

ESSAY II.

ON THE PRINCIPLES ON WHICH THE AUTHOR'S SKETCHES
ARE COMPOSED.

—— Contented with a humble theme,
He pours the stream of imitation down
The vale of nature, where it creeps and winds
Among her wild and lovely works.

MOST of the sketches here offered to the public, are *imaginary* views. But as many people take offence at *imaginary* views; and will admit such landscape only as is immediately taken from nature, I must explain what we mean by an *imaginary* view.

We acknowledge nature to be the grand storehouse of *all picturesque beauty*. The nearer we copy her, the nearer we approach perfection. But this does not affect the *imaginary view*. When we speak of *copying nature*, we speak only of particular *objects*, and particular *passages* — not of *putting the whole together* in a picturesque manner; which we seldom seek in nature, because it is seldom found. Nature gives us the materials of landscape; woods, rivers, lakes, trees, ground, and mountains: but leaves us to work them up into pictures, as our fancy leads. It is thus she sheds her bounty on other occasions. She gives us grass; but leaves us to make hay. She gives us corn; but leaves us to make bread.

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Yet still in copying the several *objects, and passages of nature*, we should not copy with that painful exactness, with which *Quintin Matis*, for instance, painted a face. This is a sort of plagiarism below the dignity of painting. Nature should be copied, as an author should be translated. If, like *Horace's* translator, you give word for word*, your work will necessarily be infipid. But if you catch the meaning of your author, and give it freely, in the idiom of the language into which you translate, your translation may have both the *spirit*, and *truth* of the original. *Translate nature* in the same way. Nature has its idiom, as well as language; and so has painting.

Every part of nature exhibits itself in, what may be called, *prominent features*. At the first glance, without a minute examination, the difference is apparent between the bole of a beech, for instance, and that of an oak; between the foliage of an ash, and the foliage of a fir. These *discriminating* features the painter seizes; and the more faithfully he transfuses them into his work, the more ex-

* ——— Verbum verbo curabis reddere, fidus

Interpres ———

cellent

cellent will be his representation. And when these *prominent features* are naturally expressed, and judiciously combined in a *fiſtitious* view, that view may not only be a *natural* one, but a *more beautiful exhibition of nature*, than can easily be found in real landscape. It may even be called more *natural*, than nature itself: inasmuch as it seizes, and makes use, not only of nature's *own* materials, but of the best of each kind.

The painter of *fiſtitious* views goes still farther. There are few forms, either in animate, or inanimate nature, which are completely perfect. We seldom see a man, or a horse, without some personal blemish: and as seldom a mountain, or tree, in its most beautiful form. The painter of *fiſtitious* scenes therefore not only takes his forms from the most compleat individuals, but from the most beautiful parts of each individual; as the sculptor gave a purer figure by selecting beautiful parts, than he could have done by taking his model from the most beautiful single form.

Besides, pleasing circumstances in *nature* will not always please in *painting*. We often see effects of light, and deceptions in composition, which delight us, when we can ex-

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amine, and develope them *in nature*. But when they are *represented*, like a text without its context, they may mislead; and the painter had better reject such scenery, though strictly natural. *Obscurity* in painting should be as much avoided, as in writing; unless in distances, or in some particular incidents, where obscurity is intended.

The painter of a *fiſtitious view* claims no greater liberty, than is willingly allowed to the history-painter; who in all subjects, taken from remote times, is necessarily obliged to his imagination, formed as it ought to be, upon nature. If he give such a character to the hero he exhibits, as does not belye the truth of history; and make such a representation of the story, as agrees with the times he represents, and with the rules of his art, his history-piece is admired, though widely different, in many circumstances, from the real fact. Le Brun's picture of Alexander entering the tent of Darius, is undoubtedly very different from any thing, that really happened: but it conveys so much the appearance of nature, and of truth, that it gives us full satisfaction.

