

## LITERATURE, &amp;c.

## The British Magazines.

From the London People's Journal.

## THE PAINTER'S LAST PORTRAIT.

THE neighborhood of Soho Square has long been a favorite and noted locale for the abode of artists. In an attic of a court, in a Greek street, the celebrated Etty commenced his professional career, and the same apartment was subsequently occupied by another youthful aspirant for fame, to whom, as our narrative purports to be one of fiction—though somewhat impinging on facts—we shall give the name of Herbert Annesley. Waving all ceremony, let us introduce him seated at breakfast, cheered by the rays of the morning sun, streaming into his humble domicile through a long narrow window, near which you may perceive the young artist's easel, with a painting in a half-finished state placed upon it—a fancy sketch, portraying a young female of exquisite beauty standing at a window open down to the floor, and looking out upon a lawn from an apartment elegantly furnished and displaying a breakfast table laid out in a style that evinced the most scrupulous taste and refinement. It formed a picturesque and fascinating little scene of domestic comfort, rendered doubly interesting by the charming attitude and expression of the female, in whose countenance the artist had happily and strikingly delineated the fond and anxious gaze of a young bride, looking for the return of her loved companion from his morning ramble. What a contrast to the discomfort and desolation of the poor artist's attic! But such evils were almost entirely overlooked or forgotten by one whose whole soul was absorbed in the pursuit of his profession. It was to him a world of beauty and delight, so great and so enthralling that he was scarcely conscious of existing in any other. With this the young artist combined an anxious yearning for fame, that impelled him to unwearied study of the rules of his art, which he pursued with an ardor so intense as scarcely allowed him sufficient time for rest, rising every morning by day-break, and, when the season required a fire, keeping it in all night, so that it might be readily aroused into a genial blaze when the alarm at his bedside warned him of the expiration of his allotted hours of slumber. 'What a life! and buried in an attic!' some one of our readers may, perchance, exclaim, and no wonder; for there are but few persons who can appreciate that purely mental existence known only to those who are able to create a world of their own, and live in it. It mattered not to such a man as Herbert whether he was badly lodged in a desolate attic or enjoyed all the cheering and comfortable appliances to be found in a well-furnished first floor; in fact, of the two, he might perhaps have preferred the former as the most quiet part of the house, and the one least exposed to intrusion. A man who has a lodging up three or four pair of stairs is out of the reach of many annoyances, amongst which may occasionally be reckoned the too frequent visits of his landlady, to say nothing of the noises of lodgers—a musical family, perhaps—overhead, and an incessant scampering up and down the staircase. Our artist in his 'eyrie home,' was free from all such vulgar disturbances. His devotion to his art became so ardent and intense, that even a meal to which he had sat down was frequently forgotten or neglected, especially when engaged on any fancy sketch such as that we have already described, and which was now lit up by a glorious flood of sunshine, streaming in at his window. He appeared like one entranced as he sat gazing on the beautiful face that now seemed to look out, life-like, from the canvas. It was one of those realizations of perfect loveliness which seem to have had no prototype, unless, indeed, it should happily bring to mind some fitting fairy-like vision which has become daguerrotyped on the mind, even at a glance, so strongly, that it never can be forgotten.

It was an occurrence of this nature that impelled our artist to his present labor—a casual meeting on the street, a passing vision that had enthralled and inspired him by its heavenly perfection. He had hurried home and dashed off an exact likeness not only of the features but of the expression. The impulse of the moment—an uncontrollable desire to preserve and enjoy the constant companionship of a beautiful object—having been gratified, he had subsequently resolved to make it the subject of a sketch, a cabinet picture, for the Royal Academy's ensuing exhibition, and his task was now almost completed. He had been encouraged in his intention by the admiration which the painting had elicited, even in an unfinished state, from every person whom he had permitted to see it; and he entertained the most sanguine expectation not only that it would be granted a place in the exhibition, but prove the means of bringing him into public notice—a belief in which he was confirmed by the unqualified eulogium of an eminent academician, whose friendly advice and profound knowledge of the art he had the advantage of enjoying. The picture was sent in, and in a few days Herbert received an answer proving the correctness of his friend's opinion: the contribution had been accepted.

With feverish anxiety he looked forward to the opening of the exhibition; and when at last the day came, he was delighted to find that those whose office it was to superintend the hanging of the pictures had disposed of his in such a manner as to admit of a fair judgment being passed upon its merits.

