



## BURNE-JONES AND HIS ART.

By HONOR BROOKE.

With Illustrations from his Works.<sup>1</sup>



HERE is no name amongst our modern painters, which calls up so much varied criticism as that of Mr. Burne-Jones. His pictures form a meeting-place for the critic, the artist, and the general public.

What, then, is the mainspring of his genius? What has combined to form the peculiar style of his artistic power? What are the tendencies that we see figured in his work? To answer these questions will be my best endeavour.—His genius springs from a nature deeply imbued with a poetic sense. Beauty he sees everywhere—in tender womanhood, in the charm of girlhood, in the world of Nature, in legend and fairy-lore, in classic tale and heathen myth—in all these he finds poetic charm. The realm of the past, touched by his own imagination, is inexhaustible in furnishing him with conceptions and themes for artistic utterance; he is only disturbed by their frequency and richness. But I may say that we have no imaginative painter, who is apparently so untouched by the events or progress of the world as it is at present.

His imagination is both rich and penetrating, but never was there artist less fanciful—which accounts perhaps for the very serious tone of his work; the light, the gay, the sportive has no place with him, that side of humanity is never represented, nor is the humorous, the grotesque or the plaintive. He loves all Nature, but it is Nature untouched by man, he never paints a garden, or a park, or any tilled ground. The landscape in the

*Mirror of Venus*, is an uninhabited stretch of upland valley, amongst hills, beautiful but very lonely. The rose in *Briar Rose* is not the garden rose, but the wild one, painted with exquisite fidelity. The shore the angels stand on in *The Six Days of Creation* is not one of Earth's human shores, never was there sand so delicate, never were there shells so exquisite of tint or shape. But though his love of Nature does not impel him to follow her in all her moods or manifestations, his care in representing her forms is entirely painstaking and extreme. I cannot tell if it was his early companionship with certain members of the pre-Raphaelite brotherhood (though he never joined them), which made him so careful in his delineation, and so truthful in every small detail. It is almost curious to see side by side with such dreamy conceptions an intense accuracy of detail and searching into the minutest item. This extreme carefulness is shown by his countless studies made for every picture—studies of drapery, as it falls on arm, or knee, or shoulder; studies of every part of armour, and the lights on it; studies of the gradation of hues and tints; and feathers, with all their delicate involvement—all this, and more than I can name, witness to his painstaking method in regard to every part of his work. I have no hesitation in saying that this artist is a perfect draughtsman. People may not admire his style, but that is quite another thing. The turn of a head, or the shape of a figure may not suit their taste, but that is no proof it is deformed or out of shape, so long as it is harmonious in itself, it does not break the rules of good drawing.

Accuracy of drawing is a good thing, it is the letter of the law, but there is something finer even than the latter—it is the spirit which breathes through the

<sup>1</sup> From *Edward Burne-Jones: a Record and Review*, by Malcolm Bell. London: George Bell & Sons, 4 York Street, Covent Garden. Second Edition, 1893.