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The painter of *imaginary* landscape desires no other indulgence. If from an accurate observation of the most beautiful objects of nature, he can by the force of his imagination characterize, and dispose them naturally, he thinks he may be said to paint from nature.

“ The poet’s art,” says the abbé Du Bos, “ consists in making a good representation of “ things, that *might have* happened, and in “ embellishing it with proper images.”

Du Bos speaks after Aristotle, whose principle it is, that the poet is not required to relate what has *really happened*, but what *probably might happen*; which Horace translates, when he tells us, the poet,

— ita mentitur, sic veris falsa remiscet,
Primo ne medium, medio ne discrepet inum.

All this as exactly regulates the art of managing *fiction* in landscape, as it does in poetry. And indeed the general rules of the best critics for the direction of the drama, direct us with great propriety in picturesque composition. — It is true indeed we may, for the sake of curiosity, wish to have a *particular scene exactly represented*: but, the indulgence of curiosity does not make the picture better.

Besides the advantage in point of *composition*, the *imaginary* scene preserves more the *character* of landscape, than the *real* one. A landscape may be rural, or sublime — inhabited, or desolate — cultivated, or wild. Its *character*, of whatever kind, should be observed throughout. Circumstances, which suit one species, contradict another. Now in nature we rarely see this attention. Seldom does she produce a scene *perfect in character*. In her best works she often throws in some feature at variance with the rest — some trivial circumstance mixed often with sublime scenery: and injudicious painters have been fond of affecting such inconsistencies. I have seen a view of the Colosseum, for instance, adorned with a woman hanging linen to dry under its walls. Contrasts of this kind may suit the moralist, the historian, or the poet, who may take occasion to descant on the instability of human affairs. But the *eye*, which has nothing to do with *moral sentiments*, and is conversant only with *visible forms*, is disgusted by such unnatural union.

There is still a *higher character* in landscape, than what arises from the *uniformity of objects* — and that is the power of furnishing
images

images *analogous to the various feelings, and sensations of the mind*. If the landscape-painter can call up such representations, (which seems not beyond his art) where would be the harm of saying, that landscape, like history-paintings, hath its ethics!

— — — — — Such thy pencil, Claude!
It makes us pant beneath thy summer-sun,
And shiver in thy cool autumnal eve.

To convey however ideas of this kind is the perfection of the art: it requires the splendour, and variety of colours; and is not to be attempted in such trivial sketches as these. In the mean time, the *painter of imaginary scenes* pursues the best mode of forming these *ethical* compositions, as all nature lies before him, and he has her whole storehouse at command.

To what hath been said in favour of *imaginary views*, nothing more pertinent, can be added than a few remarks from a gentleman* well known for his superior taste in painting.

“ You ask me, whether I have ever seen a *correct* view of any *natural scene*, which quite satisfied me? and you confess you rarely have. I am perfectly of your opinion. There is a servile individuality in the *mere* portrait of

* Sir George Beaumont, Bart.

“ a view which always displeases me; and is
“ even less interesting than a map. It must be full
“ of awkward lines; and the artist, cramped
“ by given shapes, gives his work always the
“ air of a copy. The old masters rarely
“ painted views from nature. I believe never,
“ but when commissioned. Like poets they
“ did not confine themselves to matter of fact;
“ they chose rather to exhibit what a country
“ suggested, than what it really comprized;
“ and took, as it were, the essence of things.
“ The servile imitator seems to me to mistake
“ the *body* for the *soul*; and will never touch
“ the heart. Besides, every thing looks well
“ in nature. Lumpish forms, and counter-
“ acting lines, touched by her exquisite hand,
“ are hardly noticed. But in art they are
“ truly disgusting; and the artist must avail
“ himself of every advantage, if he wishes to
“ cope with her. If he attack her on equal
“ terms, he is sure of being disgracefully van-
“ quished.”

