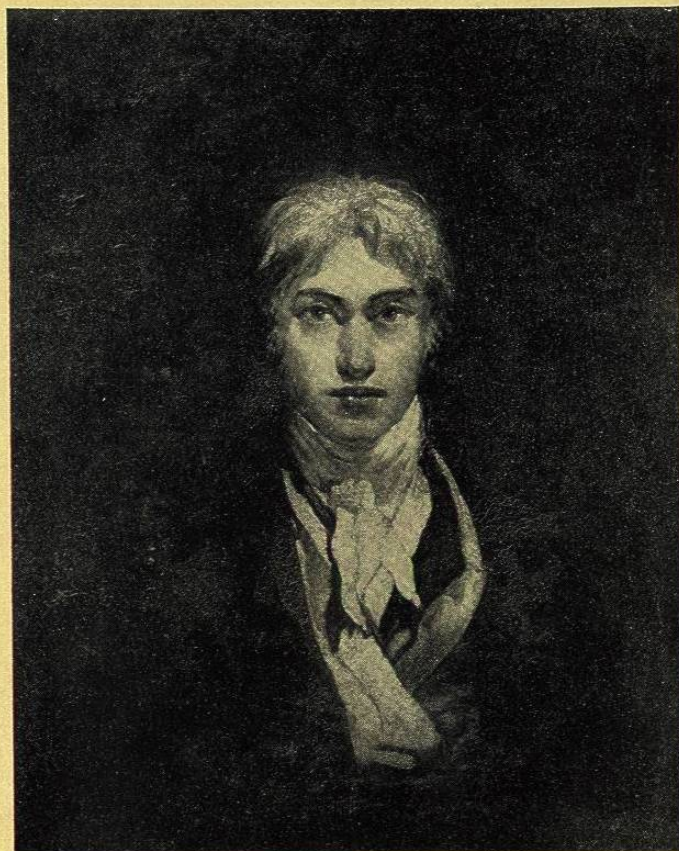


## TURNER.

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"TURNER was unquestionably, in his best time, the greatest master of water color who had ever lived. He may have been excelled since then in some special departments of the art, in some craft of execution, or in the knowledge of some particular thing in nature; but no one has ever deserved such generally high rank as Turner in the art of water-color painting. His superiority even goes so far that the art, in his hands, is like another art, a fresh discovery of his own.

"The color, in his most delicate work, hardly seems to be laid on the paper by any means known to us, but suggests the idea of a vaporous deposit, and besides the indescribable excellence of those parts of Turner's water-colors which do not look as if they were painted at all, there is excellence of another kind in those parts which exhibit dexterities of execution. Nor is the strange perfection of his painting in water color limited to landscape; his studies of still life, birds and their plumage, bits of interiors at Petworth, etc., are evidence enough that, had he chosen to paint objects rather than effects, he might have been as wonderful an object painter



TURNER.  
Painted by himself. London, N. G.

as William Hunt was, though in a different and more elevated manner." Thus writes Philip Gilbert Hamerton.

Turner was born April 23, 1775, in Maiden Lane, London, over a barber shop, in which his father, William Turner, lived and worked. The latter was an economical, good-natured, uneducated man, who taught his boy to be honest and saving.

The mother, Mary Turner, belonged to a family of Marshalls or Mallords near Nottingham, superior in position to the family of William Turner. She had an ungovernable temper, and is said to have led the barber "a sad life." Later, she became insane, and was sent to an asylum.

The boy William very early began to show his skill in drawing. In his first school at New Brentford, when he was ten years old, his birds, flowers, and trees on the walls of the room attracted attention, so that his schoolmates often did his work in mathematics for him while he made sketches. His father had intended him to be a barber, but, perceiving the lad's talent, encouraged him, hung his drawings in his shop windows, and sold them for a few pence or shillings each.

At twelve years of age, William was sent to "Mr. Palice, a floral drawing-master" in Soho; at thirteen, to a Mr. Coleman at Margate, where he loved and studied the sea; and at fourteen, to the Royal Academy. Meanwhile, he earned money by coloring prints, making backgrounds and skies for

architects' plans, and copying pictures for Dr. Munro, who lived in one of the palaces on the Strand. This physician owned many Rembrandts and Gainsboroughs, with sketches by Claude, Titian, Vanderveelde, and others.

This house proved a valuable place for study to the barber's son, who considered himself fortunate to receive half a crown and a supper for each evening's work.

When pitied by some one in later life, because of the hard work of his boyhood, he said, "Well! And what could be better practice?"

