

William Daniels

by

William Tirebuck

IN GRATITUDE I INSCRIBE THE
ACCOMPANYING PAGES TO
W. H. JUDE,
WHO FIRST INTRODUCED ME TO THE STUDY
OF THE WORKS OF DANIELS,
AND THEN AIDED ME IN THE PURSUIT
THEREOF.

WILLIAM TIREBUCK.

PARK ROAD,
LIVERPOOL

At dawn of life, I might have raised
A name the wise had loved to bless,
My truth filled pictures had been praised,
My wisdom lauded to excess;
I felt the fiery touch had given
Unto my brow a crown of rays,
Which, if to burnish I had striven,
Had lit up all the after days.

From *Thistle-Blossom*, by EVELYN PYNE.

I.

POPULAR imagination pictures Dame Fortune impartial even to the extent of reputed her blind, and the sculptor in his materialized conception, to the extent of blindfolding her. Now if the virtue or quality of Genius had to be presented to the mind's and to our other eyes, this would not be adequately expressive of what I conceive to be the total eclipse of Genius. Her marble ladyship would have to be more than merely blindfolded, more even than stone-blind-in short she would have to be eyeless. Moreover, so all-round oblivious is she, that no delicately-formed organ, portending much olfactory acuteness ; no lips as the beautiful outposts of a sensitive palate ; and no ears as the eager custodians of sweet sounds, would be there : only a stupendous brow of Fate. Like a material fact in the world, Genius rules itself and yet is very much over-ruled, so much indeed that the setting often seems to belie the worth. The grain falls into the refuse of things, and there shoots a bright strong blade. The ruddy glow of the coral, and the gentle beauty of the pearl are born of fishes' vomit. Beneath the rough dull coat of iron contemptuously called pig, there glisten sharp metal diamonds - the very genius of the highly priced steel. The flying meteor is resplendent with fiery beauty as it arcs the blue dome of night, but when it comes to earth, when we see it face to face apart from its work, we find dull dead-looking material such as forms the unrefined heart of our own globe. Truly, Genius is un-accountable in its ways and doings. It has its tent pitched and sometimes it pitches its own tent so much in the very chaos of prospects, that if ever to its honour a patron saint he created we must call her by the name of Saint Oblivious.

Away from a busy Liverpool thoroughfare, through a few semi-main streets into quieter back ones, and at last in a street remote and seclusive there stands a row of cottage property bearing a cold and solitary aspect. It is a sudden retirement from the sounds of men to the silence of bricks and mortar. An ominous-looking beer shop stands at the corner, and two houses below, through a little iron gateway there is a very ordinary door, mounted with a very frank brass plate on which is inscribed - W. DANIELS, ARTIST. Peering through the fan-light is a dusty, venerable-looking, not quite life-sized bust of our poet Milton. A fresh green geranium and a graceful fuchsia adorn the little parlour window, and beneath this are about 3 yards X 2 yards of earth and granite-probably honoured on the lips of children with the title of garden. Such is the exterior of the simple, hidden, unpromising abode of one of the most remarkable men and artists of this, and indeed it may be said, of any other period. No gorgeous reception rooms, and prim fashionably furnished studio. Four walls and a ceiling to protect or hide; a floor to stand upon ; a little window to let the light of heaven in ; a few implements, and-genius.

One dare not pity this conscious master of the brush. His works display too much independence of spirit and manner for this. From them we learn that W. Daniels, Artist, would transfer your pity to the dogs and count you as one of them. One dare not offer help ; hardly offer praise, and if rumour be true, one certainly must not find fault. Find fault, and your exquisitely-growing portrait will run the risk of being stabbed and cross cut or obliterated by a very graphic use of the big brush and the combined forces of his strong palette. There is certain risk I believe even in this little publication. I may now in his opinion be committing a dire unpardonable offence, but I am willing to take the responsibility in the hope of doing him a little public justice in spite of himself.

Daniels is not one who has departed and left behind him a few strokes and touches of great promise, like young poets cut off in their lyrical budding. He is a man of achievement, of work - and in harness now, working with much the same uncertainty, much the same indifference to everybody but himself, and yet with that power which has already given us such extraordinary things. I will not treat of him as a man living at war with the creeds of total abstainers. This touches a phase of his personal character upon which at present I am not prepared to write except parenthetically, and in expression of deep

regret that such powers as his and such worshipable work as art should be dragged through the dust, and this necessarily, not without partaking of some of its taint. But regrets however sincere and deep will not make the life of Daniels run back and thence into a new mould. We have his work as it is and must abide by it. The past is fixed, and the present in the ordinary course of things will be brief. He is advancing. He has taken a few time-strides ahead of some of us, and these pages are written in anticipation-some time in anticipation it is fervently hoped-of the often mean and thankless professional praise which drums at dead ears, though whilst there are ears to hear, the drums beat most uncertain muffled tones - when any to beat.

Let it be understood that I am personally unacquainted with the man to whom these pages refer, never having seen him, never having knowingly been in close contact with him ; but that I know his work and the value of that work-its extraordinary vigour, power, and its close relationship to high art and humanity, I am convinced and with assurance claim it as one of the most extraordinary artistic influences I have experienced. Extraordinary, not because of the presence of moral lessons, not because of any demonstrated or latent didactic influences. No; but because they have been as revelations from a new human world as seen by the wonderful eye Daniels; and because they have once more made me feel the exquisite emotion of wondering worship because I have so to speak lived and breathed with a veritable contemporary worker - an unquestionable, though by some disregarded genius; a man to whom his work and its wondrous and peculiar charms have been his life; to him in fact what to the majority of Artists are gold and silver, the line, and the applause of the mechanically condescending worshippers of high art. It is, therefore, in no common sense that I know Daniels. I know him as I know Shakspeare, Milton, Shelley. He has, through his work, through the very manhood of the man, taken possession, and I am a willing medium trying to convey to others some faint ray of the light which shines about me.

