

A BIOGRAPHY OF DAVID COX.

THE biography of a painter, when given with such charming frankness as Mr. William Hall describes the career of his friend David Cox,* is truly delightful reading. We know of no more suitable volume to put into the hands of an art student than this pleasantly told story of the struggles, trials, and ultimate success of this powerful English landscape painter. Cox's patient, unflagging industry under naturally depressing conditions makes one love the man as well as the artist. Like many of his profession before him, his genius was not fully appreciated until he had well advanced in years. In the ripest period of his art he often had the mortification of having his pictures returned to him unsold from the galleries of the Society of Painters in Water-Colors, while those of less original artists quickly found buyers. He was never so great a favorite with the general public as some other exhibiting members of the society, who included such a galaxy of eminent water-color painters as Turner, Prout, De Wint, Copley, Fielding, Barrett, Cattermole, and William Hunt. Fielding's highly finished drawings were always bought freely at the exhibitions, and they certainly were in strong contrast with the brusque-looking work of Cox, frequently rough and blotchy in manipulation. Fastidious persons, who fancied that softness and smoothness of surface were evidences of high artistic excellence, that delicacy of handling and careful elaboration were proofs of consummate skill, would pass by the broad, vigorous, suggestive drawings of David Cox with a shrug, and an entire disbelief in his genius, to secure the more polished and pleasing productions of his neighbors. But, as our author says, "Time has reversed this verdict, and set that matter right." The naturalness of Cox was one of his great charms. His effects of the changing aspects of nature, of rain, of storm, of sunshine, were wonderful. Ruskin, who greatly admires his drawings, truly says of them: "In spite of the loose and seeming careless execution, (they) are not less serious in their meaning nor less important in their truth. . . . There is no other means by which his object can be obtained: the looseness, coolness, moisture of his herbage; the rustling, crumpled freshness of his broad-leaved herbage; the play of pleasant light across his deep heathered moor or plashing sand; the melting of fragments of white mist into the deepening blue above; all this has not been fully recorded except by him, and what there is of accident in his mode of reaching it answers gracefully to the accidental part of Nature herself."

Probably about three fourths of the oil pictures by Cox are owned by the family of Mr. J. H. Nettlefold, of Birmingham, and since the appearance of this volume, this gentleman has generously declared his intention of presenting twenty-five of the best of these to the Corporation gallery. The gift represents a money value of not less than \$125,000.

The story is told of one Reynolds, a West India planter, who having realized a fortune at Berbice, returned to his native town of Hereford, and looking about for a residence, was attracted by Cox's pretty little cottage, and wanted to buy it. The owner

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wanted to sell ; so a price was soon agreed upon, and the money paid. In the settlement there were a few shillings to be returned to the planter from the sum paid down. Cox searched his pockets to find the necessary coin, when the new owner exclaimed, in perfect good faith, " Never mind the change, Mr. Cox ; you can give me five or six of your little drawings for the balance." This was in 1827. In 1872, at the famous Joseph Gillott sale, Cox's " Outskirts of a Wood " brought nearly \$12,000. The artist originally received \$200 for painting the picture. At the same sale " Washing Day," painted for a Mr. Froggat for about \$75, sold for \$4,725. The drawing called " A Stubble Field with Gleaners," bought in 1843 for \$125 by Mr. C. Birch, was sold by auction in 1879 for \$3,675. Miss Phipson, of Edgbaston, sold Cox's oil painting " Caer Cennen Castle " for \$10,000. Mr. George Briscoe, of Wolverhampton, sold his " Vale of Clwyd " for \$12,500. The artist received less than \$500 for the painting.

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