In 1792, when he was seventeen, he received a commission from Mr. J. Walker, an engraver, to make drawings for his *Copperplate Magazine*, and soon after from Mr. Harrison for his *Pocket Magazine*. To make these sketches, the youth travelled through Wales, on a pony lent him by a friend, and on foot, with his baggage in his handkerchief tied to the end of a stick, through Nottingham, Cambridge, Lincoln, Peterborough, Windsor, Ely, the Isle of Wight, and elsewhere.

"The result of these tours," says W. Cosmo Monkhouse, "may be said to have been the perfection of his technical skill, the partial displacement of traditional notions of composition, and the storing of his memory with infinite effects of nature."

His first water color at the Royal Academy Exhibition was a picture of Lambeth Palace, when he was fifteen, and his first oil painting

at the exhibition, according to Redgrave, the "Rising Squall, Hot Wells," when he was eighteen. Hamerton thinks "Moonlight," a study in Milbank, was his first exhibited work in oil. "The picture," he says, "shows not the least trace of genius, yet it has always been rather a favorite with me for its truth to nature in one thing. All the ordinary manufacturers of moonlights — and moonlights have been manufactured in deplorably large quantities for the market — represent the light of our satellite as a blue and cold light; whereas in nature, especially in the southern summer, it is often pleasantly rich and warm. Turner did not follow the usual receipt, but had the courage to make his moonlight warm, though he had not as yet the skill to express the ineffably mellow softness of the real warm moonlights in nature."

At twenty-one, Turner hired a house in Hand Court, and began to teach drawing in London and elsewhere at ten shillings a lesson. But he soon grew impatient of his fashionable pupils, and the teaching was abandoned.

At twenty-two, he journeyed into the counties of Yorkshire and Kent, and soon produced "Morning on the Coniston Fells," in 1798; "Cattle in Water; Buttermere Lake," 1798; and "Norham Castle on the Tweed." Twenty years afterward, as he was passing Norham Castle, with Cadell, an Edinburgh publisher, he took off his hat to the castle. Cadell expressed surprise. "Oh," said Turner, "I made a drawing or painting of Norham

several years ago. It took; and from that day to this I have had as much to do as my hands could execute."

In Yorkshire, the rising young artist, natural and genial in manner, though small and somewhat plain in person, made many warm friends. He was often a guest at Farnley Hall, owned by Mr. Hawkesworth Fawkes, who afterward adorned his home with fifty thousand dollars' worth of Turner's pictures.

Mr. Fawkes's son speaks of "the fun, frolic, and shooting we enjoyed together, and which, whatever may be said by others of his temper and disposition, have proved to me that he was, in his hours of distraction from his professional labors, as kindly-hearted a man, and as capable of enjoyment and fun of all kinds, as any I ever knew."

Mrs. Wheeler, a friend in these early years, says: "Of all the light-hearted, merry creatures I ever knew, Turner was the most so; and the laughter and fun that abounded when he was an inmate of our cottage was inconceivable, particularly with the juvenile members of the family."

Somewhere between the ages of nineteen and twenty-three, a sorrow came which seemed completely to change Turner's nature. While at the Margate school, he had fallen in love with the sister of a schoolmate; the love had been reciprocated, and an engagement followed a few years later. During a long absence in his art work,

their letters were intercepted by the young lady's stepmother, who finally prevailed upon her to become engaged to another. A week before the wedding, Turner arrived at Margate, and besought her to marry him; but his betrothed considered herself in honor bound to the new lover. The marriage proved a most unhappy one, and Turner remained a disappointed and solitary man through life.

His art now became his one absorbing thought; he worked early and late, often rising for work at four o'clock in the morning, saying sadly that there were "no holidays for him."

In 1799, when he was twenty-four, he was made an associate of the Royal Academy, and a full academician in 1802. Hamerton says: "His election is the more remarkable, that he had done nothing whatever to bring it about, except his fair hard work in his profession. He was absolutely incapable of social courtiership in any of its disguises. He gave no dinners, he paid no calls, he did nothing to make the academicians believe that he would be a credit to their order in any social sense. Even after his election, he would not go to thank his electors, in obedience to the established usage. 'If they had not been satisfied with my pictures,' he said to Stothard, 'they would not have elected me. Why, then, should I thank them? Why thank a man for performing a simple duty?' His views on the subject were clearly wrong, for the rules of good manners very

frequently require us to thank people for performing simple duties, and the academicians were not under any obligation to elect the young painter so soon; but how completely Turner's conduct in this matter proves that he can only have been elected on his merits! . . .

"His elevation to the full membership was of immense value to him in his career, and he knew this so well that he remained deeply attached to the Academy all his life. He was associate or member of it for a full half-century, and during fifty years was only three times absent from its exhibitions."

