces of body and mind, but who was dying of consumption. Everything was done for him that wealth and skill and love could do, but they were utterly unavailable to stay the ravages of the fell disease. Death was approaching with slow but sure footsteps, and nothing remained but to watch the setting of the sun of life. This memory so haunted Watts that it ultimately created an ideal in his mind, of which this picture was the outcome. In his prefatory note to the Catalogue of the Winter Exhibition at the New Gallery in 1896, he said of it that it manifested "the

progress of inevitable, but not terrible death, partially but not completely overshadowing love." These words exactly describe the conception. We see death as a gigantic female figure, mounting the steps and opening the door of a house where the tragedy of life is accomplishing itself, and the parting agonies within that are left to the imagination. Love is seen in the form of a winged youth, small in stature compared to death, but strong and resolute in endeavouring with all his might to prevent the entrance of death, but altogether in vain. With irresistible force he is swept out of the way, and his wings are bruised, and his form battered in the dread encounter. The bright roses that were growing round the doorway have fallen from their trellises, and are withering away unheeded on the ground. The problem of expressing harmoniously at the same time violent action and graceful attitude, attempted resistance and irresistible might, has been solved with wonderful success in these two typical figures. A turtle dove uttering its one tone of monotonous sadness at the lowest step, gives a weird loneliness to the scene. It reminds us of the mythical dove in Miss Ingelow's poem, the fond dove, the lost dove, the dove with the bright, bright eyes, which utters its mournful wail—

"O maid most dear, I am not here,  
I have no place, no part,  
No dwelling more by sea or shore,  
But only in thine heart."

Never did Grecian art express so graphically the hopelessness of human love to stay the step of death. The inequality of the contest could not possibly be re-

presented to us in a more striking manner. It seems to be cruel, remorseless, inevitable Fate, the sight of which strikes us dumb. And yet there is wonderful consolation in the picture ; a calmness, a sense of submission before which the most passionate nature must yield itself. We yield to death, as we yield to nothing else. It rules us like a law of nature ; and it stills our most desperate struggles. And on the drapery of the majestic figure of death, falling in such graceful folds around her person, there gleams a bright light from a hidden source, as if from another world out of sight, transfiguring the ceremonies of the grave. That light tells us of an unending day, into which we shall enter as surely as on this earth of ours we pass into the region of the midnight sun, and we know that in death "our sun shall no more go down, neither for brightness shall our moon withdraw itself, but the Lord shall be our everlasting light, and our God our glory." There is nothing stern about death itself. She shows by her very attitude in the dread struggle with love, how reluctantly she engages in it. That drooping head, that veiled face, that arm stretched out in tenderness as in might, are each expressive of her infinite pity. And though we cannot see in her face, for it is in shadow, the shadow cast on earth by the very glory that is to be revealed in us, we see her back illumined with a light that streams from the open door of heaven, and we trust her with our own life, and with what is dearer far ; for she is the mother of our higher life, as Watts himself so touchingly called her, "that kind nurse who puts us all as her children to bed." The idea expressed in this grand creation got such a hold of Watts' imagination, that he has worked at it at different periods, in

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varying phases, bringing out more and more its wealth of meaning, until he has matured it in the picture, which he presented to the city of Manchester, and in the equally finished version which is in the Tate Gallery.

“This is the house of life, and at its door  
    Young Love keeps anxious watch, while outside stands  
    One who with firm importuning demands  
An entrance. Strange is he, but love with lore  
Taught by quick terror names him Death ; and o'er  
    Love's face there comes a cloud, and the small hands  
    Would shut the door ; for he from loveless lands  
Is foe to Love, now and forever more.

Nay, not for evermore ! Love is but young,  
    And young Love sees alone what youth can see ;  
With age Love's vision grows more clear and strong,  
    And he discerns that this same Death, whom he  
Had thought his foe, striving to do him wrong,  
    Comes with the gift of immortality.”

“Death Crowning Innocence,” is a lovely conception, of a kind to bring comfort to many a sorely bereaved mother. It represents the angel of death with a love that is more than love, excelling that of a mother, folding a little child to its bosom, and wrapping its wings closely around its little form ; thus Watts himself in the catalogue of the Art Exhibition in the New Gallery in 1897 said, “death takes charge of innocence and places it beyond the reach of evil.” The face of the angel is full of pity and has an expression of intense yearning. The drapery is folded in graceful fashion, and all the lovely details stand out clearly from a background of the softest ethereal blue. The effect of such a picture is to convince one indeed

that "those whom the gods love die young." There is nothing to regret here but the death itself. The parents feel when the angel says to them, "Suffer this little one to come unto me, and forbid it not," that they have been entertaining an angel unawares, who on his departure has left a rich blessing behind. God has need of these little ones: for in His heaven are all ages, the child, the youth, the middle-aged, and the old. They constitute the variety of heaven. Death fixes upon each stage of life the seal of immortality, and perpetuates all the beauty and excellence, and none of the defects of that stage. Death crowns the innocence of the child, and so keeps it for us for ever more. More cruel in reality is life to our children. Life takes them away from us, and changes them into care-worn hardened men and women, but death keeps them unchanged children for ever. The child is immortalised by death; and all the tender and holy feelings that it appealed to in life are perpetuated and kept fresh and vivid continually. And so long as we love the child we never lose him. It is only when we cease to love him that he dies. What would the earth be without its snowdrops and daffodils that hasten away so soon in the spring of the year; what would it be without its apparently superfluous profusion of apple and pear and cherry blossoms, not a fourth of which will ever set into fruit? Would it not lose much of its beauty and brightness, and lack those tender poetic feelings that sanctify our nature? And what would human life be if there were no such seeming waste in it; if every child grew up to certain manhood and womanhood? How much love and gentleness and heavenly-mindedness and hallowing sorrow

would be lost out of it? Not in vain have the fleeting spring flowers lived, for they have drawn up our thoughts to things more beautiful and enduring; and not in vain is the transitory presence of a child in the family, for it causes our hearts to bend over the things of that kingdom into which, not the wise and prudent of this world, but those who become as little children enter. Not in vain is the death of a child, for it softens the most callous into unselfishness and unworldliness. The mother who gazes upon Watts' picture of "The Crowning of Innocence," which says all this and far more to every thoughtful mind, can give the old reply to the question, "Is it well with thee? Is it well with the child? And she answered, It is well." The artist has had abundant testimony that it has comforted many a bereaved mother, and this has been a more satisfactory reward to the painter than any praise of its artistic merits.

The allegorical painting which Watts thinks most of as representative of his deepest thought is that which he calls "Love and Life." He himself says that this picture is "perhaps his most direct message to the present generation." Love he believed to be the guiding and inspiring angel of life, not merely the conqueror of death. He depicts him as a strong immortal youth, fair with the beauty of the gods, gently leading a timorous soul, leaning upon him, up a steep and difficult hillside which is never climbed but once. The contrast between the two figures is strikingly brought out. One admires the youth, so reliant, so independent, and at the same time so kind and considerate. He is painted with a strong brush in colours that inspire you with confidence and pride. He is the





LOVE AND LIFE.

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ideal of manly vigour and grace and efficiency. Everyone praises the artist's skill in painting this ideal. But the woman is disappointing. She is not depicted in the full rounded beauty of womanhood. She seems spare and slight, and scarcely developed, as if in the transition period between girlhood and womanhood; and many look at the picture with critical eyes, complaining of the somewhat angular lines and sharp curves of her figure, as if the artist did not do justice to his own conception. But a closer study of the picture will enable us to realise a purpose in this seeming departure from the mould of perfect beauty in the female figure. He painted her as she is intentionally. If he had put before us in his picture a strong and gracious woman, with a form like that of the Venus de Medici, he would have detracted from the significance of the picture. She would in such a case have been sufficient for herself, self-sustained and independent. She would have needed no help or guidance. Whereas the moral of the picture is that she is weak and helpless in herself, and requires all the assurance and support that love can give. Who does not know how unfinished and self-distrustful is a life without love? Life without love is what the Greeks called *βίος ἄβίος*—lifeless life. The loss of the power of loving is the loss of life. Whenever we cease to love a thing, it has no longer any interest or beauty to us; even though our hands may possess it, we can no longer call it our own. "Show me what thou truly lovest," says Fichte, "show me what thou seekest and strivest for with thy whole heart, when thou hopest to attain to true enjoyment, and thou hast thereby shown to me thy life. What thou lovest, that

it is thou livest. This very love is thy life, the root, the seat, the central pith of thy being. Nothing is attainable unless we love it. Learn to love well is therefore the first and golden rule of wisdom." We are strong only in our trust, in our power to connect ourselves with the beloved one ; and he is strongest and most developed who has most confidence in the help of love.

