

The Examiner.

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

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ORIGINAL LITERATURE.

[We are indebted for the following instructive and elegantly-written Essay, to a Gentleman who has but recently come among us, and who unites to a refined taste, a mind evidently not only imbued with a love of the Beautiful in Art, but strengthened and enriched by the graces of Literature. We know of no purpose to which the columns of a weekly journal can be more usefully and pleasingly devoted than to the insertion of such Essays as the one we now present to our readers, which, whilst they disseminate correct principles of Taste in connection with some of the higher and nobler achievements of Genius, not only supply our mind with many a delightful theme for contemplation—increase the number of our ideas—but greatly serve to elevate our moral being.]

OBSERVATIONS ON PAINTING, ADDRESSED TO A FRIEND.

NO. I.

ALTHOUGH the qualities of the mind cannot always be transmitted from one generation to another, I think that the son of a man possessing refined and cultivated taste, has peculiar advantages and opportunities for acquiring the same accomplishment. A decided taste for the Fine Arts has now existed for two generations in your family, and from my knowledge of yourself, I have every reason to hope that it may remain an heirloom with you; believe me, whatever may be your station in life, you can have no possession more gratifying to a cultivated understanding, nor more worthy the attention of a true gentleman. I wish I were capable of saying any thing likely to be of use to you in the formation of this taste, but I hope you will take the will for the deed, and accept the following casual remarks as an earnest of my desire to contribute to your amusement.

It can hardly be necessary to remind you that those departments of Painting which alone entitle it to rank among the Fine Arts, are far removed from the mere imitation of subjects presented to the eye; if such imitation, or rather mimicry, of real objects were the perfection desired, Wax Figures would, as works of art, rank infinitely above the Cartoons of Raffaele; and in like manner the scenes at a theatre would be superior to the best performances of Claude Lorraine. He who would attain eminence as a painter, must possess the mental power of rejecting every thing that is unfit or unsuitable to his proposed effect and end; whether his designs be of the human figure or landscapes, he must be capable of selecting every perfect feature which nature may at distant intervals present, and of combining and embodying those separate features in one great and glorious Idea of Beauty, *to kalon*, which he must constantly endeavour to transmit to the Canvas. This subject has been admirably treated by Gessner, and by Sir Joshua Reynolds in his Discourses, a work which should be in the hands of all amateurs of Painting and lovers of Literature, and with which I doubt not that you are already familiar.

In considering the subject of Painting, we speedily become sensible of the very limited compass of the human mind, which is lost in the region laid open to it: we must of necessity resort to mental arrangement and classification, or all our ideas would be vague and unsatisfactory.

There are various modes of classing or dividing paintings, of which at first sight the most obvious may appear to be "Figure Pieces" and "Landscape Scenery;" but a little reflection will convince us of great objections to this mode; by adopting it we sacrifice all distinctions of merit, placing Teniers and Ostade by the side of Raffaele and Michael Angelo; Cuypp and Watteau in apposition with Claude Lorraine and Poussin.

Another mode of classification is by means of what

are called the different schools of painting: this method is a good one, and very necessary to be known, but still it does not appear to me perfectly adopted to the mere amateur, or to the man of property and leisure, who wishes to attain a general knowledge of the art, as a branch of liberal education; he requires some more general and natural arrangement, some other plan than that of having constantly to refresh his memory by a reference to Books: he requires such an arrangement that his pictures may of themselves, wherever he looks at them, bring it with renewed force to his mind.

With a view to such an arrangement I would divide the art generally into four principal classes, which I would name as follows.

1. THE ENNOBLING.
2. THE PLEASING.
3. THE SATIRICAL.
4. THE IMITATIVE.

In the first or Ennobling class I would place those great Masters who have most successfully aimed at *to kalon*, the abstract ideal of perfection and beauty in forms, whether of animated or inanimate nature; and who have not applied to ornament to enhance the value of their conceptions. Borrowing from the science of Botany, I would subdivide this class into two orders.

I. THE PURE,

in which the Artist himself is forgotten and lost in the effect produced by his performance: where all the means are eclipsed by the glorious end; and where the picture is not looked upon as a mere work of art; but as the source of those sublime ideas which are raised by it in the cultivated mind; foremost in this order, I would place Raffaele, Guido, Leonardo da Vinci, Claude, and Poussin.

The second order into which I divide this class is,

II. THE CHARACTERISTIC OR ORIGINAL,

in which the hand of the master can more distinctly be traced; and where *to kalon*, the Ideal of Beauty though unimpaired, is somewhat warped, and moulded rather on the model of one mighty mind than on a general abstract: here I would place Michael Angelo, Dominichino, Annibal Caracci, Coreggio, Salvator Rosa, and a numerous host, differing in degrees of merit, according as they more or less approach the Ideal of Beauty, and avoid the grotesque.

