

The Examiner.

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

Vol. I.]

CHARLOTTETOWN, P. E. ISLAND, MONDAY, JUNE 19, 1848.

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ORIGINAL LITERATURE.

OBSERVATIONS ON PAINTING, ADDRESSED TO A FRIEND.

NO. IV.

The existence of natural genius, however much some Philosophers may pretend to call in question, is a fact of which the common sense and feeling of mankind will not admit a doubt; our daily experience, without any further argument, may convince us of the great intellectual superiority which some men possess over others, and of the different manner in which that superiority manifests itself as the peculiar genius of each. Among Painters, to whom these observations have especial reference, the presence or the absence of genius is so very evident as scarcely to admit of being mistaken. It is true indeed that Painters of great genius do sometimes widely and egregiously err; but their very errors are their own, and bear no sort of resemblance to those of mediocrity; neither do the blemishes of one Painter of real eminence resemble those of another; each has his own, proceeding from the exuberance of that same peculiar genius to which are owing all the good qualities and beauties of his style.

You are no doubt aware of the leading incidents in the life of the late Mr. Salt, with his early struggles to attain skill as a Painter, and his cruel mortifications and want of success in that endeavour; yet he laboured hard and long, and acquired an ample knowledge of the mechanical parts of the art; he even took likenesses with such precision and verisimilitude that upon one occasion his portrait of a Lady enabled one who had never seen her in person to recognize her Brother, also a total stranger to him; but Salt's genius was not that of a Painter, and of this he was himself painfully sensible; a prospect of humiliating drudgery on the threshold of art was all that lay before him, until at length it pleased providence to open a new path which exactly suited the bent of his energetic and powerful mind. This was the Eastern Expedition of Lord Valentia in the year 1802. Salt's rise to distinction was now rapid, his knowledge of the merely mechanical part of Drawing was, doubtless, of much service to him, but for proofs of his genius we must look at his conduct as Envoy at the barbarous court of Abyssinia,—as the active and prudent Counsel General in Egypt,—the companion and counsellor of Mahomet Ali,—the liberal patron of Belzoni,—the diligent and successful Antiquarian, and lastly, as the kind friend of all who stood in need of his assistance;—nature made him both a good and a great man, but not a Painter.

Men of genius, particularly Artists, look at whatever may be before them with reference to the bent of their own minds; the late Mr. Robson,* for instance, looked upon the Mountains, Glens, and Lakes, of the Highlands, as Homer may have looked on Greece, or Virgil on Rome,—not as mere combinations of rocks, trees, and water; but as the groundwork of those conceptions of alpine grandeur which his masterly hand would afterwards stamp and embody in his drawings. In the summer of 1830, I had the pleasure of making one of a little party with Mr. R. for the purpose of an excursion to the Highlands; we went by water from London to Aberdeen, and thence by way of Elgin, Gordon Castle and Nairn, to Inverness. Up to this place the scenery though generally pleasing, and at Elgin in particular of surpassing loveliness and beauty, yet did not seem to strike any corresponding chord in the mind of Mr. Robson; his lively and unaffected good humour, irresistible drollery, and sterling wit had been the very life of

our little party, but when, having left Inverness, our route lay through Ardmeanach by Fortrose, the Mulbuy Hills, and the beautiful Bay of Cromarty,—with Ben Wavis and the Ross-shire mountains in the distance, Robson was no longer the same man; his eye involuntarily fixed upon the lofty summit of Ben Wavis, and remained immovable as its object. I really do not think he spoke twice during the whole of our ride from the Kessock Ferry to Cromarty, and it was merely observed by one of our company that "Mr. R. might as well follow his eye and his heart out of the carriage window." I feel a pleasure in this recollection of a friend to whom I was sincerely attached, and I hope it will not be considered irrelevant to the support of my opinion of the reality of genius, that is to say, of a natural bias and tendency of the mind towards some particular class of objects. Such a tendency in the mind of an Artist towards his art, is almost certain to lead to excellence, and indeed it has not unfrequently conquered all the obstacles which external circumstances could well heap together, to retard and prevent its triumphant progress towards perfection.