In the course of the season he made frequent visits to the exhibition, chiefly for the purpose of studying the perfections of those who far exceeded him in his art; though sometimes, with the natural vanity of a youthful aspirant for fame, he found himself gazing admiringly upon his own work, and eagerly endeavoring to overhear any criticism that strangers might pass upon it. In addition to the encomiums Herbert thus enjoyed, he was still further delighted by the high praise that was lavished upon him by the press, the critics all speaking of the 'youthful bride' as a poetical creation, displaying so much talent as to afford indubitable promise of the artist rising to a high rank in his profession. In the encouragement thus given the first step was gained; but still, years of toil and privation might elapse before any substantial reward could be realized—talent and even genius, but too frequently receiving such slow and slender patronage that the possessor becomes crushed by poverty and exhausted by toil, so as to be incapable of making the final effort that shall realise the recompense he has so long struggled for and deserved.

Herbert read the praises of his work in every journal, and although these might alleviate the want of a dinner, and many other privations that extreme poverty inflicts, they tended rather to sharpen the poignancy of numerous indignities, which a man unable to satisfy paltry debts is invariably compelled to endure. Hoping daily to relieve himself from these by the sale of his picture, and his anxiety on this point increasing most painfully as the time approached when the exhibition would close, his mind became so fevered as to unfit him for setting down to any fresh work; and thus he spent whole days out of doors that might have been more advantageously employed at home.

One afternoon, returning from a long morning's ramble, during which Herbert had been amusing himself with his sketch book in the suburbs, he happened to look in at Somerset House, when the exhibition was most thronged with visitors, so much so that the stream of persons going in and coming out compelled every one to proceed slowly and cautiously. Indeed it was difficult to pass without a struggle, and even an occasional crush, so violent as to be far from beneficial to ladies' dresses. Unwilling to be deemed guilty of any rudeness that could be avoided, Herbert, on reaching an angle of the staircase, paused for an instant and drew himself up into a corner for the purpose of avoiding collision with a very fat lady whom a diminutive old gentleman, was escorting down the stairs. When she had passed and Herbert was watching for an opportunity of continuing his ascent, he chanced to catch a glimpse of something that was lying glittering on the ground close against the wall, a few steps above where he stood. On coming towards it he managed to pick it up, and found it to be a bracelet set in a very costly manner with precious stones, one of them a large diamond of great brilliancy, surrounded by small ones. He put it into his pocket, and on examining it minutely, when he arrived home, he found that the back of the clasp was engraved with the initials 'L. B.' and that a lock of hair, gleaming like silver, was curiously concealed in the gold casing. His first impulse was to shew the trinket to a jeweller, who pronounced it to be of very considerable value, the sum he mentioned as the worth of the diamond alone being nearly double that which Herbert expected to realize by his picture, and, in conjunction with the rest of the jewels that formed the bracelet, affording a most tempting source of positive wealth to a man in such desperately needy circumstances as our struggling artist. It would be unreasonable to suppose that the idea of immediately disposing of it, and thus placing himself at once in comfortable circumstances, did not cross his mind, but he rejected it as unworthy of him, and hastened immediately to seek for the owner of the trinket by a newspaper advertisement, although he was forced to borrow even the few shillings that were required for the purpose.

About a week had elapsed, when some one called upon him to claim the bracelet, the visitor taking him by surprise in his attic; an intrusion solely attributable to the vulgar-mindedness of the landlady, who had no notion of showing any more attention than she could help to a lodger who was in arrears of rent. The visitor was a gentlemanly man of about fifty years of age, who, having briefly stated the nature of his errand and informed Herbert that his daughter had lost a bracelet at the exhibition only a few days previously, proceeded to give an exact description of the one in Herbert's possession, adding that it was a trinket she prized far beyond its pecuniary value, simply because it was a keepsake from her uncle, who had been many years absent in India, and whose age rendered his returning to England extremely improbable.

'I am delighted that it has fallen to my lot to restore to its owner so treasured a gift,' said Herbert, handing his visitor the bracelet.

'And I,' replied the stranger, 'esteem it a most fortunate circumstance that the trinket should have fallen into such honorable hands. If your advertisement had not appeared so quickly, a handsome reward would have been offered.'

'A very annoying and unprofitable species of expense,' observed Herbert.