"*Aimer c'est vivre*" is indeed true. Love is the old perfect tense of live. If we analyse life closely we shall know that the one supreme passion of it is love. It is the ruling motive of human action. The hill-side which love and life climb together is rough with boulders ; precipices yawn on every side. It is no pleasure jaunt they have undertaken. But Love bids Life look up to the celestial heights, and encourages her to put forth all her energy to surmount the steep and arduous way. She is not to look down at the difficulties of the way, for so doing she would turn giddy, and lose her footing, or shrink from the terrible abysses on either side of the narrow path. She is to look upward to the great reward, and so receive new strength to persevere. It will be observed in the picture that the angel does not cumber her with help. He does not gallantly put his arm around her, and so save her from self-exertion ; does not enable her by the help of his wings to surmount at once the difficulties and dangers of the way, without any toil or trouble of her own. Her contact with him is of the slightest, enough to remove her self-distrust and inspire her with confidence, but not enough to render exertion on her own part unnecessary. She merely lays her own open palm in his hand, which does not grasp it

or close around it, and the other arm is altogether free. She leans upon him, and yet barely touches his form. And all this is for the purpose of calling forth and educating her own powers. It would benefit her little to be raised by love to the highest heights, if she brought up there her own old self, unbraced and unimproved. She must be strengthened by her toil, and have in her the blessedness of her own experience. She must be crowned with the crown of life, her own life in its highest manifestation. Such love as the artist represents in his picture is not the mere domestic passion which the sexes entertain for each other, although that is part of it. It has nothing personal or conventional about it. It is not a sentiment, the sweetest that life knows, throwing its glamour around it. It is an impersonal principle like that, as the artist himself informs us, lifting life out of all low depths to a rarer atmosphere and to clear celestial visions. All our experiences of love as a passion and a sentiment are designed to lead us upward to something far higher and more lasting.

Watts presented in 1894 to the Luxembourg Gallery at Paris, a version of this painting to the great gratification of the French national feeling. For a long time there had been no English works at this exclusive gallery; but about the time that Watts bestowed his gift, a place had been found in it for characteristic specimens of Burne Jones, Leighton, Whistler and Calvert. Watts was engaged at the time on two versions of the same subject. One, after being exhibited at Chicago, he presented to the Government of the United States. It was received with much enthusiasm by an express act of Congress,

and hung in the Reception Room of the White House at Washington. The other, which was sent to the Luxembourg Gallery, was not a mere replica. It so happened that the two pictures were on the easel at the same time, as Watts wished to develop the subject and to make a somewhat different arrangement of the subordinate details. The one sent to America was first finished, and the other was somewhat modified according to the criticism of M. Benedite, the Conservator of the French Gallery. In reply to an inquiry about the variations in the two versions, Watts wrote with characteristic modesty—“ I regard my whole series of these works in the same direction of thought as so many monumental manuscripts, not otherwise probably much to be valued. I have another version of the same subject, for I think the suggestion of especial value, which will go with the whole series that I have completed, and these I hope still to complete and present to the nation here. I do not concern myself with the thought whether they will be cared for or not. The object is one I made for myself many years ago ; perhaps the intention and example may suggest to abler artists the carrying out of a similar intention with greater success.”

Usually death comes in the most undesired of all forms, as loss and waste of the most precious things in life ; but in Watts' picture called “ The Messenger ” it comes in the most welcome of all forms as the consoler of sorrow, the giver of rest. In this aspect men and women have dug for it as for hid treasure, and longed for it with an inexpressible longing. In the picture before us it stands in front of a weary,

worn-out sufferer, whose face is turned away from us so that we can only see the suffering impressed upon it. In the most tranquil and dignified attitude, it touches with its beckoning finger the aged, worn-out frame, stretched in utter weariness on its couch, and bids him leave the open book that he has been reading lying on the floor, the violin with which he has striven in vain to soothe his depressed spirit, the globe which he has used in his astronomic studies, and the palette and the chisel that have helped by the painter's and the sculptor's accomplishments to enrich and beautify his life. The heavenly figure is no longer an angel with wings, a being having an entirely different nature from our own, who has never known our experience, and therefore cannot have a fellow-feeling for us, but a woman, an intensely human being, knowing the frailty of our frames, and therefore able to enter into all our sorrows and sufferings as if they were her own. It is a touch of genius to represent death in this form, giving the sufferer the comfort which only one of his own nature can give. While she has this womanly appearance, with downcast, pitying eyes, sorrowing with the sufferer's sorrow, she has a dignified, upright carriage, and wears a crown of victory over all human ills, and the touch of her arm has a sense of power in it, which ministers strength and compels obedience. She has a little child cradled in one arm. And this feature of the picture shows us that she is not only a woman, but also a mother, and therefore more tenderly sympathetic still. When Jesus stood beside the widow of Nain, and saw her speechless, overwhelmed, it is significantly said that He had compassion upon her. In the original Greek, the word

compassion has a *maternal* meaning, and expresses the most consoling truth that the very same feeling which she had towards her dead son, the Saviour had towards herself. So here, in this picture, the mother-heart of death has the same feeling which the sufferer himself experiences, and it can comfort him as nothing else can.

In another picture of Watts', the angel of death has come and called for the mortal, and he has gone with him across that bourne from whence he shall never return. The artist paints the hour after death "before decay's effacing fingers have swept the lines where beauty lingers," as his consummate idea of the nothingness of all earthly possessions, and calls the picture "*Sic transit gloria mundi.*" It is a concrete expression in form and colour of the old German proverb, "What I spent I had; what I saved I lost; what I gave I have," inscribed on the wall behind the subject in the painting, and suggested by what had fallen from Carmen Sylva, Queen of Roumania, during a visit to the artist in his studio. It is one of Watts' latest works and exhibits his powers at the ripest. In it he concentrates all his observation and experience of life, and shows what might be called life in relation to death, how death deepens the mystery and quenches the glory of life, and brings all its questionings to an end. There are none of the usual accessories of death in the picture. It is reduced to the utmost simplicity. Nothing is allowed to interfere with the oneness of the impression which is to be produced. The horizontal character of nearly all the lines of the picture produces a feeling of deep restfulness and



peace which takes possession of you at once ; and this feeling is enhanced by the pearl-grey hue of the winding-sheet and the faded tints of the once brilliant accessories. On a marble tomb like that on which the sculptured figure of a mediæval knight reposed there is a shrouded form, concealing and yet revealing the mould of the dead. That shroud is the largest, most conspicuous and most important object on the canvas. The angularities of its folds disclose the rigidity and motionlessness of the outlines beneath. The light falls along it from the west to the east, indicating that it rests beneath a setting sun. The picture represents not the mean and perishing elements of life, but life in its most favourable form. It represents the case of a man who has made the best of this world. He has either achieved greatness or has had greatness thrust upon him. In one corner is the ermine mantle of a nobleman ; in the opposite corner is a laurel wreath that adorned his brow, showing that he had won fame and honour at the hands of his fellow-creatures. Between them is a carved shield leaning useless against the shroud ; a long spear lying harmless on the ground, and a gauntlet thrown down as the gage of battle, telling us that he was a warrior who had conquered in war ; and the peacock's feathers from beneath the cuirass, and the roses mingled with the armour, proclaim that he enjoyed the pleasures of life and mixed the arts of peace with those of strife ; while the lyre and the half-opened book standing up against the tomb give us an indication of his love of music and learning. Underneath these suggestive objects, stretched along the floor, is the dark robe of a pilgrim with its scallop stole now cast aside for-

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ever, and showing that the groundwork of his character—what formed the basis and foundation of his multi-form achievements and acquirements—was the religious life.