There is now in the National Gallery, a Picture, by Sebastian Bourdon, of the return of the Ark to the Israelites; of which it may be sufficient to say that it was very much admired by its former possessor, Sir Joshua Reynolds, as evincing in the highest degree the true Poetry of Painting. A reference to the Scriptural text* will convince us that the subject is not one upon which an ordinary Painter could have conferred any interest, yet Bourdon's composition is of such classic beauty, elegance, and imagination, as we do not often find surpassed. With this picture in our minds, let us return to considering the varieties of genius, and ask ourselves how the same subject would have been handled by different masters, say for instance, Hogarth, Rembrandt, and Rubens. In the work of Hogarth we might expect to see something like a Brewer's Dray, or a Sussex Wain, drawn by two Smithfield Heifers;—the Philistines either all agape with amazement or in common place attitudes of grief; the Jewish husbandmen, in the mean while, dancing in awkward merriment to the music of a Violin; in short much such a regale to the eye as that offered to the ear of "The enraged Musician" in Hogarth's famous picture of that name. Rembrandt would probably present us with clumsy and ill proportioned figures in a very common-place landscape,** but we should at the same time find that magnificence of chiaro oscuro, that magic harmony of light, shade, and colour, in which Rembrandt stands almost without a rival, and which, blinding us to every defect, would leave no other impression than that of admiration and delight. There is a little difficulty in picturing to ourselves that conception of the subject which we might expect from Rubens; his very name calls up ideas of a spirited and splendid group of stalwart Philistine Chiefs in gorgeous armour; a triumphal car of the most elaborate magnificence drawn by cattle worthy of the sacred burthen, and the Israelites, as well as every other part of the picture, disposed with a view to the most striking effect.

The name of Sir Joshua Reynolds has often been brought forward as an authority by those who deny the existence of genius; but I think this is hardly a fair construction of the context of Sir Joshua's "Discourses" taken collectively; he was addressing himself to young men who were too apt to trust entirely to genius, if they had it, and to wait for it, if they had it not; it was necessary to urge them to study and application, and to set before them, in the most impressive manner, the benefits of steady perseverance and laborious practice in the mechanical parts of the Art; but Sir Joshua, in his enthusiastic praises of Michael Angelo, and in his de-

precation of wasting time in that minute and laboured trifling which distinguished the Dutch School of Painting, proved that he was fully capable of appreciating genius, and well aware that, without it, no labour and no study can ever make a great Painter.

It is not in Painting only that genius becomes evident but also in Sculpture, Architecture, and Landscape Gardening—those sister arts which so eminently tend to elevate, improve, and delight the human mind; to satisfy ourselves of this, we need but recall the names of Phidias, Michael Angelo, Thorwaldsdan, and Canova among Sculptors; of Palladio, Sansovino, and our own Sir Christopher Wren, among Architects; and of Uvedale Price, Gilpin, Repton, Whately, and Loudon, among Landscape Gardeners. In the light and ornamental branches of Mechanics, in the art of the Goldsmith, the Jeweller, and the Cabinet-maker, genius may be abundantly manifested. In evidence of this, I shall refer you to an authority which, at the same time, proves genius to be the gift of a kind and benevolent providence, ever watchful for the best interests of mankind, and furnishing us with the means of raising and expending our minds in endeavours at the highest order of excellence, in the fine arts, as in every thing else; this authority I find in the calling of Bezaleel and Aholiab, mentioned in the first six verses of the 31st Chapter of the Book of Exodus, and shall conclude these observations by quoting them as an argument, last in position but preeminently first in importance:—

1. And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying,
2. See, I have called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah:
3. And I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship.
4. To devise cunning works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass.
5. And in cutting of stones to set them, and in carving of timber, to work in all manner of workmanship.
6. And I, behold, I have given with him Aholiab the son of Ahisamach of the tribe of Dan; and in the hearts of all that are wise hearted I have put wisdom; that they may make all that I have commanded thee.

* 'Ingenuas didicisse fideliter artes
'Emollit mores, nec sinit esse feros.'

THE EXAMINER.

MONDAY, JUNE 19, 1848.

THE BAR OF P. E. ISLAND.

WE return our thanks to a correspondent who has drawn our attention, during the past week, to the state of the Bar and the legal profession generally in this Island. We regret to observe that the letter contains too many personal reflections to warrant its publication, but we shall gladly avail ourselves of some of our correspondent's observations, premising, that we presume our remarks upon the political creed of the Bar as a body, in our last Number, may have given rise to our friend's communication.

To take modern instances only, it may be said that everywhere but in Prince Edward Island, the Legal Profession has produced not only accomplished statesmen, but men distinguished for their advocacy of popular and constitutional rights, from Lord Erskine to Lord Brougham, with a horde of others. This appears to have been eminently the case in Great Britain, and elsewhere—Curran, Grattan, O'Connell, and others in Ireland, and nearly all the celebrated men of modern times in France, were men of the Legal Profession. In more ancient times, and particularly among the Romans—the most enlightened people then on the earth—the cause of popular liberty readily found advocates in the Legal Profession. It should almost seem as if legal studies, when divested of those technicalities and subtleties, by which, in unworthy hands, they are too often disgraced—had a tendency, at least in enlarged minds, to

* See Hall's 'Life and Correspondence of the late Mr. Salt,' a very interesting and instructive work.

** This distinguished Artist died in the Autumn of the year 1833 at Stockton upon Tees, to which place he had gone by a Steam Boat from London about a week previously:—a tremendous Storm on the passage was thought to have at least accelerated his decease.

* Samuel I Chap. 6.

** See his picture of 'Tobias and the Angel' in the National Gallery.