This strange erratic Artist may not have worked like Millais, Leighton, or Burne Jones - having the modern story interest of the first, the classic imagination and purity of the second, or the revived medievalism and super-sentimentality of the third. To prefer this charge would be mere trifling. Can it not on the other hand be said, and as truly, and as legitimately, that they do not work with his peculiar and individual spirit? He may not indeed work like one single man now popular; but has he quite apart from the means produced works of Fine Art? I venture an ~emphatic Yes, though the affirmation cannot add to or take from them.

If to some the name of a predecessor in style be a recommendation, then the name of Rembrandt can be mentioned. It is a key to many of his characteristics, characteristics as native to him as something akin to them was native to the great Dutch master. Let me at once candidly acknowledge that Daniels has cast from him much rough-rough because unfinished-work; that in a certain artificial mental excitement he has pushed his bent for broad graphic treatment too far - so far indeed that it ought to have the aid of stage-setting and footlights. But his finished work is sufficient in quality and quantity to rank him high in the line of original British Painters, men who abandon themselves to the promptings of their own genius, and produce that which they most feel. His powers of rapid observation and dexterity in conveying impressions to canvas have been such as to make the word Talent tame and altogether inadequate. They claim and can only be comprehended by the title of Genius. He has done things by that subtle intuition which, in rare individuals, at times, sets the rules of schools at defiance, and produces in charmed moments a result to discover the basis of which men of mere talent may occupy a life-time. From a strict standpoint the things so done may be found wanting. They may not, for example, have definite precision, delicacy, and finish - but ah they have what these finer qualities lack: that fervour which seems to burn in the colours as when it first fired the Artist to his ardent work; that enthusiasm which all genius inspires us to emulate in our own labours in life.

The man of talent may sport himself in setting out pretty precise private parks ; may indeed in his little way, imitate the wood, the cascade, and the brook ; but it has required a Divine genius to throw together in apparent careless munificence, the parks, the woods, the cascades, and lakes of nature, with wonders and charms towering above us with influences loftier than we know, instead of falling at our feet as pretty bits of mechanism to be patronized. So, though in a lesser degree, is the power of men who, in various departments of art, do things, and the mystery is - how. This man Daniels has done things so. Strange ideas have burned his brain until they have forced expression in form and colour-colours deep and rich like the shaded moss-bound nook of a brook; and so vigorously presented that they must have afforded a sensuous gratification both during and after manipulation. It is on this account deeply interesting to study some of his unfinished work. Every touch has expression. Each rapidly-made stroke is so apparently a recorded thought. No mere haphazard or apology, but an actual fact fully known to him, and to all appearances accomplished so rapidly that one inclines to question whether the thought and the deed were not contemporaneous, there appearing to be no time lost between premeditation and the act it conceived. This electric-like composition is so apparent in much of his work, yea even in the more laboured work where there is effort at higher finish, that Daniels is accepted as an Artist in the true sense, at once. There is no hesitation, putting off till the morrow, and then passing judgment in cold blood. You see him today, and forthwith you acknowledge his power as you acknowledge it of great ones long since gone, and of whom indeed some of his works forcibly remind you.

Daniels has not in his works the element for catching instantaneous popularity. Indeed he has worked with an almost tragic indifference to public applause-tragic in this way, that had the solicitations of real friends been regarded, the tone of his life, the work therein accomplished, would have been higher. It is doubtful whether ordinary dealers would speculate in much he has done, even supposing they had opportunities - supposing, for example, there were not a few select and ardent admirers who buy up and retain with affectionate attention all that they know this erratic character to produce. As I have said, his works are not popular. His subjects are not in many cases his colouring is not. He has not caught any of the fashionable spirit of this period and given it a local habitation and a name. He has simply but boldly discarded this and produced himself - his own idiosyncrasy and feeling - his own slavish surrender to the sombre and pathetic. Not the sombre and pathetic of the aesthetic school, but the sombre and pathetic of domestic economy and no bread, and to the sombre and pathetic character of his own life when viewed seriously by himself. He has metaphorically snapped his longest finger and thumb at the solicitations of admiring friends anxious that he should produce his best-defied them, insulted them, and, in addition, hurled himself against the whole world, except that personal part of it which he and his weakness-yea, let it be said, but with regret, his weakness-has composed. In this respect he is like a Satan encountering the sun ; a Lear defying the lightning ; a Dorè-like figure, solitary, black, and rigid, poised against immensity. The result is, that his work has run into peculiarly personal grooves in matter and manner. Some would count it coarse, because it is not always detailed to a single hair's shadow; others, sombre and unpleasant, because the colour is not akin to some modern Joseph-coat-like-combination costumes, and because the subject is not what is known as catching.

There are so-called worshippers of art in these days whose mental, emotional, and physical equilibriums must not be set awry. The current of their own sweet, easy lives must not be ruffled. If anything, art must flatter. Never mind depth, never mind the emotion, the tragedy, the right and wrong of life. Give them the smiling comedy to aid digestion ; art to tone the wall paper. They do not want Art to tower above them. They must be the lady superiors of art; the patronizing "good, good," onlookers. It is therefore no wonder that when young Artists of these days set themselves out to flatter the whims of patrons, their work becomes subdued, mechanical, lower even than their own low standard, little, trivial, and all-round dwarfed. It is no wonder either that such a free spirit as Daniels lacks wide

popularity, for even if his life had been set in happier because healthier grooves - if he had been the pure, unsullied master of a high art, instead of the slave of an infirmity, it is probable that popularity would have come, if at all, late in life, and in defiance of fashionable taste. Had this true artist been still truer to himself, as taste goes now, there would have been prejudice, and the struggle which prejudice incurs, but-and this is a momentous but-his reach would have been higher. High as it has at odd times been, it is dwarfed when compared with the possibilities, and, it be said, the certainties of accomplishment. Head and shoulders, like a Sphinx in the desert, would he have stood erect above the crowd, instead of head bent and lost in his conscious contact with the dust. He and his Art would have been happier. Though serious in subject, no doubt, it would have been free from that morbid personal grief of which I am forced to believe many of his pictures are the material expression. His work has been his tears. It ought and would have been his pure, unalloyed joy.