Thus we see that the man who lies there in his shroud on the tomb was a man of the noblest kind, whom rank and bearing and all the graces of life had crowned with the highest success. And there he lies! The paths of glory lead but to this tomb. And the question arises, What had he got from all his travail under the sun; what enduring work had his life wrought; what everlasting treasure to be borne through death and the grave had he laid? Death teaches now that what he spent he had, and it belongs to the irrevocable past. What he saved he lost, and the richest dies as the poorest, and takes nothing away with him. But the sacrifices of life remain, and what he gave away in charity, in religion, has an indestructible quality and abides forever. What he gave he has. The cup of cold water which he gave to the thirsty has become a river of water quenching his own immortal thirst. The fragrant spikenard with which he anointed the head and feet of the poor has gone to fill the vials full of odours sweet that perfume the praises of eternity. The laurel wreath at the corner of the picture may speak not only of what the dead has laid down, but of what he assumes after death. "I know thy poverty (but thou art rich)" said the Spirit to the angel of the Church of Smyrna. Within the brackets, concealed from the outward eye, is his real wealth. The brackets of this life fall from the poverty, and death reveals his inexhaustible riches. Death deprives the wealthy and

cultured life of its laurel wreath of success in this world, but it crowns him with the crown of life. He takes with him his real possessions into the eternal world; and the hour that eclipses all earthly glory fills his horizon with the light of eternal day.

Another picture of similar character is that which is entitled "Can these bones live?" Its treatment is the opposite to that which the picture of "Sic transit" has received. Instead of quiet lines and colours of restfulness, it has the strong hues and lines of violent action. It is a large and most imposing composition, in which every line of the exquisite drawing is a poem, and the expressive colouring seems inspired—"hues which have words that speak to us of heaven." The whole picture is its own metaphor, most harmonious in all its details. The draperies are ponderous, of a strong yellow tint, and fall down in angular folds; the branches are swayed and broken by the storm; there is an ominous confusion among the ancient bones, seen in lurid shadow, with "a strange splash of colour among them here and there," as if owning a supernatural power coming upon them; all these particulars force themselves upon the attention and compel one to look with the eyes of Ezekiel upon the wondrous scene. It has been objected that the symbolism of the picture is too forcible, and leaves no room for quietly picking out and dwelling upon the beauties and sublimities of the work. But it may be remarked that this coercive effect of the whole picture upon the mind is just the intention of the artist. He wishes that the moral lesson should be even more important than the technical beauties of the painting.

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But there remains another picture yet in this great cycle of death representations. It is that which is called "Love Triumphant." We saw how love was conquered by death ; how the majestic form of death pushed aside by its mighty uplifted arm the puny person of love standing in the way, and vainly striving to keep him from entering the house of life. But though love is conquered by the physical form of death, the power of love nevertheless is triumphant over it. Through death it escapes from death and becomes immortal. In Watts' picture Time and Death have companioned together throughout the ages ; and they are at length overthrown and lie prostrate at the feet of Love. They appear as two vague figures wrapped in clouds ; the man half recumbent, the woman lying prone on the ground ; death in the form of the woman illumined with a bright light ; death in the form of a man overshadowed by his own form, and knowing nothing of the secrets that are hidden in his stern keeping. Love appears as a mystic angel with hands outstretched and mighty wings lifted upwards, and a waving robe blown across his body by a strong wind, and clouds of glory round about him, mounting into the empyrean. Love is the most indestructible element of our being. It is to degrade, instead of to exalt our conceptions of immortal life, to speak of the risen spirit as soaring out of the sphere of our earthly loves into impersonal being in fellowship with God and His angels. The beautiful affections of the human heart and the earthly home are not specialities of the present life, moral exuviæ to be cast off when the spirit wings its way to eternity. We take them with us, and death can annihilate no worthy love wherein the heart rejoices.



LOVE TRIUMPHANT.

*Reproduced from a photograph by FREDK. HOLLYER.*



And the highest conception we can form of the true heavenly-blessedness is the human heart which is unchanged in all its pure, gentle, earthly affections transfigured and glorified. And this is the grand consummation of the varied conceptions of death to which the artist is leading. He wishes us to realise that life and death are only phases of the one element of love—one in their source and one in their unity of purpose. The highest conception of heaven where life is perfected by death is that of the mortal love that has put on immortality.

The series of remarkable pictures of death is wound up by the design which is entitled "The people who sat in darkness." The fact that death has been conquered and swallowed up in victory has to be proclaimed to mankind; and this announcement in the picture founded upon the passage in Isaiah which says "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined." The prophet makes a strange antithesis. He does not oppose life to death as we should have expected, for life is the natural contrast to death. Upon them that dwell in the shadow of death not life has come, but light hath shined. Death remains, but it is illumined. Its true nature has been revealed. It has not been abolished, for death serves an all-important purpose. Without death there can be no development into a higher sphere of being. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; and it is only through death that the mortal can put on immortality, as it is only through the sleep of the cocoon that the caterpillar can become the butterfly. But the abolition of

death is not the only cure for it. The shedding light upon its profound mystery is a higher form of cure. It is the darkness of death that makes death terrible. It is our ignorance of it that fills us with dread ; and when it is revealed in its true light, when in God's light we see light on it, we realise that it needs no transformation. It is transfigured by the sunshine beyond into a mode of life ; and we feel that the shadow of its eclipse is the shadow of God's wing, under which we can put our trust. Watts' picture tells us that in death it is not earth obscuring heaven, but heaven obscuring earth ; it is not darkness that is blinding us to all earthly glory, but the light that is above the brightness of the sun that is arising upon our darkness. We see the expectant group, consisting of youth and age, straining their eyes to catch the first opening of the gates of the east, and the flush of the rising day-star leaping to glow over the world ; and we hear the prophet's burning words telling us that the life of earth is the vestibule of eternity, and earth itself the sacred theatre of spiritual dramas, "the field of unspeakable and everlasting victories." "The present life seemed," as the Northumbrian pagan chief said long ago, "like the swift flight of a sparrow through a lighted room, in at one door and out at another into the wintry storm and the unknown darkness." But all around this little lighted hall of life the curtains have been drawn up, and man's life is seen to be in the midst of the vast heavenly places, with abundant means to stimulate the spirit and occupy every faculty of man. And it is for this glorious hope that is to dawn upon the world, that the watchers of Judea are waiting. The pity is that while the drawing



that embodies this noble design was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1849, it was never executed on a scale sufficiently large to be worthy of it.

One of Watts' most recent paintings shows that in spite of his great age his mind still retains its youthful power of imagination. It is called "Love steering the boat of humanity," and held the place of honour in the last exhibition of the New Gallery. The sea is rough, and on it there is a boat, just escaped from a storm. A strong wind is still blowing, and the clouds are driven by it across the face of the sky. There has been a sail, but it has been dropped, owing to the force of the elements. Humanity represented by a nude man is rowing the boat of human life, has caught a crab, and lies helpless at the bottom, and Love sits at the helm and steers. The design of this picture is serious, and is meant to teach in a somewhat different way, what is the constant lesson of all Watts' works, that it is love that guides all the affairs of the world, and is the motive behind all its undertakings. A playful humour, shown by such touches as the unskilfulness of the rower, hovers over the seriousness of the painting. Some are not so much impressed by it as usual, owing to the obviousness of the allegory leaving little or nothing to the imagination.

## Chapter XIV

# Unity and Harmony of all his Pictures

THE thoughtful student of Watts' pictures cannot fail to notice that the subjects of them are not random and accidental. He will discern a close sequence and connection in them all, arising from a common purpose, and having a systematic unity. They grow up together as a plant grows from one root, whose stem and leaves, flower and fruit and seed have so close a mutual resemblance, that each part is an image of the whole organism. They are all the outcome of his profound religious teaching. Indeed, he himself confesses that all his works are but fragments of one complete harmonious whole—of that great epic painting, the story of mankind—a sort of "pictorial cosmos," like that which Chenavard projected, or the grand composition which Kaulbach executed; a representation of the decisive points on which the progress of the world has turned.

