



Little Trips among the Eminent.

Sir Edward Burne-Jones

Some weeks ago biographical sketches on the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood appeared in these pages. We now come to one who, although not of the Pre-Raphaelites, was akin to them, especially in his earlier work, but whose personality was so strong and whose versatility so marked that he has exerted perhaps a greater influence on the general art of the world than any of the famous "P.R.B's."

Edward Burne-Jones was born August 28th, 1833, at Birmingham, England, but was of Welsh descent, hence, perhaps, the strongly imaginative bent of his mind.

Although he gave evidence of some love of drawing and design at an early age, his ambition was not fixed at all upon art as a career in life, and he was destined for the church.

Accordingly, after completing the course at King Edward's, where he threw himself zealously into study of the classics, he went up to Exeter College, Oxford. But on that same day, in January, 1853, there entered another student who was destined to have a strong influence on the life of the young Burne-Jones. This was none other than the afterwards famous William Morris.

Thrown together from the first, the two soon became close friends. They walked together, studied together, read "Modern Painters" and "Morte d'Arthur" together, made drawings and designs together, each finding in the other his other self, such a friendship as can only be born of similar tastes and interests.

Morris also had entered with the intention of taking orders, but as time went on the liking for a clerical career lessened, and art began to loom above the mental horizon of the two young men as the walk of life for which they were best fitted.

To Burne-Jones the awakening came with seeing two pictures by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, one a woodcut in a book of poems, the other a water-color. Almost at once he decided to leave the college without taking his degree, a decision not reached without some of the pain that comes, almost invariably, on forsaking a plain and sure way for one fraught with struggle and uncertainty. As Mr. Malcolm Bell has said in his excellent biography, "He was casting away from him, he knew, an assured livelihood, and grasping at a nebulous uncertainty; he was flouting the ingrained prejudices of those near and dear to him; he was, in their eyes at any rate, wilfully deserting the high-road to social recognition, and throwing in his lot with vagabonds and wastrels. On the one hand was the good opinion of his kin, and at least a comfortable competence, on the other disapproval and very possible penury. Yet he scarcely hesitated."

At the next turn we find him in London, settled with Morris at 17 Red Lion Inn, in the curiously interesting rooms already described in these columns in the sketch on William Morris. About the same time he met, with delight, Rossetti, and henceforward there were great foregatherings at Red Lion Inn.

Of the three Burne-Jones found himself perhaps, in most precarious plight. He had cast himself upon the world as an artist, yet he had had no previous training, either as

a draughtsman or in color. What he lacked in instruction, however, he made up for by unremitting work and the force of his vivid imagination, which gave to his fingers the magic touch in everything that he did.

At once he began to take lessons from Rossetti, and so rapid was his advancement, so positive the quality of his genius, that ere long his master declared that he had nothing to teach him. In the meantime he was wresting a living from the world by

and other public buildings in all parts of England, and in many of the cities on the continent.

He was, however, painting pictures also, at first chiefly in water-color, and with such success that he was one of the artists chosen to take part in the unfortunate decoration of the walls of the Oxford Union (already referred to in previous articles in these columns).

In 1859 he went to Italy to study, and in 1860 was married to a Miss Macdonald, just one month

Water-Colours, and exhibited among other works "The Merciful Knight," the first picture to reveal his ripened personality as an artist. For six years he was a constant exhibitor at the gallery of the society, six of the bitterest years, perhaps, of his life. The artists were inclined to look with contempt upon the work of a man who had had no regular training. The public could not understand his dreamy, poetic work. Nothing like it had heretofore appeared. It was essentially "decorative." Burne-Jones did not try to paint "life" as it was around him, and England as yet could not grasp his meaning. Hence he was reviled on every hand, criticized in the newspapers, and neglected by his fellow artists to such an extent that in 1870 he abruptly resigned all connection with the society.

For the next six years he was almost unheard of. In all that time he exhibited only two pictures, small water-colors, but he was working, working, as assiduously as ever, now finding his ground in oils.

At last came the day of recognition, with the opening of the Grosvenor Gallery, at which were shown his six panels, representing the Six Days of Creation, the Beguiling of Merlin, The Mirror of Venus and other canvasses.

"His reappearance at the Grosvenor Gallery," writes a biographer, "was so dramatic and so convincing in its proof of the amazing development of his powers, that he leaped at one bound into the place among the greatest of his artistic contemporaries, which he was able to hold for the rest of his life."

Praise now came thick and fast from all quarters. He was recognized as a power in the art world, and during every succeeding year was one of the foremost contributors to the annual exhibitions, among the pictures shown being the well-known "Golden Stairs" with its graceful figures in 1880, and "King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid," marvellous in its depth and richness of coloring, in 1884. This picture is now in the National Collection, London.

In 1885 Burne-Jones was again elected, as an honored member, to the Society whose indifference had once driven him forth. At first he declined to accept the membership, but yielded on the personal request of Leighton, then President of the Academy. He never, however, sent pictures to the Academy, and in 1893 again resigned.

After 1886 he ceased sending to the Grosvenor Gallery, as he had become one of the chief members of a group of artists who founded the New Gallery, to which he sent all of his pictures for the rest of his life, which ended after a short attack of pneumonia on the 17th June, 1898.

Burne-Jones was one of the sweetest in character as well as one of the most brilliant among English artists. At no time in his career did he try to attract attention; quietly and industriously he went on his chosen way, refusing to be turned aside from his conception of art by neglect or contumely. Nor when success came, and all England flocked to admire work which it had once scorned, was he ever spoiled by success. All unsought came honors at home and abroad, even the honor of knighthood conferred upon him by Queen Victoria. To the end he remained the same Burne-Jones, simple of life, industrious, poetic, high-minded, loyal to his friends and



The Golden Stair.

From a painting by Burne-Jones.

the very multiplicity of the works he had to offer. He was making designs for stained glass, for tapestry, for mosaic, for metal relief work and many other things, and by this work alone, after the establishment of the firm of "Morris & Co.", for whom he thenceforth worked exclusively, he was enabled not only to make a living, but to achieve a world-wide renown. To-day stained-glass windows and mosaics from his designs may be found in churches

after Rossetti's marriage with Miss Liddal.

As yet his work bore some resemblance to that of Rossetti, but from this time he began to make excursions in art on his own account, a broadening which was no doubt much assisted by a second visit to Italy, which he and his wife made, in 1862, in company with John Ruskin.

In 1864 he was elected an Associate of the Society of Painters in