WHEN Girtin and Turner enfranchised the art of English water-colour they set it free from its humble apprenticeship to the business of topographical engraving, and enabled it to find stimulus and independence amid the mysteries of external nature. It then became a not unworthy rival of oil-painting. The statement of this fact is not intended to convey any disparagement of the work done by Turner and his fellows in the neutral-tinted manner which the engravers found most useful for translation into tones of black and white. It is indeed customary to write of that tinted manner in a strain of apology, though Turner owed to it many qualities both of brush-work and of draughtsmanship. His thorough training in the use of grey tints taught him to handle his brush with ease, and to fix his whole attention upon the actual drawing of the thing before him, undisturbed by those difficulties which would have been forced upon him by an attempt to imitate with fine precision all the combinations of tone and colour presented by a series of objects. The results, in the strong young hands of Turner, were often so restful and so charming that they seemed beyond criticism, like the simple ballads of a song-loving people. Even to-day, after more than a hundred years of Time’s ill-usage, the best of them are among the kindest friends that a collector can gather around him. Friends they really are, because they persuade one to be entirely satisfied with what they have to give. It is not till we come to the style based on Girtin’s and to the work engendered by the first Continental tour that Turner invades criticism like a conqueror. A time of transition now begins, and thenceforward to the final decadence of his genius the history of the master’s water-colour is a glorious thing, in which beauty and blemish are found often side by side. Turner never drifted into a groove of settled excellence, but preferred to attack new dangers in order that he might recreate his art with fresh discoveries. The period of transition marks his growth from a draughtsman in water-colour into a painter in that medium; and the change in question not only closes the first stages of Turner’s progress, but leads the mind onward into the latter-day transformations of his aims. In other words, the emotions called forth by his first acquaintance with the Alps did not pass away all at once, but kept on