He begins with the making of the world, and the preparation of its primitive chaos for the abode of the highest self-conscious life; for the Eden in which man finds a reflection in nature of his own lofty nature. He shows in the creation of Eve the origin of the maternal spirit, of the unselfish love that purifies and

ennobles everything ; and then reveals, as the sacred narrative itself pictures it, in the poetic drapery of spiritual facts, which can thus be best revealed to the understanding of mankind, the root-sin of the human race, out of which and according to the type of which all after sins have grown ; and the judgment which it produced in the bitter repentance of Eve, in the remorse and banishment of Cain, and in the overwhelming destruction of the Flood, and in the resting of the dove that returned not to the ark on the battered olive tree that survived with the wreck of the world's wealth and pomp at its foot. He emphasises the loss of the soul in the case of the young man with great possessions who had gained the world—who had turned his back on Christ rather than give away his goods ; the vain chasing of satisfaction in life in the *Fata Morgana*, and the development of revolting cruelty and brutal passion from the cherishing of selfishness and worldliness in the heart in Mammon and the Minotaur. He tells us how the strong man is overcome by sensuous passion in the case of Samson, and how the well-born young man becomes an exile from his father's plenteous home, and a husk-fed prodigal, through his impatience of restraint and his desire for the good which is within the reach of a free moral agent, but is beyond the pale of the commandment of God. He assures us that sin is avenged not only by external judgments, but also by the more awful moral penalties inflicted by the Dweller in the Innermost, who sits enthroned as a judge in the heart of each man, and from whose eyes, which are as a flame of fire, no sin can be hidden. We see each type of the prophet and reformer of the

world proclaiming the inevitable doom which hangs over every wrong, personal and national; and in the horses of Revelation—the symbols of the inevitable and triumphant conquest of the evils of the world, controlled by the will of God. We are taught to discover love where we had found only law in nature and in the experiences of man; love leading the young and untrained up the steep and dangerous paths of life; love passionately rebelling against death as a terrible waste of the grace and tenderness of life; love crowning innocence by death, delivering it from the desecration of the sin and misery of the world by an early dissolution, and sealing its freshness and fairness with immortality; love by the healing hand of death releasing those who are worn out by the toil and pain of life; and love finding in death the gate of life, and the highest disclosure of the majesty and mystery of love.

And while the fashion of the world passeth away, and all the things that are seen are temporal, Hope wistfully lifts its bandaged eyes to the shining of the Morning Star, and the dawn that is always somewhere in the world, and listens to the note on the unstrung lyre, every chord swept away save one, at first faint and low, but swelling louder as the years go on, bringing harmony out of untoward things, and turning all discords and confusions to triumphant music; Charity with its motherly comfort soothes every ill; Faith overcomes all difficulties and discouragements; and Peace and Goodwill reconcile the differences and alienations of men. Sir Galahad as the type of youthful fervour, is strengthened by seeing the heavenly vision that makes the world no longer a devil's world,

but a divine world, linked to celestial zones and everlasting victories. Aspiration strives to bring this world under the ennobling powers of the world to come ; and the Happy Warrior with dying eyes sees the crown of life that he has won, and the opening glory of the immortal rest. Time and Oblivion, while sweeping all things down to one common doom, reserve from the universal fate the deed of sacrifice and the gift of love. Into the Court of Death all that is representative of mortal life is summoned by the Power that rules the world ; while the last great Judgment sums up the lessons which all the other incidents have been teaching, and discloses the march of time, and the pity of death, and the unswerving rectitude and overmastering power of judgment, with its avenging sword and unerring scales, setting right all that was wrong, and bringing eternal good out of temporal evil, and proclaiming that just and true in all His ways is the Power that makes for righteousness and works by love in the universe. All these pictures shadow forth, in expressive symbols, the religion of Watts—his belief in the moral government of the universe, his serene faith that all things come through a Divine ordering, and in conformity to a Divine plan, —his artistic solution of the great problems of sin and life and death and judgment, of the ruin and of the redemption of the world. Into the unfolding of this great drama fit the idylls of poetry and romance, the fables of Greek mythology and fairy literature, the pagan systems with their deep thoughts about man and God and nature, the struggles after higher ideals—and all the salient incidents in history and individual human life by which the progress of the

world has been advanced. All these things belonging to the world's history, Watts has expressed in pictorial form, and we see the close relation of the individual parts to each other and the unity of the vast whole.

Art has been called by Prudhomme a priesthood. But Watts is more a prophet than a priest. His creed has no dogma or doctrine; there is no ecclesiastical cross visible in any of his pictures, though the spirit of its self-sacrifice is felt in them all. Though he has devoted a lifetime to religious thought, there is no sectarianism or party-spirit in his religious profession. He has confessed that to him one creed is as good as another, and that nature, divinity and humanity are almost convertible terms. The religion that prevades all his works is no theology, but a natural religion, which is therefore more in harmony with the present state of uncertainty and unrest on all such subjects; a religion which is as great and wide and deep as the mysteries of life; which brings the deep things of eternity into close and constant touch with our daily existence, and quickens our personal responsibility in regard to them.

Some have objected that Watts' pictures are not finished. Rembrandt said, "A picture is finished when the painter has expressed his intention." According to this dictum, Watts' pictures are not finished; or rather, they are finished, as Smetham has said, in the sense in which a leaf by Turner is finished, when it looks near at hand only as a dab with a palette-knife, and yet affects you deeply by its typical suggestiveness, compared with a similar leaf painted by Mieris, with every rib and stain on it

carefully elaborated, and which yet awakens in you only a feeling of microscopic curiosity. Almost all Michael Angelo's statues were mere sketches in marble; and yet how full they are of power and suggestiveness—fuller than if they had been finished with nicest technical art. His gigantic figures of Twilight and Dawn beneath the statue of Lorenzo on his tomb in the Medicean Chapel at Florence, are sculptured out of the rough block of marble, and a large mass of the stone is left in its original amorphous condition, as if the sculptor's thought exceeded his power of expression, and the figures slipping off the pedestals which support them, were passing—the Twilight into the eternal chaos of things, and the Dawn emerging out of it.

What nearly all his pictures tell the spectator is, that the man himself is greater than his works; that there are depths of thought in him which cannot find utterance; that he looks up with the inner eye to heights of achievement which he cannot attain, and feels in his soul mysteries which he cannot explain by any outward hue or form to others. No man has a greater sense of the limitations of his art than Watts has. In nearly all his pictures one cannot but perceive a sense of being baffled, a feeling of imperfection and weariness, a sense almost as of failure. He has been frank to confess this himself. He has uniformly said that he has been only a student in his art; and he has shown his genuine modesty by exhibiting many of his works at only a stage of their completion, reserving to himself the opportunity of finishing them, and even keeping such unfinished works in his own possession rather than complete

and sell them. Unless they could have been shown in this imperfect state, they would not have been exhibited to the public at all. This is a condition of mind which many cannot understand or sympathise with. The generality of people like an artist who is perfectly sure of himself, and able to accomplish what he has intended, who is not troubled with scruples or difficulties, and is not haunted by unattainable ideals. They are so short-sighted that they cannot see the real greatness of a painting, of which the painter himself has had a higher conception than he could carry out, and they are all the keener on that account to see the imperfections of the small things close to their vision. And therefore it is that Watts is too often taken at his own modest estimate, and subjected to most unworthy criticism when he ought to receive the warmest praise. Paintings like his, in which there is so much that art can indicate, but can never fully express, are out of place in a popular exhibition. They have a sacred character, and should be hung, like many of the religious works of the great masters of Italy, such as the frescoes of Fra Angelico, in some chapel of worship above the altar.

