CHAPTER X.

ENTERS THE STUDIO OF CHANTREY — NOTICE OF CHANTREY — CUNNINGHAM'S RESPONSIBILITIES IN THE STUDIO—RECIPROCAL ADVANTAGES—DESCRIPTION OF CUNNINGHAM—CONTRIBUTES TO VARIOUS MAGAZINES—LETTER TO MR. JAMES M'GHIE—LETTER TO HIS BROTHER JAMES.

AFTER Cunningham had been a short time in London, and had finished the "Remains of Nithsdale and Galloway Song," Mr. Cromek introduced him to a rising young sculptor, Francis Chantrey, as a young man of very considerable literary genius and artistic ability. The sculptor, however, did not require an assistant at that time; he was as yet unknown to fame, and had barely work sufficient for himself alone, but he promised to keep the young stranger in view should times improve. In the course of three or four years times did improve, and Cunningham was not forgotten. When from indifferent health, caused by late and long hours, he quitted the reporters' gallery, Bubb, his former master, was in ecstacy at the prospect of again receiving him into his studio, and ran to Chantrey intimating the likelihood of good fortune by his return; but Chantrey, having improved in business, engaged Cunningham as his assistant, greatly to the chagrin and disappointment of Bubb. Of course ill-feeling was

engendered on the part of the disappointed sculptor towards the other two parties, but they judiciously took no notice of it, and in course of time it died away. Cunningham was now permanently established, and his fears for the future were considerably done away. Though his wages at first were comparatively small for the duties he undertook, yet they were afterwards increased, and he had ample leisure for gratifying his literary taste, and adding to his resources by the fruits of his pen.

Some little account of Francis Chantrey may be interesting to the reader, as he and the subject of our memoir were so long and intimately associated together, death alone causing the separation. He rose from almost the humblest origin to the pinnacle of artistic fame. He was born at Norton in 1782, and was, therefore, only some sixteen months older than his future coadjutor, Allan Cunningham. Though his father rented a small piece of land, yet it could scarcely be called a farm, and the boy Francis carried sand from it on a donkey's back, and sold it in the town of Sheffield, riding home in one of the empty creels. His father having died while he was young, his education, though attended to by the widowed mother, was very desultory, and, as might be expected, not very satisfactory, seeing that he was oftener engaged in field operations than in school, and what he learned the one day was forgotten when he returned again. Like some others who rose to eminence in science or art, he gave early indication of his future greatness by showing a decided taste for modelling in common clay whatever

objects came before him; and it is said that on great occasions he assisted his aunt, an aristocratic housekeeper, by forming figures out of the dough with which to ornament the pastry for the table.

When he had attained the age of seventeen, he took it into his head that he would enter the legal profession, and was desirous to become an apprentice under a certain Sheffield solicitor. On the day fixed for his introduction to this gentleman, in his eagerness he was in town an hour too soon, and while he awaited the arrival of his friends who were to accompany him to the office, he sauntered through the streets, gazing at all and sundry, as a country lad would do. He was arrested by some figures he saw in the window of a carver and gilder named Ramsay, a Scotchman by birth. His early taste at once sprang up anew, his former resolution was entirely given up, and when his friends arrived, to their great astonishment, he intimated that a "change had come o'er the spirit of his dream," and that he desired to be apprenticed with Ramsay instead. In order to gratify his wishes this was accordingly done, and he immediately entered upon the trade of an incipient carver and gilder. Ramsay's business was not flourishing, as work was not plentiful, and, consequently, the hours of labour were limited. This was all the better for the new apprentice, who employed his leisure time in gratifying his favourite taste for modelling and drawing. Unaccountable as it may seem, when his master discovered what his private labours were, instead of encouraging him in the exercise of his taste, seeing that it did not interfere with his legitimate duties, he

ordered all his figures to be destroyed, and the making of them discontinued! The modelling, however, was still carried on, the place of operation being transferred from the workshop to his own lodgings, and there, night after night, beyond the latest hour, he wrought away with none to disturb him in his artistic amusement. He felt anything but comfortable in this situation, with such a prohibition hanging over his head, and after enduring it for three years, he bought up the remaining portion of his indenture, and the two separated with mutual satisfaction.