Assigning a national place to Daniels, as an Artist, is not a very difficult undertaking, because as already noted he has happened to have a predecessor so striking in manner as Rembrandt himself. That he works like and approaches Rembrandt there is not even the suggestion of a doubt-whether designedly or in the evolution of a bent that would have asserted itself had Rembrandt never been, I cannot say. It is a fact that there is a strong relationship. Both have loved the almost grotesque effects of strong light and shade both have delighted in wealth of deep colour ; both have recorded commonplace subjects and facts under kindred conditions ; both are sombre and pathetic ; both have frequently painted their own portraits ; and both have lived in different degrees questionable lives. To call Daniels an English Rembrandt is not, I think, assuming too much. To my mind, he creditably approaches the great original in everything but the power to grasp such subjects as have many important figures introduced, and these he has avoided. Daniels, too, may not be equal in the quality of his colouring ; but, on the other hand, the English Artist has, in certain imaginative moods-in the treatment of poetical characters for example-left the Flemish prototype behind. I question if even Rembrandt would have been equal to the passionate abandonment shewn in the "Shylock" by Daniels. In the smaller works, where the detail is more minute and definite, there are a few points which remind one of Wilkie, but while not displaying Wilkie's humour, the figures are superior and more masterly in drawing, and there is a pathos of a key deeper than Wilkie could touch.

Though Daniels has exhibited such undoubted powers as are here hinted at, I do not think that he has throughout sufficiently sustained his powers to honestly or justly rank with much steadier workers. He has dissipated his energies, and the examples of fully sustained genius are therefore comparatively few. The world judges -and rightly so-by what has been done, and not by what could have been done. The world indeed sometimes censures the Coulds and Woulds of men, because they often infer neglected opportunities. Daniels, as I think is already understood, is not discharged upon this count. Nor has he, let me again acknowledge, the refinement of the Millais and Ward Hunt School; the free imagination of Watts ; or the aesthetic sentimentality of idea, or effulgence of colour of the Rossetti, Burne-Jones clique. But, on the other hand, he has peculiar qualities of vigour and breadth in conception, drawing, and colour, quite his own, except in what general kinship they stand to the Dutch School. Daniels, in my opinion, holds a most unique position in British Art. Whilst others rank higher in the number of fine things, his few fine ones seem to hold him for brief moments above them all. His are the few peaks which touch the sun, but are hidden by the clouds, leaving the more numerous lesser heights the most prominent-and by these lesser heights has Daniels too often been privately judged. There is, I own, more emotional power than Beauty in his art. It may be said, with much truth indeed, that he has often sought the uglinesses of human misery and depicted them with ironical relish. His own nature-good, noble, and beautiful at the core, they say-has been long out of joint, and his secondhand questionable nature has absorbed the Artist pure and simple in search of the beautiful things of life. He has sought its pangs, and as far as the thus self-handicapped Artist could with fidelity to his subjects make such things beautiful, he has made them so. But his works generally, appeal to the heart first,

and then to the artistic understanding.

II.

It would, at least, be presuming too much upon one's own descriptive powers to detailize in black and white all the works of Daniels which I have seen; and even if all were separately dealt with, the result, I fear, would prove tedious reading to the majority of people. I will therefore content myself with descriptions of a few of his most remarkable pictures, and others will be dealt with only so far as I think essential as information to those who may be interested to pursue their enquiries further.

The reader of the preceding pages will be aware that our friend Daniels has shewn a great partiality for strong contrasts in light and shade. I have not yet seen one picture which does not betray his passion for this kind of effect. Moonlight, candlelight, gaslight, lamplight, firelight, but rarely, strange to remark, sunlight. Like Rembrandt, he has instinctively avoided the light which rules the day. Night, night, with its weird sombre effects, has been his time, not only for observation, but for work, making night hideous by the flicker of his candle amid the moving shadows, when all else was asleep. Thus it is that his scenes by candlelight, whether in subject-pictures or the studies of girls' heads, are very numerous. If the actual source of the light be not in the picture, the light itself coming in at the side or from above, is there, throwing its strange halo upon the features. In my opinion, this does not always carry with it artistic advantages. To me the dim, yellow, sickly glow sometimes falls with painful results, giving the scene or the object a palsied appearance, which the consciousness that it is art, and art only, cannot render entirely un hurtful. Besides, being artistically questionable, it has at times a suggestion of artificiality. Nor are these disadvantages wholly compensated for, though they are in a degree, by the introduction in some works, of a little window through which a deep blue sky and a bright crescent moon shine as though to mock the pallor of the prevailing candle-gleam. On the other hand, there are occasions when Daniels can introduce the rush of light into a dark chamber or passage, with startling results, marking out the principal object of his picture in strong vividness, and thus court for it the closest observation. We find him painting the effects of a bright moonlight as it streams in between the massive pillars of the Goree Piazzas, Liverpool, lighting up the dim figures in the blackness ; or as it falls, together with a street-lamplight, upon the figure of some worn and haggard begging creature, whose pale face and tearful eyes appeal without appealing ; or as the moonbeams fall upon the face of a nun in the act of devotion beneath the reflections of a painted window ; or again, as they shoot through a broken storm-cloud upon a sailor' at the wheel (a portrait of himself), and hold him out the conspicuous thing amid the storm. Even the shining face of an African nigger had light and shade charms for him, and these he has arrested with a fidelity and artistic effect which equal the painting of the Hunted Slaves by Ansdell. But in another head of a coloured youth I have since seen, there is more than fidelity and artistic effect; there is, in addition, that mystery of imagination and feeling which carry some of his pictures above the mere portraiture of fact. Daniels must have fact, something tangible to work upon, but given this he will carry fact out of itself and make it ethereal. It is so with this touching head of a Lascar youth, whose tanned face has traces of shining lines under the faint glow of stars. The face is slightly upturned, for his dark, sun-burnt eyes are arrested by a star, and as he watches its movements he is wont to think of a place beyond it, and then of some one who is dear but dead unto him. This face is placid but prayerful, his black shining fingers are clasped, for the cord of his affection has been struck, and his eyes are with his heart, and that is far away. There is a small work to which I must refer in this connection-painted surely in one of the most felicitous moods of the Artist. A boy is sitting in close proximity to the floor, opposite a glowing fire. His eyes follow the flames, which he has just bellowsed with evident satisfaction, as they flicker up the chimney mouth and weave indefinite open-eye dreams for him. There is a red glare prevailing. The native warmth of his cheeks has another warmth added to it, and the whole of the little canvas is aglow in the most