I would not arbitrarily exclude all portrait painters from the Ennobling class: those who can seize the spirit and momentary expression of a countenance, as well as the mere outline and colour, deserve high rank in the art; an instance of this occurs in the celebrated portrait of Gerartius by Vandyck: neither do I reject all who draw scenes and landscapes from nature; compare that view of La Riccia, the ancient Aricia, now in the National Gallery, with any of the Landscapes of Watteau, and the distinction which I would make will, I think, be evident.

In the second class, the Pleasing, I would place those painters who have delighted the eye and raised agreeable images in the mind by means of the Ideal of Beauty in the effect produced by harmony of colours, and the judicious management of light and shade. I consider that Titian, Guercino, Canaletti, Rubens, Swanefeldt, and Everdinghen are of those who range in this class, of which also our two countrymen Morland and Gainsborough were distinguished ornaments; indeed I am not sure but that the Ideal of Grace and Beauty, which the latter of these artists has bestowed upon the peasantry of his country, may claim a still higher rank in the art. I would allow an honourable place in this class to Quentin Matsys, the painter Blacksmith of Antwerp; it is true that he has not always chosen the most pleasing subjects, but his admirable picture of "the Misers," now in one of the state apartments at Windsor Castle, proves him at least to have been perfectly master of the harmony of colours; and

indeed we occasionally meet with parts in his works which might almost be mistaken for the earlier studies of Raffaele.

In the third or Satirical class, of which Hogarth is the unrivalled head, I place a tribe of artists who have evinced powerful and original, but very low, minds; and who, having no idea of the Beautiful, are at home only in the absurd: pictures of this class may possess true harmony of colouring, and may astonish or even amuse us; but they never can elevate or improve the tone of the human mind; the instruments and details employed in them to produce effects, are generally borrowed from mean or familiar objects, and are in consequence totally devoid both of sublimity and novelty.

In the fourth or Imitative class, I would place those artists whose works are mere imitations of nature. I would subdivide it into two orders.

I. THE JUDICIOUS,

where the artist, though he be incapable of improving upon that which is placed before him, yet prefers and selects such scenes as are in themselves agreeable; many artists of the Flemish, and a few of the Dutch Schools, belong to this order; Hobbima, Cuypp, and Jan Both justly rank in it, and the courtly mannerism of Watteau can claim no higher distinction.

II. THE SERVILLE.

In this lowest grade of art I place those who by means of mere mechanical dexterity, give close and exact representation of their models, which are generally unpleasant and disgusting in the Dutch School, and only accidentally interesting in any case: Teniers and his innumerable imitators, of whom I think Ostade the lowest, belong to this order, wherein Bowls, Cups, and Brooms, the vacant stare of Intoxication, the insane fury of Anger, the leer of low Humour, and the broad grin of animal Gratification, may be seen to the life: all breadth of effect is here sacrificed to relief, and the vulgar of all ranks are pleased with objects appearing, as they phrase it, "to stand out from the picture."

Do not suppose that I place Flour and Fruit Painting thus low in the art; on the contrary, I think that to give to the leaves and petals of Flowers their natural free and unconstrained elegance, to place them in groups devoid of stiffness and formality, and to give to Fruit its roundness, without losing the charm of breadth of effect, are real triumphs of art which well deserve to rank in the second or pleasing class.

I have not unfrequently heard amateurs express regret that Titian, Rubens and Rembrandt should not have united the grandeur of Raffaele to their own unrivalled Harmony of Colouring; but this regret seems to me founded upon very erroneous ideas: severe grandeur is incompatible with that grace and ornament which are essential to a different style of art, and which especially delight us in the works of Titian; if even Coreggio in attempting to combine them with grandeur has sometimes lapsed into affectation, what shall we say to artists of the Satirical class aiming at the higher excellences, the Ideal perfection of Beauty? This is indeed most absurd rivalry: we cannot easily forget Hogarth's endeavours at the sublime, his picture of "Paul before Felix," for instance; instead of the realization of those ideas which we naturally form of such a subject, we find only a disgusting caricature, without the slightest pretension either to Dignity, Beauty, or Propriety.

A painter, unless he be a mere imitator, will always transmit to his canvas some reflection of his own intellect; and he whose mind is not blest with true dignity, can never rival the great leaders of the art; neither can any person without correct ideas of the Harmony of Colours ever tread in the path of Titian and Rubens; though an artist, who might attain eminence in the lower grades of the profession, may readily fail altogether by attempting that which to him is impracticable. In art, as in Nature, there are certain qualities which are in-