He now went up to London and began operations there as a sculptor; but not succeeding up to his expectations, he set out on a course of travel through Ireland and Scotland, but was stricken down with a dangerous fever in Dublin, from which he did not entirely recover for several months. When his health was completely restored he returned to London in the autumn of the following year, where he began his studies anew, and carried them on with an ardour, a perseverance, and success which commanded public acknowledgment, though not without envy and jealousy on the part of some in the same profession; and after a considerable time, notwithstanding this party feeling, he was raised to the high honour of a Royal Academician, after first having been made a member of the Royal Society, and also a member of the Society of Antiquaries. The crowning honour of all, however, was receiving the honour of knighthood from his Sovereign.

The first bust which he contributed to the Exhibition of the Royal Academy was one of Raphael Smith, an

engraver, and a man of no ordinary talent, who had proved a kind friend, and given him good advice before he came to London, greatly encouraging him in the pursuit of excellence in the art. It was considered so good that the great Nollekens, who was far beyond rival competition, and died leaving £200,000 derived from bust making, caused one of his own works to be removed that Chantrey's might take its place, saying, "It's all there; he'll do it; it's in him." Chantrey had also a talent for painting, and many of his performances in this line, which are said to be of very great merit, still remain. This acquisition, however, nearly proved fatal to his success on a very important occasion. When the City of London resolved to erect a statue of George III., designs were called for, and several candidates sent in drawings, of whom Chantrey was one. His design was considered preferable to the others, but one of the Common Council objected, on the ground that the successful artist was a painter, and consequently could not be considered qualified for the execution of a work in sculpture. Sir William Curtis, who presided, said, "You hear this, young man, what say you—are you a painter or a sculptor?" "I live by sculpture," Chantrey replied, and, thereupon, the work was entrusted to his execution.

His forte was in bust sculpture, though in full length figures he was also highly successful. He cared not for the higher flights of the art, the allegorical and ideal, but contented himself with taking from nature or the life. This reminds us of an expression of a late artist in Dumfries, John Maxwell, whom Thomas Aird characterized as "the best likeness-taker on earth," on our

asking him why he did not attempt a fancy picture, "My faith," he said, "I have enough ado to paint what I see." As illustrative of this distaste of the ideal, Cunningham once requested Chantrey to look at a painting done by a young artist, when he inquired, "What is the subject?" "Adam," was the reply. "Have you seen it?" "Yes." "And do you think it like him?" with which sarcastic hit the matter dropped without any opinion being given.

Cunningham engaged with Chantrey as superintendent of the works, but in his new position he was more than this. He acted also as secretary and amanuensis, while, from his connection with the Press, he had the most favourable opportunities, and he embraced them, of bringing his master's productions into public notice. He conducted all the correspondence, for Chantrey himself had neither the inclination nor the ability to do so, as may be inferred from the character of his education while a youth. An anecdote of this has been told us by Cunningham's sister, with regard to the Washington Statue, which went from Chantrey's studio. A number of American students in London one evening over their wine, while discussing the merits of the work, adverted to the beauty of the penmanship in the correspondence, and the elegant style of the composition. Some doubted that the sculptor had had anything to do with it, and others took the opposite side. A keen controversy ensued, and a heavy bet was laid on the subject. To settle the affair, a deputation of their number immediately started for the studio to ascertain the truth, and finding Cunningham present, they told him the object of their

errand, who at once admitted that he himself was the author of the correspondence, verifying the fact by showing them a specimen of his handwriting in the letter books of the office.

