

ART AT HOME AND ABROAD

Mr. Finberg's Study of Turner's Sketches and Drawings a Critical and Constructive Contribution to Art.

WHEN we consider that the new Turner wing of the Tate Gallery contains 120 oil paintings and 467 water colors, and that the 300 sketch-books in the unexhibited portion of Turner's bequest to the nation contain 19,000 pages, each one with drawings or memoranda, we can gain some idea of the formidable task involved in tracing Turner's artistic development by direct reference to his sketches and completed works.

This task has been performed by Mr. A. J. Finberg in his book "Turner's Sketches and Drawings" in a spirit of superbly critical and constructive. His criticism differs from that most in vogue at the present time in its adherence to a theory or philosophy of aesthetics, the proving of which by the steps of Turner's progress is an even more important affair than the illumination thrown upon the character of the master's genius.

It is curious that Turner should have served, at an interval of more than half a century, both as the text for Ruskin's didactic glorification of nature as the sanction and reason for art, and the text for Mr. Finberg's discussion of pictorial art as "an arrangement of spatial symbols embodying an individualized psychological content present to the mind of the artist, and intended always to call up the same ideas and emotions in the minds of others."

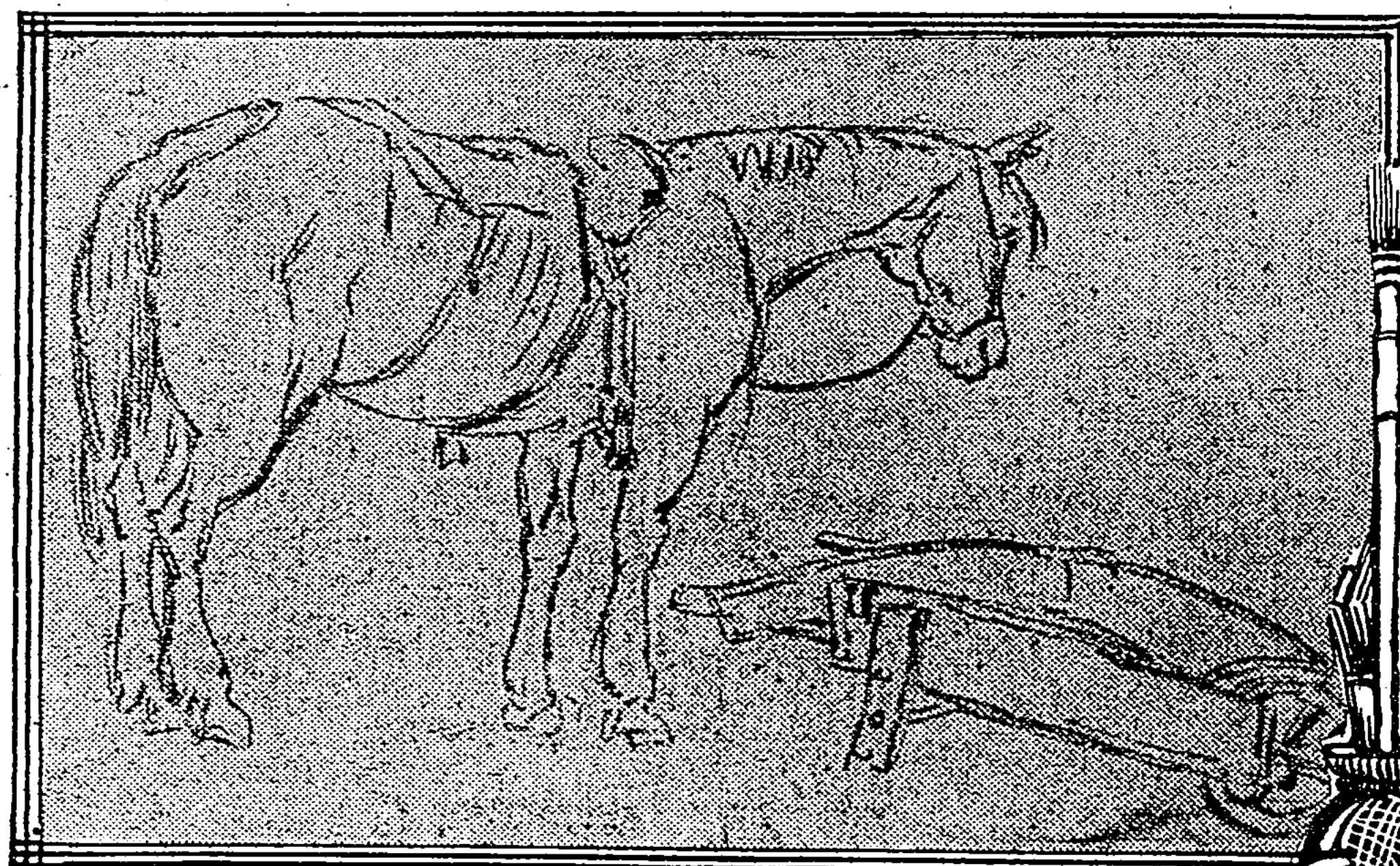
No dispassionate student of Turner's painting and Ruskin's comment upon it can fail to feel in closing the present book that Mr. Finberg has succeeded as Ruskin did not, in achieving a synthesis of a complex subject and illustrating a philosophy by a single personality.