This year, 1802, he removed to 64 Harley Street, taking his plain old father home to live with him. He took his first tour on the Continent, this year, making studies of Mont Blanc, the Swiss lakes and mountain passes. The exhibitions of 1803 to 1806 contained, among other pictures, "The Vintage at Macon," the celebrated "Calais Pier" in a gale; "The Source of the Arveiron," "Narcissus and Echo," "Edinburgh from Calton Hill;" his famous "Shipwreck," now in the National Gallery; and the magnificent "Goddess of Discord choosing the Apple of Contention in the Garden of Hesperides," also in the National Gallery.

In 1807, Turner began, at the suggestion of his friend, Mr. W. F. Wells, the *Liber Studiorum*, issued in dark blue covers, each containing five plates, the whole series of one hundred plates to be divided into historical, landscape, pastoral,

mountainous, marine, and architectural. The work was intended as a rival to Claude Lorraine's *Liber Veritatis*.

After seventy plates had been published, the project came to an end in 1816, because of disagreement with engravers, and lack of patronage. The principal pictures were "Æsacus and Hesperia," "Jason," "Procris and Cephalus," the "Fifth and Tenth Plagues of Egypt," "Christ and the Woman of Samaria," "Rizpah," "Raglan Castle," the "River Wye," "Solway Moss," "Inverary," the "Yorkshire Coast," "Mer de Glace," the "Lake of Thun," "St. Gothard Pass," the "Alps from Grenoble," "Dunstanborough Castle," and others.

"So hopeless and worthless did the enterprise seem, at one time," says M. F. Sweetser, "that Charles Turner, the engraver, used the proofs and trials of effect as kindling paper. Many years later, Colnaghi, the great print-dealer, caused him to hunt up the remaining proofs in his possession, and gave him fifteen hundred pounds for them. 'Good God!' cried the old engraver, 'I have been burning bank-notes all my life.' . . . In later days three thousand pounds had been paid for a single copy of the *Liber*."

"The most obvious intention of the work," says Monkhouse, "was to show Turner's own power, and there never was, and perhaps never will be again, such an exhibition of genius in the same direction. No rhetoric can say for it as much as

it says for itself in those ninety plates, twenty of which were never published. If he did not exhaust art or nature, he may be fairly said to have exhausted all that was then known of landscape art, and to have gone further than any one else in the interpretation of nature. . . .

"Amongst his more obvious claims to the first place among landscape artists are his power of rendering atmospherical effects, and the structure and growth of things. He not only knew how a tree looked, but he showed how it grew. Others may have drawn foliage with more habitual fidelity, but none ever drew trunks and branches with such knowledge of their inner life. . . . Others have drawn the appearance of clouds, but Turner knew how they formed. Others have drawn rocks, but he could give their structure, consistency, and quality of surface, with a few deft lines and a wash; others could hide things in a mist, but he could reveal things through mist. Others could make something like a rainbow, but he, almost alone, and without color, could show it standing out, a bow of light arrested by vapor in mid-air, not flat upon a mountain, or printed on a cloud. . . . If we seek the books from which his imagination took fire, we have the Bible and Ovid; the first of small, the latter of great and almost solitary power. Jason, daring the huge glittering serpent; Syrinx, fleeing from Pan; Cephalus and Procris; Æsacus and Hesperia; Glaucus and Scylla; Narcissus and Echo. If we want to know the artists he

most admired and imitated, or the places to which he had been, we shall find easily nearly all the former, and sufficient of the latter to show the wide range of his travel. In a word, one who has carefully studied the *Liber* has indeed little to learn of the range and power of Turner's art and mind, except his color and his fatalism."

In 1808, Turner was appointed professor of perspective in the Royal Academy, which position he held for thirty years, though he rarely gave lectures to students, owing to his confused manner and obscurity in the use of language. Ruskin says: "The zealous care with which Turner endeavored to do his duty is proved by a large existing series of drawings, exquisitely tinted, and often completely colored, all by his own hand, of the most difficult perspective subjects; illustrating not only directions of line, but effects of light, with a care and completion which would put the work of any ordinary teacher to utter shame. In teaching generally, he would neither waste time nor spare it; he would look over a student's drawing at the Academy, point to a defective part, make a scratch on the paper at the side, say nothing. If the student saw what was wanted, and did it, Turner was delighted; but if the student could not follow, Turner left him."