He was also helpful to Chantrey in another way, by making suggestions which only a poet could, with regard to certain details of the figures. One of Chantrey's masterpieces of sculpture is that of the two Sleeping Children in Lichfield Cathedral. The two sisters are represented asleep in each others arms, the younger with a bunch of new plucked snow-drops in her hand, a sight which has brought the tears over many a cheek while contemplating this emblem of infant innocence. The design of the group was made by Stothard, the eminent London artist, but the bunch of snow-drops which imparts such a charm, was inserted at the suggestion of Cunningham. Chantrey made the model in clay, and a Frenchman named Legee, in his employment, carved it in marble. This was Chantrey's mode of operation, only to take the model in clay, and leave the rest to his workmen, under the superintendence of Cunningham, of course subject to his own inspection as the finishing touches approached. After the clay model was finished, which was generally done at one performance, a cast was taken in plaster of Paris, from which the marble or bronze bust was copied, and with which it was always minutely compared. Cunningham's position, therefore, was one of very great responsibility, requiring both taste and discernment, in addition to the care necessary for a faithful and safe completion of the work. How efficiently he discharged the duty may be inferred from the

fact that he held the situation for twenty-eight years, when death called him away. Chantrey had the greatest affection for him, and always regarded him as a bosom friend. When he was about to build his mausoleum, some time before his death, that it might be ready when the occasion required, he offered to enclose additional ground for the remains of his friend also, that they might lie together. "No, no," said Cunningham, "I wont be built over, but be buried where the daisies will grow upon my grave, and the lark sing above my head." But he was "built over" after all.

But Cunningham's responsibilities were even of a weightier character than we have described, although they were weighty enough. Under the eye of the master the burden of care and anxiety is considerably lightened, for attention can be immediately called should difficulty arise, and counsel be received; but when he is far away, self-reliance must then be depended upon, whatever may be the result. Chantrey was in the habit of going away for several months every year, visiting Paris, Rome, Venice, and Florence, as his taste inclined him, during which absence Cunningham was left entirely in charge, to receive orders, answer inquiries, receive visitors, and see properly and faithfully executed the works in operation. In short, he was Chantrey's second self, and what he undertook, or performed in the absence, was cordially approved of on the return. Never were master and servant more united or confident in one another.

If Chantrey received advantage from his connection with Cunningham, as his secretary and superintendent, Cunningham also received advantage from Chantrey, so

that the benefit was reciprocal. Apart from pecuniary remuneration, he was thereby introduced into a class of society which was otherwise beyond his reach, for here he met with the titled and the great who visited the studio, to whom he descanted in the most fascinating manner on the merits of several works of art which they examined and admired. In short, he became a favourite, and almost a familiar, with all, although his good sense and innate modesty preserved him from using too much freedom on that account. We know that by this means he was invited and welcomed into the families of many distinguished personages, whose kindness and hospitality he was ever ready to acknowledge, and which he reciprocated with those who either offered him a visit, or whom he could judiciously invite under his roof, and partake at his board. We are naturally desirous to know what was his appearance and bearing on his introduction to the literary and other magnates of the great city. Mrs. S. C. Hall, in one of her admirable and graphic sketches, thus describes him:—

"I can clearly recall the first interview I had with him. It was before I had been much in literary society, and when I was but little acquainted with those whose works had found places in my heart. I remember how my cheek flushed, and how pleased and proud I was of the few words of praise he gave to one of the first efforts of my pen. He was then a stout man, somewhat high-shouldered, broad-chested, and altogether strongly proportioned; his head was firm and erect, his mouth close, yet full, the lips large, his nose thick and broad, his eyes of intense darkness (I could