His treatment of his immediate subject—the development of Turner's art—is admirably cogent. He divides his subject matter into eight parts, dealing in his first chapter with Turner's seven years' apprenticeship from 1787 to 1793, or from his twelfth to his nineteenth year. In this chapter the critic calls attention to the significant fact that the young artist acquired the rudiments of pictorial language by imitating the works of contemporary artists, "not, as is the modern way, through the course of a random study of nature," and emphasizes the facility with which Turner later drew from nature as due to this early discipline of eye and hand.

The second division concerns "The Topographical Draughtsman," and is confined within the period from 1793 to 1796, when Turner established himself in the esteem of the public by producing topographical drawings, executed with coolness, patience, and dexterity—models of the class to which they belong. In his diligent mastery of this form of expression he was unconsciously preparing his hand for the free interpretation of scenes that later were powerfully to stir his emotions, and in the sketchbooks belonging to this period Mr. Finberg discovers notes of romantic scenery that show the utmost sensitiveness to impressions unflinchingly recorded with a deft and skillful hand.

In the next chapter, which bears the title "The Sublime," and carries the history of the artist's development to the year 1802, we are asked to observe Turner's awakening to spiritual issues previously ignored. His mind grasps the possibility of using the invisible as subject matter for pictorial art. His aim changes from objectivity to subjectivity, and in place of clear forms we get synthesis and the use of chiaroscuro to intensify emotion.

As in the years of his earlier development he turned to the work of others for guidance. In Wilson's pictures the darkness of the tone, the subordination to the tone of all local color, and



Pony and Wheelbarrow, from A. J. Finberg's "Turner's Sketches and Drawings."

the expressive character of the paint give him an appropriate model and he bent his mighty energies to assimilating the Wilson tradition. The water color entitled "Ruined Castle on Hill" shows with what diligence he molded his cheerful view of nature to "concepts full of gloom and horror." He fed his imagination with turbulent skies and angry waves, the massive ruins of huge castles, the gaunt structures of time-worn crags. We cannot forbear to quote Mr. Finberg's final description of the change that has taken place in his mental attitude:

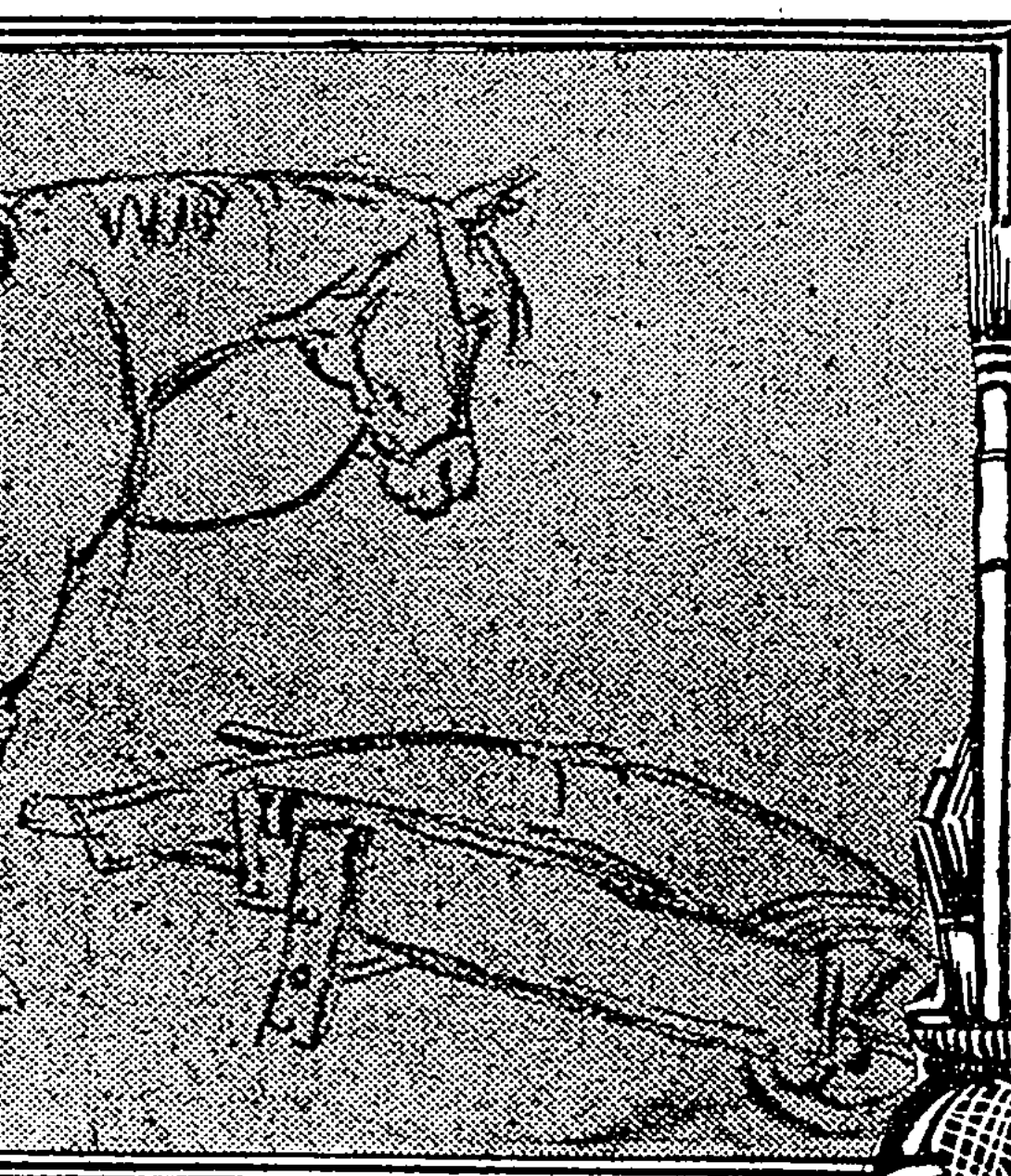
"His mental grasp has clearly broadened. He no longer sees buildings as isolated objects, but they now fall into their places as incidents in the wide panorama of the country. Nothing is now drawn for itself; the trees are emanations from the ground, the dry land and the waters are kinsmen, the stones in the foreground are parts of the distant mountains, and the mountains huge elder brothers of the pebbles by the riverside. The bubbling waters are but clouds made captive, the clouds the freed souls of the brooks, the trees the organ of their transformation, and castles like Conway, standing with their roots plunged deep into their rocky foundations, seem but rocks raised to a higher power. The distinction between human art and physical nature is everywhere broken down. The spirit of life in nature is identified with the volitions and passions of the artist's own soul: he has become sensible to the moods of time and season, to the moral power, the affections and the spirit of the place."

This preparation for liberation from the bondage of the visible world gave Turner mastery of an emotional method as it had been used by another. He was next to enter a field where he could apply his new principles with greater originality and freedom. Much has been made of his unfamiliarity with the sea by critics descending upon the fanciful character of his marines, but Mr. Finberg's examination of the sketches makes it clear that although he had painted several important sea pictures before he had ventured out of sight of land, he made use of all his opportunities to observe the sea. There are studies of ships and boats, of waves dashing against rocks, of storms and wrecks.

In these last he has tried in a succession of vigorous sketches every possible movement in the sinking of a big ship, and also many variations of rhythm of design, before finally exalting the sum of his observations into the composition of epic quality which we have in his picture "The Shipwreck."

Mr. Finberg places no stint on his admiration of Turner's sea pictures. The best of them seem to him "the most glorious pictures of the sea ever painted," and he adds:

"The finest Dutch pictures of this kind, with all their admirable qualities, do not seem ever to get beyond a certain prosaic outlook. This matter-of-fact effect is enhanced by—if it is not altogether due to it—the ruthless display the artists make of their special



Pony and Wheelbarrow, from A. J. Finberg's "Turner's Sketches and Drawings."

knowledge of the construction and rigging of their vessels. I believe Turner's knowledge of this kind was almost as exhaustive as theirs, but whether as full or more limited, he made a better use of what he did know. His objects are never there simply for themselves. They are always subordinated to a genuinely imaginative conception. His pictures, therefore, are not the work of a man with a professional speciality. They are real epics of the sea. From their own imaginative point of view their workmanship is almost perfect. Their style is sonorous and weighty. They are as solemn and majestic in conception as they are manly in feeling. They have something of that "beauty which," as Milton sings, "hath terror in it." Together they move in perfect phalanx to the Dorlan mood—the noblest sequence of poems ever dedicated to the majesty of the sea.