In presence of many of his pictures one feels inclined to be silent. The subject takes possession of you and hushes any disposition you may feel to talk even to a friend about it. You are wrought up into such a state of mind that you have no sympathy with the crowd of spectators who hurry through the gallery, and either utter a shallow exclamation of delight, or presume to pass a hasty censure. James Smetham, in his thoughtful "Letters," says that one of the finest expressions we ever see on a human face, is



that with which a good judge of painting looks at a picture. "Reynolds, on one occasion, was painting the portrait of such an one, and he would keep turning his head to look at a picture on the wall, and the look and posture were so fine, that Sir Joshua took a new canvas and began a new portrait." We may suppose with much plausibility that, according to this principle, the elevated look on the faces of many of Watts' portraits, may have been caught, while the individuals were sitting to him, by gazing upon his own pictures on the walls of his studio.

Watts is the finest of modern poets in colour. As unfortunately most people have not an opportunity of seeing his paintings in his own gallery and in the public galleries in London, they are dependent upon photographic reproductions for their knowledge of them. And though Mr Hollyer, who has made the largest and most perfect collection of platinotype representations of them for sale, has admirably translated into black and white much of their beauty, and by the touch of his own individuality raised his work from a mechanical process to an art, still the buyer of these reproductions cannot come under the peculiar spell of the colorific splendour and meaning of the originals. In nature colour has a most important purpose to serve. It is not a mere accidental thing applied from the outside for the sake of effect, or only to gratify a love of brightness and startling contrast. It is the result of vital action, and marks its ebb and flow in the most exact manner. Where functional action is most intense, there colour is most vivid; where it is feeblest, there colour is faintest. The reds and crimsons indicate the parts

where life is most vigorous. In plants the blues and purples generally distinguish the blossoms whose development is most advanced and complicated ; the yellows and whites characterise the flowers of simplest and most primitive construction. So also in animal structures, the period of mating, when the current of blood flows with stronger force through the veins, is emphasised by a deeper crimson on the robin's breast, a redder comb on the head of the domestic fowl, and brighter features in the male bird of every species. And so with all animals, which have more vivid hues in the outward parts that display more intensely the forces of life, and in the season of spring when these forces are called forth into greatest activity. In animals and plants also colour indicates quality. Poisonous species have lurid and often brilliant hues, clouded over in a way which cannot well be described, but is instinctively recognised as a warning ; whereas harmless and useful species have soberer and clearer hues, which are at once symptomatic of health and safety. Thus colour in nature has a profound significance, speaks to us of processes that are deeper than the surface, and indicates good or evil qualities.

Watts has penetrated far into this mystery of colour. He understands its true meaning. He has framed his whole scheme of colour in accordance with this esoteric adaptation of it. Every object and scene and feature in his paintings has the precise hue and tone given to it which brings out its thorough appropriateness. He does not use his palette merely to glorify his picture or to express his own delight ; simply to paint objects with technical excellence in their natural colours, without which they could not be recognised,

but because he wishes to emphasise his subject and knows that these natural colours represent deep mysteries physical and psychological, of which they are the outward expression. He uses colour as nature uses it, when she wishes it to appear on the most vital parts, and to express the most vivid functions. Hence Watts' colouring must vary with the subject, and he does not in consequence always please the eye that is sensitive only to the beauty of colour and not to its use. When the subject is less intense, the colouring must necessarily become colder and less pleasing. The nobler the subject, the more it excites the imagination and fills the heart with a glow, the richer becomes the colouring. *Uldra*, the water nymph of 1882, shows this wonderful appreciation of colour, as also the vision of *Iris*, which shines with tender iridescence.

It has been remarked that one of the most striking signs of the freshness and vitality of Watts' mind, the rejuvenescence of his whole nature, is this wonderful symbolism of colour of which many of his later works particularly testify. His colours, like the colours of the veils of the ancient tabernacle, like the hues of the jewelled walls of the New Jerusalem, are invested with a parabolic significance. They are natural because they show to the eye what is deeper than nature, the force and the life and the truth that are beneath and behind it. In his landscapes we feel that the grass and the leaves are green, and the mountains purple, and the sea and sky blue, and the flowers crimson and yellow and white, because no other hues but these could display them to us, or could represent the forces and the processes which make them what they are.

And more particularly in his allegorical pictures do we feel that he uses colour with an eye to the symbolical meanings of his subjects, and not for the mere sake of beauty and brightness. The glory of all his paintings is their coloration. We distinguish them afar off among other pictures by this quality. They shine with a splendour peculiarly their own. Sir Wyke Bayliss says in his admirable chapter on Watts, in his "Great Painters of the Victorian Era," that "the colours in his pictures cannot be adequately described by the words we use to denote the paints upon a palette. His reds are rubies ; his blue is lapis-lazuli ; his whites are pearls set in silver ; his blacks are the blackness of Erebus, or the beautiful darkness of the heavens at night." And then he compares his colouring to the tinctures of armorial bearings, which are varied according to the dignity of those who display them ; the shields of knights being defined by the colours of ordinary paints ; the shields of nobles by the colours of metals ; of kings by jewels ; and of emperors by stars. Watts' colours in relation to those which other painters employ, are as those of gold, or jewels or stars. To the commonest hues he gives a tone beyond their ordinary power.

## Chapter XV

### The Sculptor

CANVAS and paint are not the only materials by which Watts expresses his ideas. He also works in clay and marble, like his great prototype Michael Angelo, whom he strongly resembles in the massiveness and simplicity of his art. In this branch of his craft his comparatively infrequent labours have not altogether delivered him from some of the weaknesses incidental to the occasional worker ; but it must be confessed that he has reconciled the teachings of Michael Angelo with the conditions of his own time with unprecedented skill. One of the most celebrated sculptors of the present day, on looking round the Gallery at Little Holland House, remarked that Watts had left little for sculptors to do, having in his paintings given form and expression to the most abstract ideas of human passion. His beautiful bust of Clytie is worthy of the best traditions of the classical school. Mr Gosse claims for it a very high place in modern sculpture, as marking indeed a new departure from the old conventions. It has been executed in bronze, and so has become familiar to every lover of art. It tells eloquently the charming story of the heroine who loved Apollo with a passionate devotion, but was abandoned by him to despair, and pined away until her lover took pity upon her, and changed her into a sunflower, which

follows the course of the sun in the sky. The bust is of heroic size, and represents Clytie as undergoing her transformation, half changed into the sunflower, the calyx forming part of the pedestal. Comparing Watts' Clytie with that of Mr Powers, the American sculptor in Florence, we are struck with the finer expression of the former. The figure in Mr Powers' work is extremely beautiful, and the sunflower on her forehead emblematic of her fate, in consequence of her jealousy of Leucothea, is admirably moulded ; but the face itself, lovely as it is, has not the suggestion of spiritual refinement which the face in Watts' sculpture shows. Mr Powers took his model from many faces ; so the result, like a composite photograph, was a quintessence of the beauty of each. Watts had no model, only an imaginative conception, and hence its superior unearthly charm :—

“ So lovely, that if mirth could flush  
Its rose of whiteness with the brightest blush,  
Your heart would wish away that ruder glow.”

Michael Angelo said on one occasion that “oil painting was fit only for a woman, but frescoes were worthy of a man.” Watts' colossal equestrian statue of Hugh Lupus, Earl of Chester and ancestor of the Grosvenors, is work worthy of a man. It has been much admired for its bold treatment of a romantic subject. It took years to complete it. Like Penelope's web, the sculptor often took down what he had taken long to set up. Every detail and effect was carefully studied, and the whole combined in a wonderful degree the huge and the delicate. The great Earl is on a hunting expedition, and has just launched from his

outstretched hand his falcon into the sky, whose flight he is following with his eye, while with the other hand he is reining in his restless horse. The sculpture is a splendid ornament in the park at Eaton Hall, in front of the house where the Duke of Westminster spends a considerable part of the year. The Duke got it cast in bronze and presented it to the city of Chester. All the wild acts of Hugh Lupus' career, which have formed the subjects of many curious legends, arise in the memory at the sight of this statue of him. As Lord of the Welsh Marches he met with many a romantic adventure ; but at the close of his life, tired of all its worldliness and vanity, he sought shelter for his wearied spirit in the bosom of the Abbey Church founded by himself at Chester, the ancient Minster of St Werburga the Virgin, now the Cathedral of Chester, and there he died as a monk in the odour of sanctity and was buried A.D. 1101.