never define their colour), beneath shaggy and flexible eyebrows, and were, I think, as powerful, yet as soft and winning, as any eyes I ever saw. His brow was expansive, indicating, by its breadth, not only imagination and observation, but, by its height, the veneration and benevolence so conspicuous in his character. His accent was strongly Scotch, and when he warmed into a subject, he expressed himself with eloquence and feeling; but generally his manner was quiet and reserved—quiet more from a habit of observing than from a dislike to conversation. . . . In after years, when it was my privilege to meet him frequently, it was a pleasure to note the respect he commanded from all who were distinguished in Art and in Letters. He had a sovereign contempt for anything that approached affectation —literary affectation especially; and certainly lashed it, even in society, by words and looks of contempt that could not be easily forgotten. 'Wherever,' I have heard him say, 'there is nature, wherever a person is not ashamed to show a heart, there is the germ of excellence. I love nature!' His dark eyes would often glisten over a child or a flower; and a ballad, one of the songs of his native land, would move him to tears (I have seen it do so more than once), that is to say, if it were sung 'acording to nature,' with no extra 'flourish,' no encumbering drapery of form to disturb the 'natural' melody."

This description is endorsed by Mr. S. C. Hall himself in the following tribute to his memory, after the remains of his friend had been laid in the dust:—

"Allan, as I have said, was a man of stalwart form; it was well knit, and, apparently, the health that had been garnered in childhood and in youth was his blessing when in

manhood. Certainly, to all outward seeming, he had ample security for a long life. His brow was large and lofty; his face of the Scottish type—high cheek-bones and well rounded; his mouth flexible and expressive, yet indicative of strong resolution; his eyes were likened, by those who knew both persons, to those of Burns, and no doubt they were so; they were deeply seated, and almost black, surrounded by a dark rim, and shadowed by somewhat heavy dark eyebrows. His manners conveyed conviction of sincerity; they were not refined, neither were they rugged, and the very opposite of coarse. It was plain that for all his advantages he was indebted to nature, for although he mixed much in what is called 'polite society,' and was a gentleman whose companionship was courted by the highest—statesmen and peers—up to the last he had 'a smack of the heather.'

"Nothing seemed to irritate him so much as affectation, either with pen or pencil, or in word, or look, or manner. I have seen him exasperated by a lisp in a woman, and by a mincing gait in a man. Any pretence to be what was not, made him, so to say, furious. I would close this memoir so as, I think, may best convey an idea of his peculiar character and worth, by quoting a favourite phrase of his own—

'Love him, for he loved Nature.'"

From these descriptions of candid and intimate friends, in which prominence is given to his love of artless simplicity, and his great dislike to all kinds of affectation, one sees the strong link of connection which bound Chantrey and him so closely together. They were both lovers of what was true, natural, and unaffected, and despised what was artificial, constrained, or assumed.

Their minds in this, as in many other respects, were congenial, so that mutual esteem and affection could not fail to be the result.

Being now in a measure secured against anxiety for family comfort, should health and strength be continued, he set himself resolutely down in the evenings by his "ain fireside," and wielded the pen with a will which was not to be resisted. He contributed prose articles of various kinds to several magazines, and wrote a series of tales, chiefly illustrative of Scottish character, mostly connected with his own native Nithsdale, which had to appear month by month when begun, thus entailing an incessant drudgery upon the pen as well as the brain. The Muse, however, was not altogether willing to be set aside by this description of work, but he was enabled to gratify her longings in this respect by inserting in his prose compositions occasional flights she made, thus to prevent her wing from becoming stiffened, and her fancy dulled. So his prose tales are interspersed with ballads, and songs, and snatches of poems, which give a lightsomeness to the reader, and impart variety to the theme. But, besides this, he is preparing works of a higher style and aim, which are not permitted to see the light in monthly piecemeals, but are reserved in secret till they are ready to issue forth to the public as a compact whole, then to stand or fall by their own merits or demerits, to receive praise or censure, without having the benefit of monthly criticism and suggestion.

Though always thus engaged, either in the studio by day or the study by night, he never forgot his native district, and the many friends he had there left behind.

Every now and again, however, he learned directly or indirectly that they were becoming fewer, which made him cling the more closely to those who remained. One of his special friends, for whom he had the deepest regard, was Mr. James M'Ghie of Quarrelwood, the father of his "trusty fier" George, in whose household he had spent many a joyous evening. The following letter sent to this worthy is interesting and amusing:—

"Eccleston Street, Pimlico, 28th Jan., 1817.