Turner this year moved to the Upper Mall, Hammersmith, where his garden extended to the Thames. In this he had a summer-house, where some of his best work was done. He still retained

the Harley-Street house, and lived in it much the life of a recluse. Mr. Thornbury tells the following incident:—

“Two ladies called upon Turner while he lived in Harley Street. On sending in their names, after having ascertained that he was at home, they were politely requested to walk in, and were shown into a large sitting-room without a fire. This was in the depth of winter; and lying about in various places were several cats without tails. In a short time our talented friend made his appearance, asking the ladies if they felt cold. The youngest replied in the negative; her companion, more curious, wished she had stated otherwise, as she hoped they might have been shown into his sanctum or studio. After a little conversation he offered them wine and biscuits, which they partook of for the novelty, such an event being almost unprecedented in his house. One of the ladies bestowing some notice upon the cats, he was induced to remark that he had seven, and that they came from the Isle of Man.”

Turner was fond of his pet cats, and would let no harm come to them. After he had moved, in 1812, to 47 Queen-Anne Street, one of his favorite pictures, “Bligh Shore” was used as a covering for a window. A cat desiring to enter the window scratched the picture severely, and was about to be punished for the offence, by Mrs. Danby, the house-keeper, when Turner said, “Never mind,” and saved the cat from the whipping.

At his house in Twickenham, which he bought and rebuilt in 1813 or 1814, calling it Solus Lodge on account of his desire to be alone, and afterwards Sandycomb Lodge, the boys named him “Blackbirdy,” because he protected the blackbirds in the adjacent trees, not allowing their nests to be robbed. Turner sold this place after having owned it about twelve years, because his aged father, whom he always called “Dad,” was always working in the garden and catching cold.

The eccentric artist must have been at this time quite rich, as well as famous. He had painted “The Sun rising in Mist,” in 1807; the well-known “Wreck of the Minotaur,” in 1810; “Apollo killing the Python,” in 1811; “Hannibal and his Army crossing the Alps in a Snowstorm,” in 1812; and “Crossing the Brook,” and “Dido building Carthage,” in 1815. “The first (‘Crossing the Brook’),” says Monkhouse, “is the purest and most beautiful of all his oil pictures of the loveliness of English scenery, the most simple in its motive, the most tranquil in its sentiment, the perfect expression of his enjoyment of the exquisite scenery in the neighborhood of Plymouth. The latter (‘Dido building Carthage’), with all its faults, was the finest of the kind he ever painted, and his greatest effect in the way of color before his visit to Italy.”

It is said that “Crossing the Brook” was painted for a gentleman who ordered it with the promise of paying twenty-five hundred dollars for it, but

was disappointed in it when finished, and refused to take it. Turner was afterwards offered eight thousand dollars for it, but would not sell it.

In 1815, the artist, now forty years old, was again disappointed in love. He wrote to one of his best friends, Rev. H. Sectt Trimmer, vicar of Heston, concerning his sister, Miss Trimmer: "If she would but waive her bashfulness, or, in other words, make an offer instead of expecting one, the same (Sandycomb Lodge) might change occupants." But Miss Trimmer had, at this time, another suitor, whom she married, and Turner never again attempted to win a wife.

In 1817, "The Decline of the Carthaginian Empire" was exhibited, a companion piece to the Building of Carthage. Years later, Sir Robert Peel, Lord Hardinge, and others, offered twenty-five thousand dollars to Turner for the two pictures, intending to present them to the National Gallery. "It's a noble offer," said the painter, "but I have willed them." He had already made his will, privately, giving these and other pictures to the nation.

The artist is said to have once remarked to his friend Chantrey, the sculptor: "Will you promise to see me rolled up in the 'Carthage' at my burial?"

"Yes," was the reply; "and I promise you also that, as soon as you are buried, I will see that you are taken up and unrolled."

In 1819, Turner made his first visit to Italy,

after which his works became remarkable for their color. In 1823, says Monkhouse, "he astonished the world with the first of those magnificent dreams of landscape loveliness with which his name will always be specially associated: 'The Bay of Baia, with Apollo and the Sibyl.'"

The "Rivers of England" was published in 1826, with sixteen engravings after Turner's designs. Monkhouse says: "For perfect balance of power, for the mirroring of nature as it appears to ninety-nine out of every hundred, for fidelity of color to both sky and earth, and form (especially of trees), for carefulness and accuracy of drawing, for work that neither startles you by its eccentricity nor puzzles you as to its meaning, which satisfies without cloying, and leaves no doubt as to the truth of its illusion, there is none to compare with these drawings of his of England after his first visit to Italy."

During this year, 1826, among other pictures, Turner exhibited his "Cologne — the Arrival of a Packet-boat — Evening." "There were," says Hamerton, "such unity and serenity in the work, and such a glow of light and color, that it seemed like a window opened upon the land of the ideal, where the harmonies of things are more perfect than they have ever been in the common world." The picture was hung between two of Sir Thomas Lawrence's portraits, the golden color of the "Cologne" dulling their effect. Turner at once covered his picture with lampblack, thereby spoil-