

The Examiner.

"THIS IS TRUE LIBERTY, WHEN FREEBORN MEN—HAVING TO ADVISE THE PUBLIC, MAY SPEAK FREE."—EURIPIDES.

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ORIGINAL LITERATURE.

OBSERVATIONS ON PAINTING,

ADDRESSED TO A FRIEND.

NO. II.

Your enquiry gratifies me, by proving that you have not only read, but also considered, my former observations on Painting. You are pleased to compliment the Sketch which I sent you, of my opinions, and require that one or two parts of it be made more distinct. In the first place, however, allow me to remind you of the very superior advantage possessed by Painters, in fully and concisely expressing their meaning; one stroke of the pencil, one application of the brush, and the intention of the Master stands clear, beyond the possibility of being mistaken; but it is only by laborious minuteness of expression that a writer can hope to be so well understood, and even when he has succeeded, his success is but fleeting and transitory; the language in which he may write is constantly undergoing revolution, and the words which he shall have used may alter their signification within the compass of an ordinary lifetime;—not so with Painting: Nature remains unchanged, and he who successfully appeals by his pencil to the best feelings of Humanity, will be understood and admired until this world shall "like the baseless fabric of vision leave not a wreck behind."

You concur, you say, in my opinion as to the general divisions of the Art; but you consider that placing Morland in the second or pleasing class is inconsistent with other parts of my theory: you think that because he has taken his subjects from the Stable, the Homestead, and the Common, he can at best be no more than a judicious imitator. Oblige me by looking again at his performances, and I think you will observe that the Cart Horses, Cattle, and other details are always subservient to the general effect of the picture: a fracture in the paling is certain to appear just in the right place for admitting a stream of light upon Dobbin or his attendant, so as to produce the most agreeable effect; the coats of the Cattle are not rough in the picture merely because they are so in Nature, but as instruments for producing the picturesque in Art. Now here lies the difference between a Painter *par excellence*, and an Imitator; the one employs details to produce certain effects; the other gives a place in his work to whatever he may happen to see before him while sketching. There is certainly a necessity for discrimination in selecting instruments in the rough from Nature, but it does not appear that Morland has in general evinced any want of this discrimination; there is also a great and striking difference between the rural and the vulgar, between simplicity and coarseness; the first is frequently united with the highest refinement, but the last is the sure mark of a mind either uncultivated or vitiated; we can discover nothing of this in Morland; at least not in those works upon which his reputation is principally founded.

I am very partial to the observation of analogies; they tend materially to assist the judgment in forming, as well as the memory in retaining correct ideas; and I now wish to point your attention to that analogy which exists between the arts of Painting and Poetry. I am much pleased to find my opinion supported by Gessner, who united in himself all the qualities which led to excellence both as a Painter and a Poet; writing to a friend, he says, "I must observe, too, that Poetry is the true sister of Painting, and that the artist should not fail to study those delightful works of the Poets, which will improve his taste, refine and enlarge his ideas, and enrich his imagination with a store of the most beautiful imagery; the poet and the painter draw from the same source; both are governed by the same laws; an exquisite sense of the truly beautiful in nature must direct each in the choice of every object and image in-

roduced into his work." Speaking of the Poet Thomson, Gessner proceeds: "I have found in the writings of this great Master, descriptions which might have been copied from the works of the most eminent Painters, and which the artist might with ease transpose again to the canvas. His pictures are not more beautiful than they are various; they are sometimes finished with the pastoral simplicity of Berghem, Potter or Rooss; they sometimes exhibit the grace and amenity of Lorraine, or are characterized by the noble and sublime of Poussin's style, or the wildness and melancholy of Salvator Rosa's."

As further instances, I may observe that the Cartoons of Raffaele evince the same sublime spirit as the Poetry of Milton; the compositions of Claude may well be compared to the imperishable works of Virgil; while propriety and chaste elegance are equally pleasing in a Poussin and a Cæsar. Writing and Painting are, it is true, different languages or modes of expression, but the mind of the master is reflected alike by either. Dr. Young is believed to have been the author of a paper in the Guardian, No. 86, of which we gladly avail ourselves; he says, with great truth, that if we examine the principles and causes of excellence in Poetry, and of different Poets, we shall find that they are the same principles and causes which have produced excellence in Painting, and different degrees of it in different Painters. Homer and Virgil, says Dr. Young, have each given us a description of the Horse in violent or spirited action:

"Freed from his keepers, thus, with broken reins,
The wanton courser prances o'er the plains;
Or in the pride of youth o'erleaps his mounds,
And snuffs the females in forbidden grounds;
Or seeks his watering in the well known flood,
To quench his thirst and cool his fiery blood;
He swims luxuriant in the liquid plain,
And o'er his shoulders flows his waving mane;
He neighs, he snorts, he bears his head on high,
Before his ample chest the frothy waters fly."

POPE'S HOMER.