"Dear James,—The warlike offspring of auld minstrel Hugh has undertaken to carry this to your fireside, and along with it my warmest hopes that it continues to be gladdened with the same kindness of heart, social mirth, and hospitality, for which it claims a kind place in my early remembrance. I recognized the kenspeckle aspect of a Paisley whenever Hugh presented his front at my door, and immediately the hours when our feet made the Kirkmahoe barn-roofs wag to the remotest rafter, to the compound melody of auld Hugh's fiddle, came upon my mind, and I could scarcely restrain my feet from making a movement similar to the first step in Shan Trews.

"Thoughts which gave me pleasure might well recall your family and fireside to my mind, which I must always associate with all that gave delight to my youthful days, and I hope the hour is not remote when I may open the door latch and step ben among you all with a patriarchal 'Peace be here,' and take my seat with the same consciousness of a soul-warm welcome as if I had not been absent an hour. How are George, and James, and Rachel, and how is Katy? She would never, you know, tolerate me to call her Mrs. M'Ghie. I wish I were beside her to have one of her

laughs and shakes by the hand; and, man, how are you yourself, my dear and worthy friend? May the cloven foot of Envy never touch one of your treddles, nor Trouble draw her black hand across the white warp and weft of your existence.

"I understand that many of the old faces that gladdened the social circles in my native place have passed into the consecrated earth; that Hugh Paisley is now listening to melody superior even to his own, and that James Macrabin has ceased to pickle in saltpetre the decaying bodies of his neighbours, or admonish the easy morality of honest Thomas M'Ghie with the terrors of his gird rung.

"Do Mirth and the Muses continue to haunt the groves and streams of Quarrelwood, and do you, now and then, hang the chastening rod of poetic sarcasm over the vices and follies of the proud and the titled around you? I wish I could tell you good tidings of myself, but I have nothing better to tell you than that I am toiling eidently for 'saps o' cream' to three boy bairns, and coats of callimanco to my wife. I preserve a decent silence in verse and prose, and I believe some of my best friends think I have '*steeked my gab for ever.*' Believe not one word of it. I will come out among them all some morning like a trumpet sounding in a lonely glen.

"I wished to introduce my wife to you and Katy in a long description, but Jean declares she is perfectly well acquainted with you all, and that the manner in which I have so often talked to her of you both has done as much as half a century's friendship of visits given and received. Give my kind respects to George and James and Rachel, and especially to Katy, and my wife desires the same from her to you all.

"I hope you will all be as much delighted with our towns-man Hugh as I have been; he possesses all the manners of a

gentleman, with a mind keen and inquiring, and stocked with useful knowledge, and he relates his adventures in the perils of war with the spirit, the conciseness, and elegance of a historian. Now, I entreat you not to wait till you find a messenger to convey the answer which I know your kindness will dictate to this; write by the post-office whenever your inclination stirs you. With the kindest wishes for your welfare, I remain, dear James,

"Your most faithful friend,

"ALLAN CUNNINGHAM.

"Mr. James M'Ghie,
"Quarrelwood, Kirkmahoe."

A few months afterwards he sent the following letter to his brother James:—

"London, 24th August, 1817.

"My dear James,—I have received both your kind and brotherly letters, and I assure you when my indolence interrupts our correspondence, I deprive myself of one of the chief comforts of existence. It gives me unmingled satisfaction to find that you have plenty of work, and that your future affairs promise to be so prosperous. It will increase that delight much if circumstances enable us to unite our hearts and hands in one pursuit, and at present I cannot contemplate any situation so gratifying to my feelings, so consoling to my best affections, as that of returning to my native land, with the prospect of work before me, to awaken the echoes of gray cairns of Nithsdale and Annandale once more with the clank of our whinstone hammers. In the meantime I enjoy good health, plenty of work and its produce, and I might be happy, if a man may be happy who stoops himself in the command of others, whose genius he finds to

be that of the Roman rebuked by his own (slave?), and who feels more pleasure in being the chief of a village than the first courtier of a palace.

