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WILLIAM CRUIKSHANK, R.C.A.

by G. A. Reid

William Cruikshank was born at Broughty, Ferry, Scotland, in 1848, and came to Canada in 1857. He returned to Edinburgh and studied at the Royal Scottish Academy, afterwards in the Royal Academy, London, and at the Ateteer Yvon, Paris. His admission to the Royal Academy School was secured by drawings made under Sir Noel Paton in the Edinburgh Academy, giving him a seven years' studentship. While he worked in the Royal Academy School only a part of the time of his studentship, he carried with him throughout his life the admission "Disk" of the Academy student.

While in London the young Cruikshank exhibited his first paintings in the Royal Academy and the Dudley Gallery, but his chosen line of work was in illustration in which direction he had a distinguished career. On coming back to his adopted country he worked for a time in New York, and is credited with having introduced pen drawing with broad lines in the United States and having established a nucleus around which the Art Students League grew.

On coming to Canada in the early 80's he settled in Toronto where he had a studio until about two years before he died. As a Canadian Artist he rose to a first place, wielding a strong influence in the various sides of his genius. On opening his studio in Toronto he was immediately called upon to undertake important work. His illustrative talent was recognized by the Ontario Government by being appointed to illustrate a series of school books, and his powers as a draughtsman brought him the appointment as instructor in the Ontario School of Art, a position held from about 1882 to 1920, having continued with the Ontario College of Art when the School was reorganized in 1912.

In the foregoing connection Cruikshank's influence became far reaching and nearly every young art worker of his time in Ontario acknowledges him as his master. He regarded drawing from the antique east as highly important, being a school of discipline affording the art student accuracy, knowledge of construction and close observation. His power of terse expression combined with his wide knowledge of world art made him essentially a teacher.

Cruikshank is well known by his pictures of Canadian life, both in his illustrations in black and white, and by his paintings. Two important works in the National Gallery are "Breaking The Road" and "The Sand Pit". Other works are "Hauling the Mast", "Gathering Seaweed" and "Ploughing Lower Canada". The latter received a medal at the Pan American Exposition, Buffalo. He painted some portraits, nearly always of chosen subjects or friends, and scarcely ever executed commissions. He never accepted office in any of the Art Societies, but he was a member for a time of the Ontario Society of Artists and in 1894 was elected a full member of the Royal Canadian Academy.

Of a philosophic turn of mind Cruikshank had a hatred of sham and pretense, and with a sharp tongue his sarcasms were well known, but he made many close friendships in all classes in which he moved, and for many years was the leading figure in the Toronto Art Students' League. He had a keen sharp eye and wore a full, dark beard. He never married, and while he did not live the life of a recluse, he lived alone, and was generally accessible to his friends only.

After partial recovery from a serious illness he moved from Toronto to Kansas City to live with his sister, and died there in 1922.

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G.A.R.