

SIR WILLIAM ALLAN.

SIR WILLIAM ALLAN, R.A., President of the Royal Scottish Academy, Member of the Academy of St Luke, &c., &c., was born in the year 1782, at Edinburgh, and was educated there partly at the High School of the city, under William Nichol, the companion of the poet Burns, a somewhat severe disciplinarian. At a very early age Allan evinced a love for the Arts, and all his spare hours were devoted to drawing; he studied for several years at the Trustees' Academy, commencing on the day that Graham entered on his duties as master, at which time Wilkie also entered as a student. Wilkie and Allan were therefore among Graham's first pupils at the Academy. They began drawing from the same example, and thus continued for months, using the same copy and sitting on the same form. The friendship thus begun by the young painters increased as they grew to manhood, and ceased but with the life of Wilkie, whose character as a student, as an artist, and as a man, it has been, and still is, the delight of the surviving subject of this memoir to hold up as an example to the young aspirants in the profession who seek his counsel. After the close of his studies with Graham, of whose instructions and kindness Allan has ever cherished a most grateful remembrance, he removed to London and was admitted to the School of the Royal Academy, where he remained some time; but not ultimately finding professional employment, and after many hard struggles in the great brick wilderness, he determined on going abroad to try whether encouragement might not be had elsewhere. Russia suggested itself as a country where an opening for his talents might be expected, and as one abounding in stirring and novel subject-matter for the pencil.

Sir William's well-known character for energetic action when once his plans are resolved on was here manifested. He scarcely gave himself time to communicate his intention to his friends in Scotland, but with one or two letters of introduction to some of his countrymen resident in St. Petersburg, he embarked in a vessel sailing for Riga. Adverse winds threw the ship almost a wreck into Memel, in Prussia; and thus our artist, with, by no means, a heavy purse, was cast upon a strange land, of whose language and people he was ignorant. The universal language of his Art, however, he could speak; and relying on his innate powers, he took up his abode at an inn and commenced portrait-painting, beginning with the portrait of the Danish consul to whom he had been introduced by the captain of the vessel. Having, in this way, recruited his exhausted finances, he lost no time in resuming his journey northward. He proceeded overland to St. Petersburg, encountering on the road various romantic incidents, and passing through a great portion of the Russian army on their way to the battle of Austerlitz. On his arrival at Petersburg, he was, through the kindness of Sir Alexander Crichton, then physician to the Imperial family, introduced to many valuable friends; and eventually, was enabled to pursue his Art diligently and successfully. Having attained a knowledge of the Russian language, he travelled into the interior, and remained for several years in the Ukraine, making excursions at various times to Turkey, Tartary, to the shores of the Black Sea, Sea of Azoph, and the banks of the Kuban, amongst Cossacks, Circassians, Turks, and Tartars; visiting their huts and tents, studying their history, character, and costume, and collecting a rich museum of their arms and armour, as *matières premières* for his future labours in Art. In 1812, Mr. Allan began to meditate a return to fatherland, as in some measure he had accomplished the objects of his journey and stay abroad. But the French invasion had commenced; Napoleon had already passed the frontier with his numerous army; the whole country was thrown into confusion and alarm: so that our painter's return became a matter of impossibility; and thus he was forced to witness not a few of the heart-rending miseries of that eventful period. In 1814, after an absence of ten years, Mr. Allan returned to the romantic city of his birth and boyhood, and had the happiness of



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again seeing his father and other dear friends. Our space will not permit us to do more than glance at Allan's Edinburgh life at this time; suffice it to say, that the most eminent of his countrymen in Literature and Art visited and were in daily intercourse with the young and enterprising artist; among whom were Scott, Wilson, Lockhart, and other distinguished literati of the day. He commenced by embodying some of the romantic scenes which his travels and adventures had suggested. The first subject that brought his name into general notice in this country was the "Circassian Captives," a work full of exquisite and novel matter, character, and expression; and remarkable for the masterly arrangement of its parts. This picture was exhibited at Somerset House in 1815. Other works of kindred excellence succeeded:—"Tartar Banditti," "Haslan Gheray crossing the Kuban," "A Jewish Wedding in Poland," "Prisoners conveyed to Siberia by Cossacks,"—pictures which have never been forgotten by those who saw them. These and many others the artist brought together and exhibited in his native city, along with the armour and costumes he had collected in his travels. This exhibition was highly attractive; the artist rose higher in the estimation of his countrymen, but received few commissions. He had determined to make Scotland his future residence, and historical painting his exclusive profession. The beginning was thus up-hill work; but fortunately for historical Art in Scotland, there still remained a few of the *Russian roubles*. After a time, Sir Walter Scott, John Wilson the poet, his brother James the naturalist, Lockhart, and a number of the artist's other friends purchased his "Circassian Captives" at a price they thought considerable; and having resolved to

decide by lot whose property it should become, the Earl of Wemyss became possessor of this beautiful work, which now graces his lordship's collection in Stratford Place, London. The Grand Duke Nicholas, present Emperor of Russia, visited Edinburgh, and purchased several pictures from the artist; one, "Siberian Exiles," and another, "Haslan Gheray." Things began to look better; Allan's works now found a more ready sale; and his picture of "The Death of Archbishop Sharpe," a work of very high character, was purchased by Mr. Lockhart, of Milton Lockhart, M.P.; his most affecting picture "The Press-Gang," by Mr. Horrocks of Tillyheeran; his "Knox admonishing Mary, Queen of Scots," by Mr. Trotter of Ballendean; "The Death of the Regent Murray," by his Grace the late Duke of Bedford; "The Ettrick Shepherd's Birthday," by the late Mr. Gott of Leeds; his whole-length cabinet portraits of "Scott and Burns," by his friend Robert Nasmyth, Esq.; and "The Orphan Scene at Abbotsford," by King William IV.