"I have commenced a search for the book you mentioned, and I despair not of finding it soon. Books of songs are what you must want much, and I think I will fall in with some esteemed works of that kind during the course of the year, which I will treasure past me, and profit by their knowledge, and bring them with me if fortune favours us. I think you act prudently in maintaining the good graces of the Factor, and, indeed, one ought to do all he can to have the good word of every one, for the meanest of mankind may sow abundance of mischief. During the next week I depart for Lichfield to put up two marble monuments. I will be a week away; at my return I will expect another letter from you.

"I am much amused with the manner you extracted payment from ——, and I certainly felt disappointed in the conduct of ——, whom I reckoned an upright, honourable man; but bad times and ruin in trades bring the villainous part of man's character into action, and show how much of the fiend remains unsubdued by religion and virtue. The death and removal of so many masons from Dumfries certainly opens a fair path for adventure, for I scarcely know a single person whose talents one would have to dread among all those who remain. A step so decisive of one's future fate must be taken prudently, and pursued with industry.

"We are on the point of going into our new house, and it really seems a place calculated to give many happy days, and comforts to human life, but I hope my destiny is yet of a brighter hue.

"This is a period of great poetical dulness with me; the distractions of my place overwhelm all poetical broodings,

and the agitated current of business bears down my resolves like a flood. But winter is coming, and I have tasked myself to collect, collate, and correct my songs, which are neither numerous nor excellent, and dress up my little poems, among which the 'Bard's Winter Night,' must not be forgotten. Besides all this, I have covenanted with myself to rough-hew my tragedy, balance all its parts, portion out its actions, and make it ready for the finishing touches. These are tasks which will require as much resolution and leisure as I will be able to muster. Of Geraldine I have not heard one word for a twelvemonth, except by verbal report, and I was much surprised at your mentioning its being in the hands of a publisher, which I hope is incorrect, for I would look at a work where I was conscious of its incorrectness with horror. I should like much to have it returned, for I meditate great improvements. I am perfectly conscious of the progressive state of my judgment, and though I do not think my poetical powers have received any reinforcement of late, yet I can wield them with much more certainty of effect than formerly, and I don't think I alter a single line without improving it.

"I am concerned at Mr. Hogg's losses. His genius may easily repair such disasters as those you mention; besides, the farm he holds on so torch-like a tenure might keep him above the absolute pressure of want. Considering these circumstances, I was concerned to see an advertisement of his poem in the Dumfries newspaper, which seemed penned in rather a supplicating tone. I hope it was the well-meant work of the good-hearted editor.

"I have enclosed you a sheetful of extracts from a ballad called *Lord Percy's Mantle*, founded on the ballad of *Chevy Chase.* Lord Douglas hastens to encounter Lord Percy, his rival in fame, and his lady, disguising herself like a page,

accompanied by the family bard, follows and awaits the closing of the armies from the summit of a hill on the opposite side of the stream of Teviot. I can only extract what will give you some idea of the manner in which it is written, without unravelling the plan, or explaining the catastrophe.

"My wife joins me in love to you and our sister, and a' the lave. We hope to see her next year.—I remain, dear James, yours faithfully and affectionately,

"ALLAN CUNNINGHAM.

"Mr. Cunningham,
"Hoddam Cross, Ecclefechan."

We are now about to enter upon another period of his literary career, which has been foreshadowed in the foregoing letter to his brother, in which work after work will be published with amazing rapidity, filling one with astonishment, how time could have sufficed, and energy sustained, the mental strain and manual labour necessary for their production. But if evidence were required to illustrate the truth of the adage, "Where there is a will there is a way," it is to be found in the doings of Allan Cunningham.