remarkable manner. The heat is part of the atmosphere. It can be seen, permeating the confined apartment. Truly, the conception here is not great, but the technical results are wonderful, and one is not entirely free from moody thoughts suggested by the rapt face of the boy.

Like the genuine geniuses of all ages, his spell of achievement is not confined to time, place, or material. His power is like a spiritual attendant, ever with him. He can always do, even to the extent of being reckless in his doing. Give him his colours and brush and he will transpose the blank surface of a thing in to a picture, and leave it behind him in an almost reckless spirit of indifference as to the well-being of his artistic offspring. For satisfying an immediate craving, he has given in exchange a transcript from his own extraordinary nature, written in ground earth and oil-not always, be it remarked, on specially prepared, specially stretched and poised canvas, but on the brazen faces of malt barrels, on cardboard, board, has he given it. Even the great picture of Shylock is recorded on common oil cloth, bought not after months of meditation over his subject, but forthwith, on the very day he conceived it and commenced work under another man's roof. Stories of his conditions of labour have not the ring of this matter of fact nineteenth century. They hardly seem possible to belong to a man now breathing. Far more have they, the sound if not the precise spirit, of by-gone days when poets and painters sang and worked how and where the presence of bread encouraged. Theirs had something to do with primitive thought and poverty - his with something, it must be admitted, not quite so plausible.

One cannot but feel that there are sometimes touching biographical hints in the traces which Daniels has left behind him at old places of resort. He has left artistic records at old haunts in the manner that snails leave bright winding traces on moss-grown walls ready for the rising sun-with this breach in the simile, that the rising sun cannot get at some of the bright traces of Daniels. For example, within the sound of cannon-clacking billiard balls, amid the fumes of cigar smoke, and in rooms where gas light is the day light, are his works to be found. One such is a portrait-of whom think ye? Of the great Iron Duke who once commissioned Daniels to depict him, and who, for the purpose, religiously kept an appointment which Daniels somewhat irreligiously broke? Not at all, but of that other great champion known to the world as Jem Ward. In all the honours of scarred face and split knuckles has Daniels depicted him. The great Jem stands as though in spite of hearty chastisements given and received, he would to the last come up, and by the aid of Daniels go down to posterity, smiling. In the same public room hangs one of the many portraits of the artist painted by himself. This time in a new capacity He is about to strike a billiard ball but stands waiting in position, looking at the surrounding company that is anxious over the momentous shot. By the table leans, cue in hand, a bright young marker, as intent as any one upon the game, but more inquisitive than all about that particular move. Both of these pictures I must grant are more remarkable for their fidelity as portraits than as things of beauty and joys for ever. Jem Ward is an interesting study of bye-gone character, and the felicitous drawing and colouring excite admiration as this artist's works always does ; and the billiard-playing artist apparently leaning out of the frame is even more interesting for its brilliant light and deep shade effect, but neither of them can possibly give entire aesthetic satisfaction. While admiring the wonderful manipulation, one cannot entirely forget the subjects. A very kindred sort of place to this billiard saloon, and one of the oldest haunts of the sporting and theatrical fraternities of Liverpool, possesses a striking picture of his, painted on the spot. So completely built in is the long meeting room that the wonderful face of the "Friar of the order Grey," hanging there, can only be seen by the aid of gas in plentitude. But when the picture is once seen, you wonder that that hearty laughing face with its full pouting lips, dimpled cheeks and half shut small twinkling eyes, was not seen even through the previous dimness of things. The happy friar is sitting in an arm chair, the very embodiment of secular hilarity, and his impious fat hand, laden with glowing liquor, is stretched above him in a manner which, taken in conjunction with his face, denotes the joyous worship of Bacchus. This work, with its gentle indefinite light entering at the side and falling on the large but graceful folds of grey garb, is like a relic from the dim and revered past-revered because past and the worker dead to us-rather than the work of a man still with us. I

believe that “The Friar of the order Grey” was given a place of honour at a Manchester Exhibition.- Some day, with better opportunities, the Friar of the order Grey will reflect credit on Manchester.