"The fiery courser, when he hears from far
The sprightly trumpets and the shouts of war,
Pricks up his ears, and trembling with delight,
Shifts pace, and paws, and hopes the promised fight;
On his right shoulder his thick mane reclined
Ruffles at speed and dances in the wind;
His horny hoofs are jetty black and round,
His chin is double; starting with a bound,
He turns the turf, and shakes the solid ground.
Fire from his eyes, clouds from his nostrils flow;
He bears his rider headlong on the foe."

DRYDEN'S VIRGIL.

These descriptions, being composed of external details, such as the eyes, ears, nostrils, mane, and hoofs of the animal, present to the mind the same sort of image as Paul Veronese or Rubens could have presented to the eye in a painting. Let us now turn to the Book of Job, and read that sublime description of the Horse, given in the 39th chapter:

19. Hast thou given the horse strength? hast thou clothed his neck with thunder?
20. Can'st thou make him afraid as a grasshopper? the glory of his nostrils is terrible.
21. He paweth in the valley, and rejoiceth in his strength: he goeth on to meet the armed men.
22. He mocketh at fear, and is not affrighted; neither turneth he back from the sword.
23. The quiver rattleth against him, the glittering spear and the shield.
24. He swalloweth the ground with fierceness and rage: neither believeth he that it is the sound of the trumpet.
25. He saith among the trumpets, Ha, ha; and he smelleth the battle afar off, the thunder of the Captains, and the shouting.

The above extract, under all the disadvantage of appearing in a prose translation, and of being expressed in phraseology peculiar to one part of the world, is yet far more truly poetical than either of the two preceding descriptions; and it has been well observed that this superiority in the sacred poet results from his making

all the beauties of his imagery flow from an inward principle in the creature he describes, and not from external details; he gives us an ideal conception of such spirit and vivacity as no exact and servile description can attain to; thus far Dr. Young. With respect to Homer and Virgil, the writer of the Book of Job stands in the same relation which Raffaele and Michael Angelo bear to the best Venetian and Flemish Painters.

It may appear almost a piece of injustice towards Homer and Virgil that I compare their works with the Sacred Writings, dictated by the inspiration of the Supreme Being; but the comparison certainly affords a striking instance in favour of my assertion, that the ideal beauty essential to the higher walks of Painting is also requisite in those of Poetry: neither is this analogy confined to the higher or ennobling division of Art, for the soft pathos and exquisite harmony of Ovid also characterize Titian; the turgid style and cumbrous ornaments of Statius find a parallel in Rubens; while Juvenal and Dean Swift may confess a formidable rival in Hogarth. In the imitative class, both judicious and servile, numerous parallels occur to me; but in most cases the parties are still living; Bavius and Mævius are soon forgotten when they are no more, and I refrain from making any remarks which might displease some of those who are still amongst us; the past age becomes as it were the property of the present, to criticise at pleasure without bias or partiality; but it is not in our nature to exercise the same cool and dispassionate judgment upon our contemporaries.†

The pursuit of this analogy forms one of the very many considerations which I should think must tend to endear the Art of Painting to all men of enlarged ideas and liberal education. It is for those whom Providence has blessed with competence, to step forward and raise the depressed genius of their country, and to emulate the judicious liberality of a Pericles, a Macænas, a Leo, and a Medici, to whose fostering aid we may justly attribute those unrivalled works of art which graced their several æras, and which our best modern professors have been proud to own as models. The patronage of the fine arts is an employment worthy of the highest rank, the most eminent talents, and the purest patriotism; he who provides his fellow men with even an innocent amusement cannot be said to have lived in vain, much less then can we decry the pursuits of him who is instrumental in elevating the human mind above all gross and vicious objects, and fitting it to enjoy those high and intellectual pleasures which alone are worthy of its

* There is little doubt that Virgil, Silvius Italicus, Lucan, and other Roman Poets, had read the Book of Job, some of their descriptions being mere plagiarisms from it. Take, for instance, the expression, "he swalloweth the ground," and compare it with the two following:

"CARPERE prata fuga."

VIRGIL.

"Campumque volatu
Cum RAPERE, pedum vestigia quæras."

SILVIUS ITALICUS.

† It is, indeed, an invidious task to censure our cotemporaries, but not so to praise living merit, whether in our own or any other nation. The attention of every lover of Art is now directed towards Bavaria—a country which, in the encouragement and cultivation of intellectual enjoyments, very decidedly takes precedence of modern Italy. The Palaces and Public Buildings of Munich are designed by the classic taste of Von Klenze, and ornamented by the magnificent frescoes of Julius Schnou; her gardens, planned by Sckell, are filled with those rare and beautiful plants for which the indefatigable Martins has ransacked the globe; such men as these reflect the truest and highest honour upon the king and the country capable of appreciating them. It is worthy of notice, that the frescoes at the Palace of the King of Bavaria, illustrate in a continued series the great national Legend of Germany, the famous "Nibelungen Lied." Perhaps, when British Artists search the history of their own country, they may find subjects equally worthy of their canvas, and possessing a greater degree of popular interest than can easily be attained by other means.