'I should have thought nothing of it,' replied the stranger; and then, opening the cavity in the clasp of the bracelet, he added, 'this little lock of hair alone we value far more than all the jewels, and I account myself

greatly your debtor, sir, for restoring it. In fact,' he continued, with the hesitation of a man who was fearful of wounding the pride of a poor gentleman, 'I shall be delighted if you will allow me to suppose the amount I am indebted to you for your advertisement.'

Herbert unhesitatingly declined this offer, stating the actual cost of the advertisement, and declaring that it was all he could think of accepting. His visitor said no more, but having taken the amount out of his purse and placed it on the table, entered into a conversation with him on the fine arts, the remarks which he made upon painting especially evincing such a refined taste, and so high and just an appreciation of the ennobling nature of the art, that Herbert was quite delighted with him, and allowed himself to be led almost unconsciously into a familiar chat respecting the difficulties attending the pursuit of the profession, the course of study he had adopted, and the first attempt he had made, by the painting that had been sent to the exhibition, to test both his proficiency and ability.

'I never miss going to the exhibition every year,' said the stranger, 'but I have not been yet; there is always such a crowd at the early part of the season. The day my daughter went there, and lost her bracelet, the throng was so great she was not able to see a quarter of the paintings.'

'Early in the morning is the best time,' observed Herbert.

'Yes, but ladies will be fashionable and go to such places. I shall go with her myself next time, probably to-morrow, and shall have the pleasure of examining your picture, if you will favor me with the number of it.'

'Allow me to offer you my catalogue,' replied Herbert. 'I have it somewhere at hand—oh, here—but you will excuse its being disguised by pencil marks, little notes to remind me of the perfections of the best paintings.'

'A capital guide, sir, for a mere amateur like myself. You will want these notes though, and wherefore I shall do myself the pleasure of returning it. What is the number of your painting?'

Herbert named it; his visitor set a mark against it, and then began looking over the catalogue, and after a few desultory inquiries respecting some of the pictures, rose, and handing Herbert his card, whereon was engraved 'Arthur Brereton, Montagu-square,' gave him a pressing invitation to dinner any day he was not better engaged, assuring him that he would be extremely glad to have the pleasure of his acquaintance; but, continued he, 'I shall most likely take the liberty of paying you another visit, if only to return this catalogue and let you know what I think of your picture.'

'I shall be extremely glad,' replied Herbert, 'but bear in mind, as regards the picture, that it is little more than a portrait—a sketch from memory of an extremely lovely countenance that I caught sight of for an instant in the street—in my opinion, a close approach to perfection; so much so, indeed, that the critics have all given me credit for a very poetical conception.'

'I shall let you know what I think of it when you favor me by complying with my invitation, if not before, for I have some slight idea that perhaps I can render you some little service in your profession.'

Herbert expressed his thanks, and Mr Brereton departed.

A few mornings afterwards, our artist was called from his studio to receive a packet from the hands of a footman, who said he had been ordered by his master to deliver it personally. On opening the parcel, Herbert found it to be the returned catalogue, and something more—the note that accompanied it containing a check for £50, which the writer said he hoped would secure him possession of the picture as soon as the exhibition was closed, although the price he had taken the liberty of fixing upon it was far below its real value. The note concluded by naming a day for Herbert's visit, which the writer said would be far more gratifying and satisfactory to both than any written communication.

Highly delighted, not only with the munificence thus displayed, but with the manner in which it was exhibited, Herbert gladly complied with the invitation sent him, and was received by him in so cordial a manner as to leave no doubt of the very friendly feeling he entertained towards him. The picture had excited his warmest admiration—he spoke of it not merely as work of art that evinced both taste and talent, but said that he regarded it as a positive treasure, of which he esteemed himself most fortunate in becoming the possessor.

Dinner being announced, Mr Brereton ushered his guest down into the drawing room, where he apologised for the want of a more social reception by stating that his family were out of town, his daughter having been only in London for a few days. She had been greatly disappointed in not having had the pleasure of thanking Herbert personally for the return of her bracelet. When Mr Brereton and his guest had finished their repast and were seated over their wine, the former gradually led his young friend to divulge the present situation of his affairs, evidently with a view of being able to ascertain what prospect he had of overcoming the difficulties that were opposed to his advancement in his profession. This led our young artist to unbosom himself so freely that before they rose from the table Mr Brereton was in full possession even of the youth's private history—that of one who had early been bereft of his near-

est relatives—and Herbert was delighted to find, from the warm-hearted sympathy the detail excited, that his confidence was not likely either to be unappreciated or misplaced. The correctness of such surmise, was, in fact, speedily proved by Mr Brereton expressing his willingness to render him any service that lay in his power.