Another equestrian statue of heroic size, which marks a still higher reach in the sculptor's art, is called "Energy." It is full of force and meaning. The horse has just been mastered by his rider, who has brought him to the top of a mountain ridge, and then covering his face with the shadow of one hand from the too powerful sun, with the other he restrains the impatient movements of the noble steed, and prepares to launch him forth to new achievements. It is an embodiment of the restless physical energy of our day, of the wonderful control which man has obtained of the mighty forces of nature, holding them in leash with the knowledge of the laws of nature which he has discovered, and by obeying, conquering them and using them for his own purposes. Or it might be

interpreted to signify the foresight of an explorer who has from some lofty summit discovered some unknown country, and is preparing to take possession of it. The idea so symbolised has occupied the mind of Watts for several years, and he has laboured with great perseverance in working it out. The figure is purely symbolical. We see it in various stages of completion in the pictures of Watts' garden studio at Little Holland House in London. He has presented it to the new African province of Rhodesia, and it is now being cast in bronze, the cost of the material being defrayed by Lord Grey, for the purpose of being placed on the lonely grave of Mr Rhodes, amid the wild scenery on the rocky summit of the Matoppo Hills. There near the huge mausoleum beside his own burial-place, hewn out of a black and speckled rock known in the locality as Rhodesia granite, by command of Mr Rhodes, in commemoration of Mr Wilson and his men who were massacred by the Matabele some years ago, the equestrian statue of Watts is destined to stand, looking northwards over that lofty tableland to the interior of Central Africa. It will be a most appropriate tribute in that desolate wilderness to Africa's greatest son. Mr Rhodes sat to Watts for his portrait, but the rider bears no likeness to him, the figure being entirely imaginary. When fully completed Watts intends to present this group to the nation. It has been suggested that it ought to be set up in some prominent place in London; and the government, if only in recognition of his most valuable patriotic gifts, should defray the cost of execution.

The last statue which Watts has modelled is that of Tennyson. It is of colossal size, and the poet



is represented as wearing the familiar cloak on his gigantic shoulders. As a sculptor, Watts has executed a very fine recumbent figure for the tomb of Bishop Lonsdale in Lichfield Cathedral, and another equally fine for the late young and brilliant Marquis of Lothian in Blickling Church. He has also carved a monument to the late Thomas Cholmondeley, Esq. These and other important works of sculpture go far to confirm Watts' own estimate of his powers, that he had probably a greater capacity to work in clay and marble than in paint; and that if he had devoted himself entirely to the former department of art, he might have done greater things. It is fortunate, however, that he has given the greatest share of his time and strength to painting; for it is more plastic than sculpture, and admits of greater fluency in the expression of his mystical ideas. Indeed his marked tendency to a sculpturesque moulding of his conceptions in his paintings, needs to be counteracted by the greater freedom of the latter branch of art. Were he only a sculptor, we would miss exceedingly the glorious gift of colour which is such a powerful aid in enabling us to comprehend his allegorical creations; for the pure, fixed outlines of the marble would have frozen them to greater hardness and formality.

## Chapter XVI

### Literary Work

WATTS has written very little for the press ; but what he has done in that line shows that he could easily have made a name for himself in literature. His conversation is always full of good things, which if taken down, would have provided abundant material for many books on poetry, philosophy, religion and art. But having always had special facility in expressing his conceptions in pictorial forms that appeal to the eye, he has had no inducement to clothe them in literary garb that would appeal to thought. At the request of the editor of the *Nineteenth Century*, about twenty-two years ago, he was pressed to write an article regarding his views "on the present condition of art in our country" for that journal ; and his views are as applicable at this day as they were on that occasion. He goes down to the root-cause of English Philistinism in art, and in vigorous language, often rising to eloquence on account of his earnestness and intensity of purpose, he shows that the carelessness and indifference of the people are to blame. Art instead of being considered a serious thing pervading the whole of life, manifesting itself in all its objects and daily uses, is treated as a mere amusement, an outward fringe of life. The pleasure which it communicates is the only *raison d'être* of its

existence. It is something added to life in an idle hour, not something wrought out by its own inward vital forces; a mere ornament, and not an essential outcome of its own nature, as a flower is of a plant, or a beautiful face of a living and gracious human being. There is no love of beauty for its own sake. The interest in art is a fashion, a sign of wealth and luxury. The external circumstances of life, its dress and appointments, do not lend themselves to artistic treatment.

In his article "On Taste in Dress," contributed to the *Nineteenth Century Review* of 1883, he shows in very vigorous language the sins of modern fashion in female dress against what is natural and beautiful. Hair, which is such a beautiful thing in itself, and such a splendid possession, should not, he advocated, be so dressed as to materially increase the size of the head and give an appearance of top-heaviness to the human structure, and so destroy the sense of security which it ought to impart. Small stature cannot be made to look taller by piling up a quantity of hair upon the head; the only result being to put the face in the wrong place. The hand too should not be squeezed into a glove so much too small for it that it becomes useless for its manifold purposes. Such a perversion of its true character and use he regarded as vulgar and in bad taste. He pointed out how the Greeks uniformly rejected smallness and delicacy of hand, such as the ideal of modern taste demands, as a proof of being genteel and never having done any work. The notion that the beauty of the feet depends upon their smallness, leading to the crippling of them in tight shoes, is also utterly false, destroys steadiness of standing and grace of movement. But the crowning enormity of

modern fashionable dress is the corset, which makes the waist like a pipe, having scarcely any reference to the form above or below. To an ancient Greek this would be a hideous deformity. He points out how ladies after middle age lose a considerable portion of their height ; not by stooping as men do, but by actual collapse, sinking down. And this he attributes to the loss of strength in the muscles that support the spine, in consequence of habitual and constant pressure of stays, and dependence upon the artificial support which they afford. Relieved of their natural use, they lose their power of development, and become incapacitated for their work.

And not only is there loss of height and grace of carriage, but there is also failure in health ; the free play of the internal organs being restricted by the pernicious habit. For he says, "How can so vital a principle as the expansion and contraction of the elastic frame formed by the ribs in breathing, the flux and reflux of the tide of life, the day and night of respiration, be interfered with without grave consequences ? Is not all nature governed by general laws that have singular and beautiful identity, impressively suggesting a general and mighty plan, alike active and potent in the construction of the most insignificant animal, and in the tides of the far-away Sirius ?" And he winds up his graphic article by bringing the subject of dress into the court of heaven itself for judgment ; for he argues that "those who believe that God created man in His own image, cannot reconcile with the reverence which that belief ought to inspire, the habitual defacement of the human type by their unbeautiful and unnatural fashion of dress. At the court of any small sovereign,

they would wish to show all proper respect by appearing in a becoming dress ; how can they appear before high Heaven in a dress which dishonours their divine origin and does despite unto Him who made them ? ”

At the close of the third volume of Tom Taylor's edition of Haydon's Autobiography, Watts has given a brief but graphic estimate of that ill-fated artist's work. While fully appreciating his higher qualities displayed in such pictures as the "Judgment of Solomon," the "Triumphant Entry of our Lord into Jerusalem," he nevertheless found many defects in his paintings as a whole, some of which might charitably be attributed to the unfavourable conditions of his life. He regarded them as in a large measure representations of the painter himself, autobiographical, and they fail as he himself failed. They are not influenced by principle, and they do not strike any true chord that vibrates in harmony with the deeper feelings of the soul. Their want of beauty repels, and their want of modesty exasperates. One is little affected by his work, and it is difficult to retain any true impression of it. This is a severe, but an eminently just criticism of an art which excited a good deal of attention at the time by its unique peculiarities, and which ought to have founded a school, but perished with the artist himself.

