

JOHN L. TUPPER, TO 1863; "KING OF THE CADAVERALS"

John Lucas Tupper was born at Stamford Hill, Middlesex, London in or about 1824.¹ His father, George Frederic Tupper, was a lithographic draughtsman, stationer, and printer. Two of John's brothers, George and Alexander, became partners in their father's printing firm and it was they who, in 1849, undertook the printing of The Germ. Not much is known about Tupper's early years. Our only source of information is his "Extracts from the Diary of an Artist" (apparently written between 1836 and 1841), published in successive issues (1855-1857) of The Crayon.² What might appear as juvenile trivialities in the first reading eventually strike us as being of considerable consequence in his development and choice of a profession.

Tupper began by modelling in clay, copying from nature and then from prints. He progressed from one tutor to another, but he was so dissatisfied with their notions of art and its execution that he was forced to work on his own. A little before he was fifteen, Tupper enrolled at the British Museum. For the next three years he devoted himself to Greek and Roman sculpture, and particularly to modelling, drawing and studying anatomy. He regarded anatomy and perspective as the grammar of art. On July 17, 1838, Tupper was admitted as a probationer at the Royal Academy for three months, during which period he worked in the Antique School. On December 8, 1838³ he became a student at the Royal Academy. His spirit chafed when he realized that even as a full-fledged student he was expected merely to copy ancient statues and casts before being promoted to drawing from living models in the Life School. By the age of eighteen, Tupper had mastered the mechanics of art and was now seeking a path away from the insipid conventionality of the Royal Academy. Nor was he alone. Indeed, the time had come for reviewing existing formulas in painting; and the Academy became the target for attack from various quarters.

In his Academy classes, Tupper met William Holman Hunt and F. G. Stephens.⁴ Through Hunt, he established close contact with Dante Gabriel and William Michael Rossetti and with Thomas Woolner. To William Michael Rossetti we are indebted for accounts of this period in Tupper's life. In Reminiscences, William Michael describes Tupper as "a meagre young man, hardly up to middle height, with a pale visage, abundant dark hair, vivid dark eyes, and very mobile eyebrows; his play of feature in talking was unusual. He was not handsome, but got wonderfully improved and not a little picturesque by growing, as he was approaching middle age, a very copious beard."⁵ In his preface to Tupper's poems (published post-