The next day he visited Herbert in his new abode, which the munificent price he had given for his picture had enabled him to procure; and afterwards made him a present of sundry additions to his furniture, without even appraising him of any such intention. Scarcely a day passed without his calling, sometimes passing the whole afternoon in the artist's studio, and finally insisting upon taking his *protege* home with him to dinner.

It so happened that a number of days had elapsed during which our artist saw nothing of his patron, and at last, thinking that he might be ill, Herbert determined to make a morning call. His face was so familiar to the footman who opened the door that the latter, dispensing with the formality of a card, hastened to acquaint his master, and returned in an instant to conduct Herbert up stairs into the drawing room where he was received by a young lady, Mr Brereton's daughter, in whom he instantly recognised the enchanting original of the 'youthful bride' whose disposal had exercised such a benign influence upon his fortune. While he was yet bowing, stammering for something to say, and looking so exceedingly confused that the young lady could hardly help laughing, her father suddenly made his appearance, and completely turned the tables, by introducing the bashful youth as Mr Herbert Annesley, the artist to whom she was indebted as well for the restoration of her bracelet as for the honor he had conferred upon her in making her the subject of his talented pencil.

'What's that I hear?—what, what?' enquired a very yellow faced old gentleman who came hobbling unceremoniously into the apartment. 'Is this the young gentleman that took my niece's portrait? Sir, I congratulate myself on the pleasure of shaking hands with you; I never could have anticipated such a gratification as you have prepared for me; it has been quite as unexpected as my return to England—I never saw such an admirable likeness in my life, sir, never.'

It turned out, from the explanation now given by Mr Brereton, that his family had been suddenly brought to town by a letter from India, which announced (and in consequence of some delay in the delivery, had only a day or two preceded) the arrival of his brother—'uncle Ben,' as he was called—a relation to whom the family looked for a superabundant increase of fortune, and whose every wish therefore assumed the force of law.

You and my niece,' said uncle Ben to Herbert, 'must be better acquainted; and if you should ever again introduce her in one of your pictures, just take her as she is now, with her neck and face of a beautiful rose colour—only look at 'em.'

'Oh, uncle, how can you—' exclaimed Laura, as she hastily quitted the room, being too much disconcerted by the freedom of her eccentric relative, and the suddenness of her meeting with Herbert, to address even one word to him. In vain therefore did he prolong his visit in hope that she might return and gladden his eyes once more with her presence. From that hour, however, our artist found himself a constant visitor at the house of Mr Brereton, and became an especial favorite with uncle Ben. The lover speedily discovered that the maiden's personal beauty was enhanced by her mental perfections, the combination of each having such an enthralling influence that he felt it impossible for him to delay the avowal. It was favorably received, and he became an accepted suitor. The completion of his happiness was, however, most painfully delayed for some time by a family bereavement—the death of uncle Ben—an event which occurred after a lingering illness. It was then found that, in addition to a very ample fortune settled upon his niece, the old gentleman had left Herbert such a handsome legacy as to render him independent of his profession. Of this boon Herbert made the best possible use by enriching himself with the possession of the youthful bride whom he had depicted in his last portrait, and (perhaps we may be permitted to add) subsequently finding himself surrounded by a cluster of miniature likenesses, varying only in degrees of the most beautiful similitude.

From Hogg's Instructor.

## THE POETRY OF LIFE.

'We spend our lives as a tale that is told,' said the Hebrew Psalmist, and this is true in more senses than the one to which he immediately applied it, as pointing out the shadowy brevity of human existence. Yes, a tale, and how much of happiness or misery depends on the telling of that story! How various its aspects—how manifold its characters and incidents—how inscrutable its entangled plot—and how unlooked for oftentimes its startling disclosures when 'the end cometh! Surely they err widely who would forbid us sometimes to tread the flowery paths of nature's own walk of art—to take up the pen-cil as it drops, ever and anon, from the hand of some departing artist, and re-sketch the features of a story which could only be completed when the chief actor had passed from our view. Only when genuine biography shall be written in this way—when, with the frequently simple incidents and sober tints, shall be infused more of the 'poetry of life'—more of that vivid interest and loving por-