Amid the miscellaneous, dusty property of a Broker’s room, and in company with other cornered valuable Works of Art awaiting some connoisseur to relieve them out of a Broker’s bondage, hangs an unfinished picture similar in subject though differently treated to the last firelight study-and painted, it is said, in the very room it now adorns. “The last puff of the Bellows” is the Artist’s own title. Amid an almost dense blackness, except where the dark blue sky reflects its faint light through a little window, sits a boy before a newly-made coal fire. The coals are flaming flickeringly, with red heat only here and there, so unlike the general glow of the scene previously noticed. This flickering uncertain light plays upon the face and figure of the boy, as he, also with evident satisfaction, presses the last puff of wind out of the bellows, as the first puff of steam curls out of the kettle spout. So far this is not much more than roughly worked in, but this, as all the Artist’s unfinished work, displays that marvellous suggestiveness which gives eloquent promise of what completion would mean. Common though the subject may be, and clinging as it does, close to mother-earth and domestic utensils in regard to idea, there is in this little work evidence of the wondrous dexterity of which all who practically know it speak with enthusiasm. I cannot here refrain from referring to an extremely rough sketch of an “Excelsior,” executed in a single night in the house where it now hangs. It is as though the resources of his passion and palette had actually been thrown from him in anger, and seized and fixed to canvas by some elf at the tip of his brush. A youth with garment tattered and face worn, but still enthusiastic and hopeful, is pressing forward and upward, standard in hand, between two high lowering cliffs. It is night, the sky is black with rage, except where forks of lightning flash out and stab the thick air, and light up the excited face of the youth whose shaggy hair flows on the pitiless wind. And yet his “Falstaff” is more remarkable still as to the result of rapid execution. It would be incredible but for the assurance of an eyewitness to what must be regarded as an artistic feat Two hours are said to cover the time of labour over this work and the picture has wonder chiefly by reason of this. It is not in Daniels’ highest style of finish-who could expect it to be? But it is his most graphic and vigorous manner. One can almost note the developments under the brush and trace the progress of the whole work. This living picture of Falstaff is convincing proof of the pre-eminent masterhood of Daniels’ hand over the technique of his art-an art which, though in a somewhat strange manner, he has worshipped for its sake alone, seeing that he has discarded all the tempting worldly things that it might have led to. “Bardolph” too, the companion picture, has characteristics of the same kind, but in this the artist has dwelt a little longer upon the secondary detail than in the case of Falstaff. Both are excellent specimens of a remarkable phase of the man.

In another direction, there is a masterly work called “The Recluse.” It is the picture-perhaps, indeed, the portrait-of a man reading, whose head is inclined over his book towards the spectator. A light steals through a curtain and brightens up one side of his fine pate and face, and on the grey beard and brown hair turning grey in soft silky waves. The execution conveys a vivid reality, as on the face rests a calm, studious content in what the opened book reveals. It is a charming study of browns running through and imbuing all, from the dark shades to the illumined grey hair, with peculiar relief. “The Recluse,” I understand, was sent to a Liverpool Art Gallery for exhibition but was rejected.

By remarks that have preceded this, it will be gathered that both the personal and professional character of this man would be seriously questioned, and for ever condemned, by a narrow, scandal propagating few who cannot distinguish between the private man and the public Artist. Curious tales as to his conduct in life may be true, or they may be false. With them as already stated, I have little to do, and this only so far as the conduct affects his work. That it has affected his work, haunting it, peeping through the peculiarity of his subjects, there cannot now be any doubt. One of his consequent delights seems to have been to depict low-comedy characters, and no eye was ever surer in observing, or hand

readier in recording them. There is one such picture now occurring to me. It will take fitting rank with anything in the same vein ever done by Wilkie; it will creditably take its stand with the best of the low-life scenes of the Dutch School; it will bear scrutiny with anything similar of any living Artist. Great praise surely but it is justifiable. The characters are drawn to the life, and yet with that peculiar charm which only rare Comedians can impart on the stage, and which rarer Artists can convey to canvas. Art has stepped forward in the person of Daniels, and hallowed a common scene with a special existence. That common scene is the tap-room of a village tavern. It is market day. The plump, ruddy agriculturist is having a quiet rubber with a knowing village blacksmith, who reclines in his chair. One brawny arm, as strong as iron bands, is extended, half defiantly, half boastfully, and the cards are poised in the other hand almost lost in the dimness. There is evidently something wrong. The countryman green, suspects foul card-play-and indeed there is, for one of the cards is on the blacksmith's knee-and that countryman green looks at his companion player with a countenance of dread and yet of anger. Behind him reclines against the wall an excellent figure - a tall, seedy, frock-coated looker-on. He knows the trick of the blacksmith, but he puffs away at his long clay, sending his smoke aslant to the ceiling, coolly aware of the inevitable fate of the innocent green horn. Between the two players, at the head of the table, with his back to the spectator, is another placid witness of the fraud-this I take to be a portrait of Daniels himself. There is abundant artistic and anecdotal interest here, and of its kind it is one of the most felicitous I have seen. Each of the four characters is a study, and the picture complete is a striking episode of village life. The colour is chiefly brown - a favourite ingredient with our Artist-carried through various degrees and tones to suit the dimly-lighted compartment, with its small distant window, and dark rough walls. Out of the dimness grows a large wicker throstle cage and on those dark rough tavern walls one can trace printed circular notices and the happy laughing portrait of that Lancashire notable Tim Bobbin.

But if there be any who assert that Daniels is only a painter of low comedy, and - to use a convenient phrase-of low tragedy, they are ignorant tattlers, or else wilful vilifiers and slanderers. See his "Shylock" - a gallery picture with power in every square inch of its long and broad canvas. Imaginative, romantic, dexterous. Tragic in its passion-the whole spleen and anger of the defeated Jew worked up to a frenzied fever-point and then transfixed in the contorted face, the flashing eye, the one feverish hand, from which he has dropped the flesh scales, and the other grasping the blade, with which he would perpetrate a deeper murderous revenge. The old figure is trembling and tottering with rage in the rich purple velvet costume in which the unappeasable Jew hoped to transact his bloody business. And now the rich robe is a mockery, for the tables of justice are turned, and his glory is reversed upon himself in derision, as he stands in the tall, dim corridor with the prismatic colours of the richly-stained windows shooting ironic warmth on the cold tile pavement. This is a work of which not only a private gallery, a town, a nation, but of which a world might well be and some day will be proud. The original drawing for this shews how the Artist can concentrate the power if not the grandeur of the larger work in a few inches of space. Along with this masterly achievement there are, in contradistinction, works of such delicacy, such passionless purity, so much loveliness for itself, that the mind irresistably thinks of the diversity and breadth of that poet at whose fount Daniels has, I believe, imbibed deeply - that poet who, though he gave the world Macbeth, Lear, Shylock, did not forget an Ariel and a Titania. Though Daniels has given us tragedy and pathos, he has not entirely forgotten those purely fresh things which, both in art and in nature, add motive to existence. Simple portraits of maidenhood! Simple, and yet profound in wealth of feeling. One is called, though why I cannot well see, a Circassian Slave. Call it what the fancy may suggest, it is a glory of art. A face in which one looks and finds joy, that humanity and art approached and embraced, and were wedded by the priest Daniels. A face in which one might learn to love. A remarkable feature of this Artist is that he has splendid imaginative power for effect, but though he idealizes he does not idealize his subject out of the reach of common sympathy. The interest is present and living. Though carried into a high element of art, it is not out of the grasp of the mortals. I can never hope to convey in words an idea of the ennobling freshness of this