## Chapter XVII

### The Whole Man

WATTS' work is the expression of his character. Too often in the world of art we have had men of rare power of insight and artistic capacity, combined with a low moral sense. We meet in life, and read in history, of men whose marvellous genius is a special faculty. It has no essential relation to their whole being. It is "stuck into them," as a well-known popular writer has graphically said, "as a pin is stuck into a cushion." They produce glorious effects without a notion how they produced them, and give expression, and perfectly just expression, to "emotions they had never dreamt of." An inspiration lifts them above their baser selves for a moment, and when possessed by their genius they can do great and noble things; and yet like Balaam of old, they seek the rewards of divination and lust after vanities. There are specialists in science who, though occupying a high place in the world of thought, are yet not a bit nearer thereby to right judgment in the moral and spiritual sphere. In many artists of remarkable gifts, we find that they excelled only in one province; while in all other spheres they came very far short of ordinary attainments. Musicians often show wonderful genius in music, and a low capacity in other things. When Turner was at the summit of his art as a painter, his



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powers of thought and expression were of the poorest kind ; he could not spell nor write grammatically ; and his moral nature was low and perverted, gross in its tastes and covetous even to miserliness. Thorwaldsen was an exquisite sculptor, with a great deal of the genius of the old Greek school ; but he had almost no other faculty, and though he could create in marble a nobler conception of our Lord than had ever been wrought out before, he could yet find an extraordinary pleasure in scenes of base sensual indulgence. Byron had splendid endowments which compelled him to utter in burning words his poetic visions to the world ; he was lifted out of his lower nature when his genius possessed him, but in his ordinary state he had ignoble propensities. Benvenuto Cellini entirely divorced his art from his character.

But the inspiration of Bezaleel and Aholiab was one that crystallised the whole mass, and did not leave any part of the nature crude and amorphous. Throughout the beautiful description of their work in the Tabernacle, we are expressly told that they were "wise-hearted." They showed their character in their work. As their art was to themselves a divine revelation, so it was to others. They were able to do all things according to the pattern shown to Moses in the Mount. The smallest object of the Tabernacle was sacred to them, and was wrought out with the most consummate conscientiousness. The golden vessels and the glorious hangings and the sweet spices were all shadows of heavenly realities, testified by the perfection of their forms, as well as by their typical significance of things unseen and eternal. And all work in its own order and degree should be a similar inspiration, enabling us not

only to execute it satisfactorily, but also to express through it our own highest hopes and aspirations, the types of our own faith and love.

The supreme men of the world have ever been like the Jewish artists, craftsmen in whom the whole being was brought into harmony with the genius and insight they possessed. Men like Socrates and Augustine and Alfred and Dante had their inner and outer life woven of one piece. Such a man is George Frederick Watts. In his case his art is not so much a mere specialty, the development of one faculty, but the combined result of various high qualities. His genius is the sublimation of his whole nature. It is not an inspiration only, but a life. He is an easy master in the literature, the art and the philosophy of his times. Because he has the blessedness of the pure in heart, he is the true seer ; and his words about philosophy, politics, theology, society, morality, life and death, as well as his works of art, will ever command the admiration of men. No man wishes more than Watts to make Ruskin's standard of art the common one, whereby not mere mechanical skill, but moral character should be expressed by our work. No man realises more thoroughly that the Christian life is the normal life—the natural life of man at his best. It is the perfect health, the perfect wholeness of the human being—the perfect equipoise and development of all his powers and capabilities. And therefore all that pertains to this normal life belongs to the Christian life. Everything is sacred. At one time all was religious. The theatre is the survival of the religious drama of the Greeks, and of the miracle-plays by which the Church taught the story of the Cross. Archi-

ecture was at first devoted to the building of temples and churches. Painting was employed in the illustration of the altars of the church, and music in hallowing its worship. No one would echo more heartily than Watts the words of a modern French writer, which bid us beware of "a religion that substitutes itself for everything, that makes monks; and seek that religion which penetrates everything, for that is the religion which makes Christians." Religion is not a brilliant meteor in the sky to be gazed at to the exclusion of everything else, but the diffused daylight of the soul, by which we are enabled to see and perform all our tasks. It does not fill the life as water fills a glass, occupying the whole space, and consorting with no other substance, but as sunshine fills a room or a landscape—displacing nothing—making no room for itself—but illumining and glorifying everything in the room or in the view.

In the case of Watts, it is almost impossible to come to the end of the man himself. He is singularly many-sided. He might have been just as great at a dozen other things, as a sculptor, as a scientific man, as a philosophic writer, as a poet. He has the capacity; and it is so to speak a mere accident as to what object he shall apply it. He is most thoroughly modern in all his points of view, and yet most deeply imbued with the spirit of the past. He is such an admirable artist, because he thoroughly sympathises with all the thought and activity of his day. With his great age and long experience of life, his intimate acquaintance with all that is best in society during the whole of his protracted life, his vivid powers of imagination, his strong principles, his clear point of view, there is no

eminence which he might not have reached had he chosen. He is the man of to-morrow as well as of to-day. He is no mere theorist. He has carried into practice the ideal virtues which he has depicted by his pencil ; and his character has all along been in fine accordance with the lessons which he has taught the world by his art. He has the chivalrous spirit, the free-hearted, open-handed generosity which belong to the typical English gentleman. The motive of his life has been self-sacrifice ; not the promotion of his own interests, wealth or reputation, but the interest and advancement of others. He has never shown any desire to grasp and accumulate the world's good things for himself. He might have made an enormous fortune by the sale of his pictures, but he has been satisfied with a modest competency, sufficient to set him free from ignoble cares, to enable him to gratify his simple tastes, and to devote his life to his supreme aims ; while he has been most lavish, and almost reckless, in the free bestowment of the fruits of his genius upon public institutions.

There is no good cause, philanthropic or artistic, for which Watts grudges either money or sympathy. Many schemes for the amelioration of the condition of the poor have benefited by his support, and his charity is unbounded. Once he wrote, " Our little life is poor indeed if bounded by our own personal wants and fancied requirements." By acting uniformly on that principle, he has lost his lower selfish life, to find his individuality enlarged and enriched, and has felt the opulence of being every hour of his life. He is ready to extol what is good and praiseworthy in the work of others, and is most lenient to faults and defects.

No petty motives, no morbid self-consciousness, disfigure his character. His kingdom is not of this world, not of the conventional, the visible and transitory. He brings the powers of the world to come, the unseen and eternal world, to bear upon the fleeting objects and interests of time. His religion is not a thing of words and rites and moods, but an experience inwoven with his very being. There is much in him of the spirit of John the Baptist—the voice of one crying in the wilderness—the interpreter of his own time to itself. He calls his age to repentance from its mammon-worship and devotion to material success. He stands apart from the crowds of men in his own loved seclusion, and is profoundly dissatisfied with things as they are in English life; and for the cure of these evils he looks not to the commandments and doctrines of men, but to a more general and thorough application of the principles of Christ.

How little his lofty idealism was appreciated at first, even in the highest art circles, is shown by the fact, that while Millais was elected a member of the Royal Academy before he was twenty-five, and Leighton when he was only thirty, it was not till 1867, when Watts was fifty years of age, that he was made an associate, and that without his own knowledge or application. But this long neglect was atoned for by the quickness with which his genius, when once discovered, was publicly acknowledged; for in the course of the very same year he was elevated to the highest honour of Royal Academician, a compliment never before paid to any artist without a much longer probation. It is a curious circumstance that Mr Armitage, his old successful associate in the prize

competition at Westminster, having suffered in the same way from the neglect of the Royal Academy, under the old mode of election, was admitted into the membership of that august body at the same time. During his long connection with the Academy, he has always manifested a deep practical interest in its annual exhibitions; and this very summer he has contributed a picture in his old characteristic style, called "A Parasite." A tall, fresh tree-trunk is wreathed round with luxuriant ivy; and beside it, to point the moral, is a dead tree, still standing, but bare and leafless, with withered trunk and broken branches, that had been gradually choked by the fatal embrace of the parasite. In April of this year, he sent to the Exhibition of Works of Art in Regent Street, three landscapes, the titles of which give an indication of their subjects, "The Two Paths," "A Green Summer," and "The End of the Day"; and also a most thoughtful symbolic painting, called "The Sower of the Systems," in which a weird, ghostly figure in a long bluish robe is hurrying past with his head in the clouds, scattering from his outstretched hands embryonic worlds into the blue void. In this last painting the meaning, when fully apprehended, is as subtle and as inspiring as in any of his old pictures.