A serious malady in the eyes now threatened the artist with total blindness, and was a source of great suffering for several years, causing a cessation of all professional labour. A change of climate was prescribed, and he went to Italy; spent a winter at Rome, and from Naples made a journey to Constantinople; and after visiting Asia Minor and Greece, he returned to Edinburgh with health restored. "The Slave Market, Constantinople," purchased by Alexander Hill, Esq., publisher, was the fruit of this journey. Also, "Byron in the Fisherman's Hut, after swimming the Hellespont," bought by Robert Nasmyth, Esq. In 1834 an ardent wish to visit Spain, and to gather new material for his Art, led him once more to go abroad. He sailed for

Cadiz and Gibraltar, went into West Barbary, and crossing again to Spain, travelled over the greater part of Andalusia, intending to go on to Madrid, but was prevented by news from home from accomplishing the latter project. We cannot in so brief a memoir do more than mention the names of a few of his other works. Among them are "The Moorish Love-letter," "Murder of Rizzio," "Battle of Prestonpans," "An Incident in the Life of King Robert Bruce," "Whittington and his Cat," "Polish Exiles on the road to Siberia," (this latter picture was bought by W. Burn Callender, Esq., of Preston Hall), all remarkable for scrupulous correctness of character and costume, and lacking none of the higher qualities of Art.

Having long desired to paint a picture of the Battle of Waterloo, he several times visited France and Belgium to make sketches of the field of action, and otherwise to collect material for his purpose. The view he chose was from the French side, Napoleon and his staff being the foreground figures. This picture was in 1843 exhibited at the Royal Academy, and purchased by the Duke of Wellington, who gratified the artist by expressing his satisfaction at the truthfulness of the arrangement and detail in his work. Such high commendation induced Sir William to throw himself with all the indomitable energy for which the veteran President of the Scottish Academy, not less than the young adventurer of the Ukraine, was still remarkable, into another great picture of "Waterloo" from the British side, with the view of entering the lists of the Westminster Hall competition in 1846. This work also gained the approbation of "the great Captain," and was much praised by the public; it was voted for by one at least of the best judges in the committee as worthy of public reward, but without so favourable a result. Let us hope that a work so replete with truth and spirit may yet meet its just reward in the National adoption.

Undaunted by defeat, the patriotic President is now engaged with his wonted vigour in painting the "Battle of Bannockburn," on the same extensive scale as his latter picture of Waterloo. May success and reward attend his noble effort.

In 1844 Allan revisited Russia, and had an opportunity of seeing again his early patron, the Czar. There he painted a picture of "Peter the Great teaching his subjects the Art of Ship-building." It was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1845, and is now in the Winter Palace, St. Petersburg.

For a long period the only resident historical painter of his country, and for seventeen years Master of the Trustees' Academy, where he and Wilkie first began their career, Allan has had the opportunity of communicating much of his own enthusiasm to the students of Art in Scotland, and is now surrounded by a numerous body of highly talented professors of his own branch of Art. In 1838, on the death of Mr. Watson, the original President of the Scottish Royal Academy, Mr. Allan was unanimously elected by the body to fill the chair which he still worthily occupies. The labours of the Academy during his presidency have been many; and some of them, having most important bearings upon the Fine Arts not only of Scotland, but of the whole kingdom; an account of them, however, must be looked for elsewhere. Mr. Allan was elected Associate of the Royal Academy in 1826, and Academician in 1835. On the death of Sir David Wilkie he was appointed Her Majesty's limner for Scotland, and in 1842, he received the honour of knighthood. Did our space allow it would afford us pleasure to bear testimony to the genial, hospitable, and liberal private character of the worthy knight; but this we believe is as well known to most of his southern brethren in Art as to his own countrymen, who have frequent opportunities of meeting at his elegant table the men of note who visit the northern metropolis. We conclude our necessarily defective notice of one who has had much beneficial influence on the Arts of his country, by expressing our earnest hope that he may long be spared in health and honour, to guide by his experience and stimulate by his example, the rising professional body of which he is the head.



Drawn by F. Goodall.

Engraved by E. Dalziel.

THE VILLAGE MINSTREL.

“How often have I led thy sportive choir,
With tuneless pipe beside the murmuring Loire,
Where shading elms along the margin grow,
And freshen'd from the wave, the zephyr flew!
And happy, though my harsh touch, faltering still,
But mock'd all time, and marr'd the dancer's skill,

Yet would the village praise my wondrous power,
And dames forgetful of the noon-tide hour,
Alike all ages: dames of ancient days
Have led their children through the mirthful maze,
And the gay grandæte, skill'd in gestic lore,
Has frisk'd beneath the burden of threescore.”

GOLDSMITH.

1841