work, and the adoration it forthwith commands.

“Far beyond the beauty of her face Lay richer charms but shadowed forth in this,”

Fortunately this is not solitary. There are others, though indeed few, of a similar kind. I will not say of equal merit, for perhaps such wondrous excellence is only caught once in a life-time, but they are sufficiently excellent to prove that the turbulent spirit of the Artist has had quiet, subdued moods in which he could see, and not only see, but point the simplicities of life, and make them mysteries of power for all time. Girls with happy, fair faces. Rich in the transparent glow of health, and charming in the promised maidenhood latent in the speechful eye and ruddy lip. But these, alas, have strong and numerous contrasts in other girls' faces, pale and pathetic,-particularly, in four studies in the one collection. Full faces under the yellowish light of candle or lamp, look out of deep brown backgrounds, such as Daniels, judging by their frequency, likes. The most exquisite of the four is the most cheerful - not entirely because it is the most cheerful. There is a finer finishing touch ; the face is of a better type; and the idea of abstraction is more vividly conveyed. The face is English in form and colour; long and even, and the almost full cheeks are delicately tinged with a tint akin to the rose. The faintest trace of a smile answers to the bright eye lit with mirth. Rich brown hair hangs carelessly down, and shadows of some of its stray tresses fall on her neck. The face seems to be on the very tip of some keen delight. One expects it to develop under the gaze, but no, the Artist has seized one of those transient but growing expressions which give to fine faces the power to provoke while they enthrall with gentle emotion. Daniels, in this case, like that knowing, cute Yorick, alias Laurence, alias Sterne, has worked up to a critical point, and then - . . . drawn a line.

The three companion faces are tearful and sad. Not the tearless sadness of the women of Burne-Jones's pictures, who seem to have tasted much too much of life, but the sadness of buds that have been nipped-of fruit murdered in the flower. There is, I very strongly believe, a subjective as well as an objective pathos in these pitiful girls' faces. They are girls, it is true, but their youth has been dragged through the mire of bitter experience to something of premature age. Tender years are there, but none of their brightness and vivacity. Pale and tearful, the eyes afloat in their lids, the lips dim, and withal a deeper, sadder tenderness than the bright healthy tenderness of youth. I regard them not only as portraits of his daughters (as they are said to be), but of himself-his inner self, when there would creep over him thoughts of an irretrievable past; of talents which, if not buried in the earth, have often been drowned; of a life which though brilliant might have had many things added unto it. These faces are full of tenderness and pathos as portraits; full of pathos and regret as tell-tales. Their light is sad, their colour is sad, their expression is sad, but the deepest of all is the sadness of, self-oppression to be read in them.

A picture with sustained power carried through from the first stroke to the last, and worthy to be classed with the one called Shylock, is “ The Prisoner of Chillon.” It is unfair to set one against another, and then to determine which is the greater of the two. Both are great, and if every strip of canvas over which Daniels has passed his extraordinary brush were obliterated, with the exception of either of these two, there would then be sufficient to bear witness to the possession of the genius of which I have endeavoured to convey a notion. The effect of the Prisoner of Chillon is wonderful. This word Wonderful is often vaguely used, but in the present instance it is employed with deliberation, to express the almost overpowering influence of this peculiar work. It arrests the attention like a sudden revelation of natural phenomenon, or a great dramatic scene in the hands of great actors. True indeed, it is not the most beautiful thing to look upon; it is not soothing in its influence it, rather, ruthlessly strings the feelings to their utmost and leaves them unappeased, for unlike the scene on the Stage, it never comes to an end. In the dense blue-blackness of a dungeon, reclines the shaggy-haired, attenuated prisoner, his neglected clothes tattered and torn, displaying here the form of and there the actual lank,

thick-veined limbs. The light, which holds this desolate figure in strong relief, streams in from an aperture out of view above, and falls on the old wrinkled face, the tear-lit eye - all strained with eager listening.

“A light broke in upon my brain-
It was the carol of a bird
It ceased, and then it came again,
The sweetest song ear ever heard”

Towards the light his nervous hand is stretched, as though it also is listening to the wondrous modulation so strange to the silence of his imprisonment. It is a charmed moment. The aged solitary enjoys the carol, though it intensifies the sense of his confinement. He seizes the passing pleasure, though it speaks of liberty he cannot enjoy. But for this there would be a dead silence in the dungeon, as it is, there is a sensation of speechless awe as the light falls upon the cold, grey receding pillars, but does not penetrate the darkness beyond them. One learns, in time, that he in the dungeon is not entirely alone. In the dimness is to be seen horrifying companions in two rats-one smelling at the mouth of the old man's water bottle.

III.