He has been honoured by the Universities of his own country, being a D.C.L. of Oxford, and an LL.D. of Cambridge; and foreign governments have conferred upon him the knighthood of the Legion of Honour, and the knighthood of the Order of San Luigi, Lucca. In connection with the late Coronation Honours, the King instituted a new Order of Merit to which have been appointed twelve members, distin-

guished in various ranks of life, and including men as varied in their talents and avocations as Lord Roberts, Lord Kitchener, Lord Kelvin, Lord Rayleigh, Lord Lister and Mr Morley, Mr Lecky and Mr Watts. The institution was a happy inspiration, for no Order could be more coveted or prove more generally acceptable; and it could be worn by men who had refused knighthoods and baronetcies, and even peerages, for it left them without rank or title, in the plain simplicity of their ordinary names. Watts, it is well known, had twice been offered a baronetcy: the first time in 1885, when Sir John Millais was made a baronet; and the second time in 1894, when his friend Sir Edward Burne Jones was raised to that dignity. Mr Gladstone pressed him hard to accept this honour as a tribute paid to art in his person. But he declined both offers, for he set no value on rank or outward distinctions. He disliked coming out of his retirement, and shrank with inherent modesty from any public recognition which might seem unsuitable to his simple tastes. Mrs Meade, the well-known novelist, in an article which she wrote about him in the *Sunday Magazine*, called him "The Painter of Eternal Truths"; and in a letter to the present writer, she mentioned that on one of the occasions when a title was pressed upon him, he wrote to her through his wife, "Tell Mrs Meade that the only title I will ever take, will be the one she has given me, The Painter of Eternal Truths." Once when at work upon his Lincoln's Inn fresco, he wrote to his friend Sir Henry Taylor, "I have plenty of ambition and ardently desire to be useful to my generation; but I would prefer working silently and

unnoticed, save by that amount of encouragement that would cheer my efforts when well-directed, and for the sake of that direction alone. To produce great things, one ought to be intent only upon doing one's utmost, and never stop to consider whether the thing be great or little in the abstract. The really great is so far beyond one's reach, that comparison becomes an unworthy consideration. To work with all one's heart, but with all singleness of heart, is the right thing, and whoso does this may feel satisfied, whatever the results of his labours may be." No man has cared less for wealth and rank for their own sake ; and even the fame and popularity which his works have everywhere won, have gratified him only as a token of the public appreciation of the sentiments he endeavoured to express in his art. But the motives that made him shrink from the former attempts to bring him into notice, did not apply to the new Order of Merit that has been conferred upon him by the thoughtfulness of the King ; and we rejoice that he has accepted it with a free conscience, and that he is no longer without tangible honour in his own country.

Watts is now in his eighty-seventh year, but he bears in a remarkable manner the heavy weight of his years. His natural strength is considerably abated as was to be expected, and he has to go softly ; he is deaf, but not so painfully so as to make conversation too difficult. He uses glasses, but his eye is not dim ; it has the same deep, thoughtful expression which it has always worn, and lights up his face as it were from within. It confronts one without flinching, and in the presence of such a keen and steady glance one is lifted above oneself and the best of one comes out.



It can endure no shame or false appearance, and yet it has a softness in it that melts into tenderness at the sight of distress, and is full of love towards all the helpless things that God has made. His hand is delicate, with very fine lines on the skin, nervous, flexible and sensitive. It is the ideal hand of a painter. Some men's hands seem predestined for their after-work. The surgeon's hand and the artist's are unmistakable. Watts' hand is essentially the hand of a sculptor. He is in reality a small man, but somehow or other he gives the impression of being much taller, and he walks with a light elastic step.

The slightest intercourse with such a man impresses one with the charm of a dignified and courtly manner, and with a gracious, self-poised demeanour, as if he was reserving himself and waiting for an opportunity to do some good deed or utter some profound truth. And yet, at the same time, there is the utmost simplicity and simple-mindedness. He has been happy in the assurance of the warm regard of his friends, by whom he is lovingly called "The Signor," and the thorough sympathy of the general public with his high aims and purposes. Numberless letters from strangers over all parts of the world have reached him, telling how his pictures have appealed to what was best in them, have comforted them in sorrow, have saved them on the brink of despair and given a new direction to their lives, and have inspired them with ideas which have taken practical form for the benefit of their fellows. In his art he has always been alone and unique. He has founded no school; he has had no followers or imitators; and yet no one has so profoundly moved the artistic spirit of his time, or inspired conceptions

which, without him, would never have taken artistic shape. A friend one day visiting him in his own home, found him talking of the high aims of art with Burne Jones. The younger artist sat reverently at his feet, listening with a rapt expression upon his face, and remarked to my friend, "Listen to the Master."

With unabated enthusiasm he still looks forward to the future. Many old men become weary through length of days of the old themes, and long familiarity has worn away the charm of what was once most absorbing. They live only upon past experience. Their knowledge is stereotyped. Their slumber of soul is deep over a faith that has crystallised and is incapable of growth and expansion. History for them ended with their sixtieth year. But with Watts it is far otherwise. In his old age growth has not stopped, but only become accelerated because the time for advancement is short, and there is a longer momentum of habit urging on the soul; the old man growing more simple, more sunny-hearted as the years go on, his nature becoming more self-poised, more tolerant of the differences in men, more charitable towards the weaknesses of the world, more hopeful amid the troubles of life, loved even more for what he is than for what he has done. The lesson of the old age of many men is sadness; but in his face we see the aspect of heaven reflected, and his hoary head is indeed a crown of glory. At one time, indeed, while saying that "the loveliness of art increases, and that with this increase comes also to our people an increase of the sense of loveliness," he maintained also that "from a time so far back as the beginning of

the Christian era, from the death in fact of the Greek impulse, the fine arts have been in a state of constant, inevitable and natural decline." But he has largely got over this feeling of despondency, and holds that there is still evidence to prove that the Hellenic spirit has not altogether passed away. He believes that "the long decline of art" is a process of necessary and invincible evolution. In his own words, "it is well said, we have the living witness that God has not taken away from us any of His gifts." In a recent letter to Mrs Ady (Julia Cartwright), he wrote: "I even think that in the future, and in stronger hands than mine, art may yet speak, as great poetry itself, with the solemn and majestic ring in which the Hebrew prophets spoke to the Jews of old, demanding noble aspirations, condemning in the most trenchant manner prevalent vices, and warning in deep tones against lapses from morals and duties. There is something more to be done in this way, I believe, than has yet been done."

"The world is vexed with an evil cry—

A coward cry—fit for an idle throng ;

Hellas we know was sweet, and Rome was strong ;

We can but live a little while and die ;

See how the darkness creeps across our sky !

We live not in the age of Art or Song ;

We think—but are not sure—that wrong is wrong ;

O painter of Love and Life, make them reply !

No puling pessimist reaches the highest height ;

Heaven suffereth violence and is taken by force ;

Life and death follow each other in ordered course,

Moving together with Love to the triumph of right ;

For Life and Love and Death are one at their source—

As colour is one when blended in perfect light."



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## Memorial Note

THE Editor deeply regrets that this book must close with a notice of the death of its Author. Dr Macmillan had been continuously at work on "Watts" for more than a year, and had thrown himself into the subject with much vigour and enjoyment. The proofs to the end of the chapter on "The Cycle of Death" were corrected during a short holiday at Killin, on Loch Tay. He then returned to Edinburgh, and shortly afterwards received the summons to meet that "Love in Death" which he had known and served so well in life.

Since his death the proofs have had the advantage of revision by Mr and Mrs Watts ; but with the exception of a few alterations introduced at their request, the book is published as it left Dr Macmillan's hands.

THE EDITOR.

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