In the next chapter, which deals with that phase of Turner's work characterized as "Simple Nature," we find both Turner and his critic in full revolt against the realistic point of view in art. Turner's now free and complete subordination of sensuous facts to the "emotional and idealistic whole which constitutes the very being of the work of art, and which alone gives it value," makes it necessary for an art critic not only to avoid regarding the pictures of this period as literal imitations of actual scenes, judging them accordingly, but to attempt to grasp "by thought the full and perfect significance of each work," to distinguish the contents of the mood they induce, and getting clear of the materialism which clings to the letter, to feel the power behind the facts.

Passing over the chapter dedicated to the Liber Stadorum, which perhaps is the least interesting in the book, to that entitled "The Splendor of Success," we find this splendor already associated with the germs of decay. The gradual encroachment of the sensuous elements in Turner's art upon the spiritual elements, his increasing interest in the material beauties evoked by his matchless technique, already had manifested itself in works empty of significance, but after 1813 these works became the rule instead of the exception, and his increasing popularity with middle class buyers is curiously given as one reason for his yielding to his love of purely visual beauty clothing an empty thought. Mr. Finberg cleverly compares this later attitude of mind with that of the French symbolists in whose poetry "the poverty of thought is used as a foil to throw the greatest possible emphasis on the beauty of sounds and the faint suggestions of individual words." In this way "the attenuation of significance in Turner's later works throws into startling prominence all the innate and intrinsic splendors of the painter's palette."

This, of course, leads to the end, and we see Turner at seventy dreaming only confused and vague dreams, but turning them into the painter's language with the same incomparable skill of hand that he exercised upon the nobler conceptions of his middle years. "In all this," his critic sadly acknowledges, reviewing his latest works, "in this gradual impoverishment of mind and feeling, it is difficult to discover anything more than the silent and inevitable ravages of old age. But it is not their poverty of content that makes

these later drawings of Turner so remarkable. It is the virile and glorious artistic skill which only flames the brighter amid the decay of all Turner's other faculties. The man was dead before the incomparable master of tone and color was exhausted. It is this curious combination of an unexhausted special aptitude with a moribund mentality that gives this later work of Turner its uniqueness, its lurid and uncanny fascination. In the whole history of pictorial art we have never had before quite the same display of sentience apathy gifted and transfigured by the dying shafts of an incommensurable natural capacity."