Daniels has not been afraid, any more than Rembrandt his prototype, to transmit via canvas, the lineaments of his face to posterity. So often has he accepted his own invitation in this respect that many captious people would charge him-but erroneously-with pride of that kind which takes young men and maidens to the photographer. If pride at all, it is akin to that obstinate personal defying pride which has kept him from the artistic world in general. He knows his worth and mocks it by conscious degradation. He is not a man to stand at trifles. He wants a character for his picture, and he accepts himself as a model-yea, he wants his own portrait, and he paints himself, palette and brushes in hand, at the easel-Prepared, renovated, decorated, ask you? No; just as he is said to sit - coatless, sometimes vestless, and with a doubtful complexion about his linen; the latter having some sort of relationship with that strange ceiling of his which, for the sake of the dear lights and shades that hover about its cobwebs, he strenuously declines to have whitewashed. Thus we find his own portrait common among his pictures. It will be illustrative of his multifariously sided personal character to here mention that in a little oil painting of his own he figures as one of two wearers of the gloves, much to the satisfaction of a crowded ring of spectators. Like the late Comedian-Compton, Daniels would seem to have enjoyed a fair upright fight from the shoulder.

His portraits of others indicate a remarkable insight into character. He catches the breathing immaterial spirit so to speak of a face-represents the inward individual in outward but hardly definable characteristics. Though simple, as a rule, in regard to posture, most of them are very graphic renderings of the subjects. Whether they are faithful reflexes of the originals is another matter, but it may be said that owners are always ready to testify to the truthful portraiture in this artist's work. Where the interest in them as portraits must necessarily fail to strangers, they sustain a certain charm by their attractions as pictures. The glancing eye; the speechful mouth; the peculiar individuality are there-not as belonging to one man only, but to all humanity. So true to life do we feel them that what are interesting to a few as portraits are interesting to the many as works of art, in which have settled some of the broad lines of human nature. Daniels, be it known, detests photography with considerable fervour, especially if it be suggested that the camera should steal a counterpart of some of his own work. But there is a tradition that he once was, for a brief period of seconds, actually pleased with what the sun had done, and lie forthwith metaphorically patted the sun on the back as a real Artist after all. Daniels had indirectly patted his own back in this ease, for he had picked up the photograph of a

portrait of a friend, painted years before by his own hand-an intimation which provoked words that had the ring, at least, of high anger. He has done much excellent work in portraiture, and in the matter of professional success but for his own erratic conduct might easily have taken foremost rank with the best of our day. South Kensington for example possesses five portraits that have become national property. One is a portrait of Charles Kean as Hamlet, another the portrait of George Stevenson the Engineer, and the others are portraits of the members of the family of Sir Joshua Walmsley, who generously presented these works to the gallery. Tradition has it that Mr. Barry Sullivan once sought the aid of the graphic brush of Daniels, and was gradually taking his place among the illustrious theatrical portraiture when a circumstance, uncongenial to the artist, brought about a crisis. Sullivan and Daniels were closeted together at the former's hotel. A rather too decorated friend of Sullivan turned in and took up quarters very close to the canvas - too close. The artist looked at the intruder, and demanded from the actor an explanation. The actor said, "A friend - proceed." The artist replied that the friend must depart or he and his palette would. The actor smiled negatively; whereupon W. Daniels, artist, with rather forcible affirmation rose from his seat, shot his fist through the portrait, and departed.

It must not be supposed that Daniels, though strong in figure and interior scenes, is entirely confined to them. He has shewn his appreciative interpretation of landscape on several occasions where it has formed a background to his figures. Broad graphic drawing, with a depth and variety of colour and luxurious foliage, are the principal characteristics. After seeing a subsidiary landscape or rather a scene of deep and gorgeous foliage behind the figure of a strange little girl in a broad-brimmed hat and limited frilled skirts suggestive of Sir Joshua, one is inclined to regret that Daniels has not given us entire studies in landscape. From this interesting little picture we can imagine what he could give in wood scenery - the wealth of colour in heavy drooping foliage in the foreground, the delicacy of the receding shades, and the refined beauty of the distant scene of hill, dale, and sky, living in its own special light through the aperture of a wood. I have seen a very interesting, graphic, Turneresquelike, sunrise of his, in oil. It is only a few inches square, and according to report, painted in a few minutes from nature. I italicize from nature, because I believe that sunrises caught on the spot are phenomenal. However, these few inches of glowing sunrise amid a thick murky sky, forcing through and permeating the atmosphere with subdued crimson running into grey and blue, prove of what variety of power his brush is equal to. Trees in the mid-distance stand indefinitely in the glare, and in the foreground is a patch of water with deep effective reflections as though the stillness of night had in them just awakened.

One more important feature of his power for realistic treatment must be noted. He is nothing, as we have all along seen, if not realistic. He must be faithful to what he sees though he sacrifice Beauty; but in nothing is he more realistic and true to material fact than in his painting of glass objects. To say the least, the results are astounding in their fidelity. It is not often that a real tangible glass decanter or tumbler, even though well-nigh brimmed with old wine, will warm the heart of man; it is not frequent that a veritable globe with veritable swimming gold-fish, excite great wonder-we look and are pleased, and turn away with a nod of the head, granting that creation after all has some pretty things; but when we see glass and wine, glass, water and gold fishes depicted in art by Daniels as no other known man has ever depicted them, we step back astonished. We approach enquiringly, we look critically - see the glass, its transparency, its own shadows, the shadows of outside things, yea, even the shadows of shadows. We see the beautiful effects of light playing upon the cut parts, upon the graceful swimming fish, and upon the surface of the wine or water we see a room window with its patch of blue sky convexed on the globe side; we see the shadow of the whole, falling like trees down a smooth lake, upon the polished surface of a table-we see all this, and again stand back in surprise that Art should be so expressive and such an able interpreter, teaching so much about the beauties of still-life to those who have eyes to see them. Still-life studies are not, as a rule, the most inspiring, though they may be very exacting works of art. On the face of them there is something effeminate in the selection-something that suggests a lack of native force, and the fact that copying pure and simple is, as a rule, the one end

and aim of the still-life Artist, only adds to the general insipidity. This, of course, does not always apply. Things of beauty, both in art and nature, are sometimes made most interesting themes in colour and form, and light and shade. Daniels has been the most successful Artist in this respect I at present know of.

He makes your still life-live, live with beauties, subtleties of colour, light and shade, dead to your own unguided, unaided eye upon fact. Through art he gives them a habitation ; holds them up as the rays of the sun single out gems on the crag sides, or as they encircle a ship in an effulgence of light far away on the surrounding dim horizon. I will give only one example of this. There is a delicately-formed glass dessert stand with pretty touches of light falling here and there and a few hazel nuts are painted with astonishing realism. A beautifully-decorated vase-like jug, with graceful lines of gilt ornamentation, stands by shells displaying that pearly, mysterious beauty of architecture which the vast deep alone seems able to weave for its inhabitants. In a dim corner, nibbling at one of the nuts, is a characteristic conceit of the Artist - a mouse.

These are, necessarily, only a few-noted here and there - of the many works produced by Daniels in his long though self-chequered artistic career; but it is not expedient or even necessary to produce in black and white further testimony of his powers. Page upon page of words, however dexteriously employed, are, after all, words only. The rare substance of which they are the forced shadow has to be seen face to face to be felt and understood, for the subtleties of special colour and form combined under special conditions, can in that colour and form only be seen. Writing, when descriptive, may approach the art of painting, but it is not, itself that art. The mind's eye only is appealed to, and after all the writer is obliged to exclaim - See ye the Works. These pages, then, are intended as a means of introduction between an Artist and a Public; to seek for one who has neglected to seek for himself, though he has earned, a wider attention than private collections can themselves afford. They are as well an attempt to caliper, So to speak, his work while he is yet among us, not waiting for the time when a few feet of solid earth will intervene.

When in this connection I reflect upon the conduct of certain men in authority over art matters in Liverpool, I question very much if they-officially-know how to nurture the genius self-bred upon their own territory; question indeed whether they - officially - can recognise genius, when it falls around and about them. Much keener, surely, - is the hog over road-side and mud-bespattered acorns than certain men have been over worth naked occasionally at least to their very eyes. Daniels at various times, though not lately, has sent works-now deeply valued-to Liverpool exhibitions. As a rule these works have been rejected, and when accepted, either placed as near the angels as possible, or made door porters of in the chambers of Art. This Artist in fact has lived and worked in his native town with very uncommon results for upwards of fifty years, and yet he is not represented in the corporation collection by one solitary example of his works, works that are said to be numbered by thousands. In the face of this it is not asserting too much to say that he has never had justice done to him in this respect in his own town, though the Royal Academy and Manchester have known how to honour him according to deserts that are now being more widely acknowledged, to the occasional jealousy of more favoured only because more suave mortals of the brush and palette, who thumb their vest holes on the deep consciousness of their own respectability, and pass faint praise with contorted countenances.

Will it not be creditable, more than this, will it not be a ready means of testing and justifying much that has been written here, to organize a Public Exhibition of the works of Daniels, to be held in his native town? The proposal has been made to several proprietors of this artist's pictures, and they express their willingness to aid. Who will do the initiative? The writer of these pages will be away from the immediate scene, or he would gladly undertake what in the face of things appears to be a public duty-

fall upon whom it may.

These few sympathetic pages are written of a man who, when a boy, drew remarkable faces on the soft surface of newly-made bricks, at the making of which he worked for bread; that boy be it known, at the hands of his own father first learned to warm his starved vitals on bleak winter mornings at the brick field, with those liquid flames which have scorched his life; that boy night after night, sat watching the grotesque effects of his solitary candle-light in his room, and even that early, tried to seize some of their mysterious halo. When as a youth clogs crowned his feet and mean attire his back, he won the gold medal for model drawing at a Liverpool Examination. On the occasion of the award, a noble-hearted companion noted some loud speaking shodding amid the silence of patent leather, and suggested a mutual exchange of property; and the youth who walked up in that noble-hearted companion's shoes to receive the golden tribute paid to what has proved to have been genius in its childhood is now the man William Daniels, Artist. Poor, neglected, and meanly educated though he was, such was the craving and force of his nature that he found his way to those almost feeless academies of Shakspeare, Milton, and Byron, and at their illuminated primers of the heart and mind, read deeply; and became so imbued with their spirit that it has had frequent expression in his work. Indeed the expression of this the poetical spirit, more than any other, proves that under fairer conditions he could have approached the most exacting subjects with assurance of noble realizations. Well grounded rather as a passionate lover than as a mechanical student in the Elizabethan literature, his work has in some measure partaken of its energetic, enthusiastic, romantic character, and I can never look upon the many extraordinary and beautiful things done by the hand of this man without feeling that in spite of the little questionable things recorded against him, and by those small matters only is he too often judged, he must at the core have a general nobility and refinement of nature; that when entirely himself and no second-hand passion-wrought creature he is one of the men to admire. I cannot look at these extraordinary and beautiful things and believe that his mind, heart, and hand have all along conspired to create lies and so fool posterity. Many of his pictures are unavoidably true to the better nature of the man, and that better nature, I learn from those who have long known him, is more touching, simple, and beautiful than general circumstances would make people believe. But, as I have shewn, apart from personal testimony, there are his works, and by these only can I judge. The man who laboured over them I feel assured is capable of the feeling and refinement they themselves often embody.

I have noted his love of our best in literature, and now it must be recorded that astronomy, mathematics, anatomy, have always been charms and wonders to him - but alas, all this eccentric nobility, all these accomplishments only intensify the regret that such rare rare gifts as his have so long and so often been the victims of oppression.

Far from me is the desire to goad him with pangs, or hurt the sensibilities of those who are endeared to him, I only record what I sincerely feel to be just in a public estimate even of his professional character.