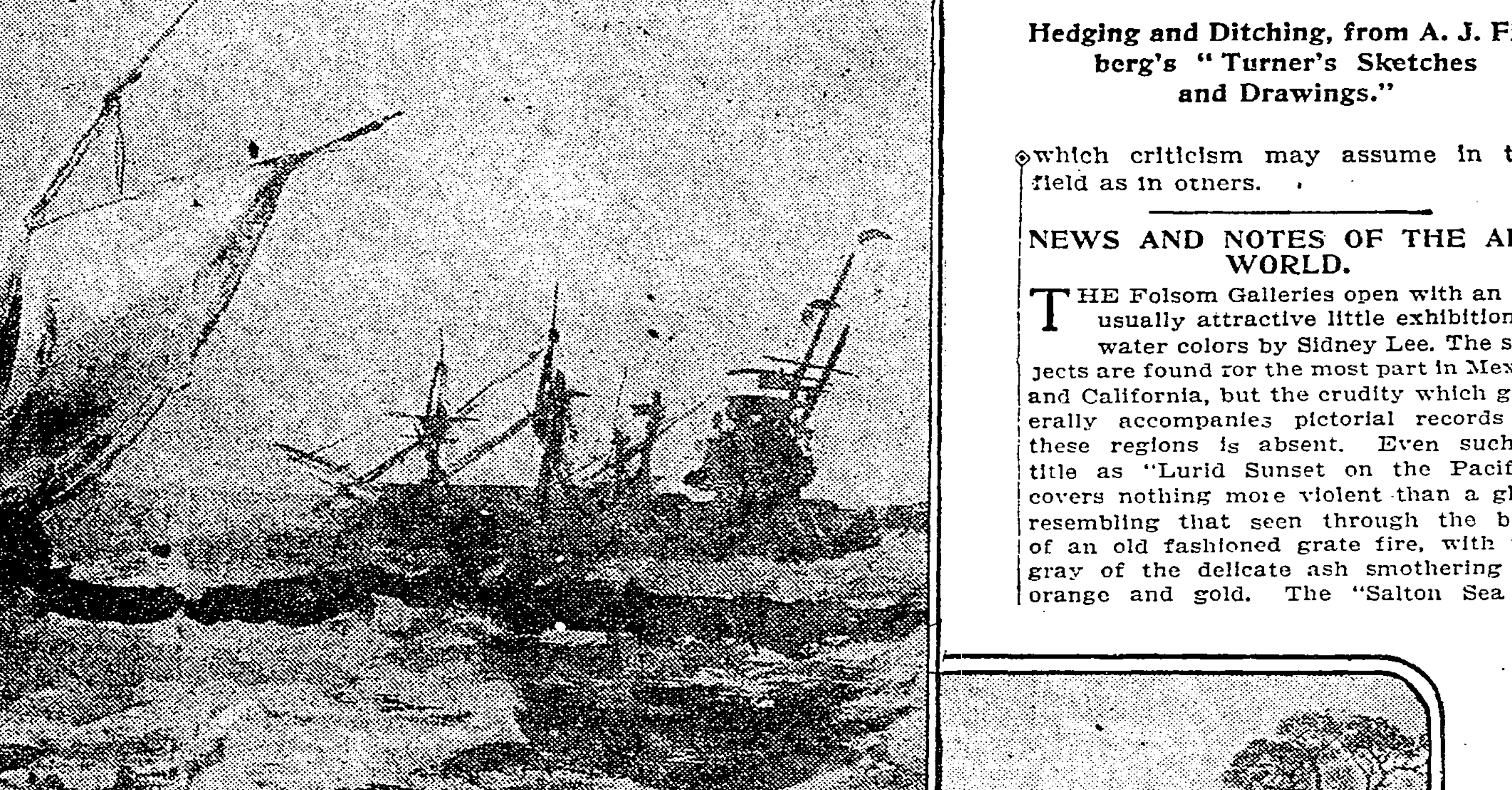
Thus we have a Turner based on study of nature, but as nature providing material for pictures—never studied for herself alone—and upon study of traditional art: more in love with art than with nature; more in love with emotion than with thought; reaching a high ideal in his revelation of what appears to have been a temporary mood of lofty feeling, and falling away from that ideal as the languor of age sapped the mind while leaving the painter's faculty unimpaired.

We have also a theory of art that demands something beyond the representation of nature, however managed, and the aim of which is intellectual satisfaction. An artist may represent nature as some of the pre-Raphaelites did, with a petrified likeness of its immovable features, or he may represent it as the Impressionists do, by trying to eliminate from the picture all subjective coloring; but unless he strives to call up in others the feeling inspired in himself by the scene portrayed, he has stopped short of the art ideal.

This, of course, is a new theory only in its present definition. All recognitions of the painter's art as the same in essence as the other arts employing abstract symbols, point this road to the art critic. Many artists, even those most enlisted on the side of nature as the source from which the painter's symbols must be drawn, are entirely conscious of their function as awakeners of emotion and plan their pictures as a musician plans his symphony or fugue. Nevertheless, in a matter-of-fact age, such as Mr. Finberg has written, using his close and rewarding study of Turner's sketchbooks as the peg on which to hang his conviction that the true art criticism deals with the living function of works of art in connection with their structure, and not, to use Mr. Finberg's phrase, as "the fossil remains or dead bodies of artistic activity," is of quite inestimable value. He awakens the contemporary critic to a sense of his opportunity and the scientific character



Hedging and Ditching, from A. J. Finberg's "Turner's Sketches and Drawings."



Study for the Bridgewater Sea Race, from "Turner's Sketches and Drawings," by A. J. Finberg.



View of a River from a Terrace, from "Turner's Sketches and Drawings," by A. J. Finberg.

Twilight" is a charmingly quiet and luminous bit of interpretation, the clear band of the water lying under a sky of peculiar richness of tone. The studies of Mexican architecture are interesting both as paintings and for the fidelity with which their special characteristics have been observed. One old church, in Moorish style with the exception of a Gothic front, is a marvel of color, the body of the facade being a deep magenta, with a canary-colored doorway enlivened by a band of pure turquoise, with a similar band running around the side walls of the church. The effect of the whole is a rich and low toned harmony. All the paintings are strong in color, and are executed almost entirely in pure wash. Admirably hung against the dull crimson velvet hangings with their smoky shadows, they present an excellent example of the value of accord between pictures and their setting. In an outer room is an oil painting by the same artist of a Mexican type, an elderly grizzled man wrapped in his blanket, which, in spite of the picturesqueness of the subject, has an air of direct and truth-telling portraiture, difficult to find in pictures of this inventively romantic region where medieval Spain still lingers.

One of the veterans among the group of picture sellers who once upon a time disposed of much excellent art in the downtown salesroom remembers New York when only one private gallery of importance had been achieved here. "That was the gallery belonging to Julia Ward Howe's father," he says, "and once when I was sent there with a note for one of the young ladies—I couldn't have been more than 16 or 17 years old—I was asked into the gallery to look at the pictures, and I saw there Cole's 'Voyage of Life,' 'Youth,' 'Manhood,' 'Old Age,' you know, a very popular work which has been much engraved."

The Connecticut Academy of the Fine Arts announces an exhibition to be held in the Annex of the Wadsworth Athenaeum at Hartford, Conn., from Nov. 21 until Dec. 4, inclusive. All work sent to the exhibition must be delivered to Wiley & Son, agents, 732 Main Street, on or before Nov. 14, and all carriage, boxing, and other charges are to be borne by the sender. The jury are Robert E. Brantice, Charles Noel Flagg, Daniel F. Wentworth, H. Siddons Mowbray, John P. Veir, Thomas Brabazon, George Keller, Ruel C. Tuttle, Henry C. White, Charles Foster, and Guy C. Wiggins.

The Corcoran Gallery of Art at Washington announces its third biennial exhibition, which will open to the public on Dec. 13, 1910, and close on Jan. 22, 1911. The exhibition will be confined to original oil paintings by living American artists, not before publicly exhibited in Washington. Cards of entry should be received not later than Nov. 8. The last day for receiving work at agencies in other cities is Nov. 15. The last day for receiving

work at the Corcoran Gallery is Thursday, Nov. 24, until 4 P. M. The Corcoran prizes are four in number; the first, of \$2,000, is accompanied by the Corcoran Gold Medal; the second, of \$1,500, is accompanied by the Corcoran Silver Medal; the third, of \$1,000, is accompanied by the Corcoran Bronze Medal, and the fourth, of \$500, by honorable mention. The two exhibitions already held in this gallery were attended by more than 100,000 persons. Forty-seven pictures were sold, aggregating over \$97,000, twenty-one of which were purchased for the permanent collection of the gallery.

On exhibition at the Scott & Fowles Gallery is a very fine Jan Steen, one of his series of invalids, with imaginary ailments and exquisite faces, languishing in the loveliest of silken jackets. This particular invalid is of quite surpassing beauty, the sweet half-tone of the face rising above the richly modeled throat; the light that strikes full on the deep chest and plays in capricious gleams over the lustrous surface of the gray jacket, the invasion of this gray into the red of the tablecloth and the shadows of the skirt, and the flickering retaliation of these reds in the jacket's gray; the ponderous bulk of the great green curtained bed keeping its place sedately in the background, a huge thing, yet taking a little room in the composition; the handsome pattern of the gold frame on the wall, and the natural gestures form a combination that has few parallels in Steen's art: an art extraordinarily rich in vitality and brilliant in execution when the painter was at the height of his powers.

Kennedy & Co. have opened an exhibition of the etchings of the late Seymour Haden, which will remain open until Nov. 19. The collection includes a hundred and twenty-five prints, with a number of rarities and many particularly fine impressions. Haden was at his best where he used an open line and did not try to get too much into his composition. The "Encombe Woods" with its sociable donkeys, the "Village Ford" with its inquiring cow, and the fine "Windmill Hill" are characteristic examples of the artist's better work. "The Mouth of a Brook," which is present in one of only four impressions of a special state, is almost pre-Raphaelite in its minute portrayal of grasses and twigs on the banks of the stream; "Inside the Cork Convent, Clitra," with its sharply defined little figure, is a quite successful attempt with a subject a little out of the line of Haden's usual interests. "Thomas Haden of Derby," a big, insignificant figure, is one of the unsuccessful plates; "The Cabin," near Tipperary, is a charming bit of Irish scenery, and throughout the whole collection, which is a wonderfully full representation of the artist's work, we constantly come upon examples that make us ask ourselves why Haden did not ever become a really great etcher.