Having said thus much in favour of *imaginary composition*, we are compelled however by truth to add, on the other side, that a constant application to his own resources is apt to lead the artist without great care, into the disagreeable

able business of repeating himself. If he would avoid this, he must frequently refresh his memory with nature; which, however flovenly in her composition, is the only school where he must study forms: or, if he cannot always have recourse to nature for the object he wants, he must turn over his common-place-book. This, it may be hoped, abounds with forms and passages, which may furnish a sufficient variety for his choice.

The hints, from which most of these sketches offered to the public are taken, were collected from mountainous, and lake scenery, where the author chiefly sought his picturesque ideas.

Such scenery affords two great sources of picturesque composition—*sublimity*, or *simple grandeur*; and *grandeur united with beauty*. The former arises from a *uniformity of large parts*, without *ornament*, without *contrast*, and without *variety*. The latter arises from the introduction of *these appendages*, which forms scenery of a *mixed kind*.

Some of these sketches are attempts at *sublimity* or *simple grandeur*. But as this is an idea, which is neither easily caught, nor ge-

nerally admired, most of them aim at mixing *grandeur* and *beauty* together.

But whether the artist paint from *nature* or from his *imagination*, certain general rules, which belong to his art, should never be transgressed.

In the first place, he should always remember, that the excellence of landscape-painting consists in bringing before the *spectator's eye*, or rather in raising to *his imagination* such scenes as are most *pleasing*, or most *striking*. Every painter therefore should have this idea always in view; and should paint such scenes only. In the choice of these interesting subjects he chiefly discovers his taste. The full effect indeed of such scenes can only be given by the *pallet*; yet it should be aimed at, as far as possible, even in the *sketch*.

Again, a landscape, as well as a history-piece, should have some *master-subject*. We often indeed see landscape composed without much idea of this kind. One piece of ground is tacked to another, with little meaning or connection. We should attend more to the simplicity of a *whole*. Some uniform, dif-



tinēt plan should always be presented; and the several parts should have relation to each other. The scenery about a castle, a ruin, a bridge, a lake, a winding river, or some remarkable disposition of ground, may make the leading part of a landscape; and if it be set off with a suitable distance, if necessary, and a proper fore-ground, we have subject enough for a picture. In short, there should be some idea of *unity* in the *design*, as well as in the *composition*; and every part should concur in shewing it to advantage. The parts being thus few and simple, the eye at once conceives the *general idea*. If the landscape be a finished piece, all these parts should be enriched with a variety of *detail*, which, at the same time, must unite in embellishing the *general effect*.

Still farther, the *probability* of every part should appear. A castle should never be placed where a castle cannot be supposed to stand. A lake should generally have the appendage of a mountainous country; and the course of a winding river should be made intelligible by the folding of the hills. In some of the drawings now offered to the public, it is endeavoured to explain this idea by a few remarks on the back of each. These
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explanatory drawings are particularly mentioned in the catalogue. Indeed, a landscape, which cannot bear to be analyzed in this way, must be faulty. Sometimes, it is true, we find in nature itself improbable circumstances. The artist for that reason rejects them. But he is inexcusable, if he purposely introduce them.

The *general effect* of a picture is produced by a unity of *light*, as well as of *composition*. When we have gotten the several parts of a landscape together, — that is, when we are satisfied with the *composition*, still we cannot judge of the *effect*; nor appreciate the picture, till we have *introduced the light*, which makes a complete change in a landscape, either for the better or the worse. It is thus in nature. The appearance of the same country, under different effects of light, is totally different. These effects therefore cannot be too much studied; and should be studied when the artist *finishes a picture*, by making different sketches of the same subject, so as to ascertain the best. This is not always perhaps enough attended to. In *painting* indeed, a bad distribution of light is less discernable. The variety of colouring
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ing imposes on the sight; but in a collection of *prints* or *drawings*, the defects in light are obvious.

Gradation is another principle with regard to light, which is very essential in point of beauty. Neither lights, nor shades, should *uniformly* spread over one surface; but should *graduate* from more to less. *Gradation* in light and shade, though not always seen in nature, is however frequently enough seen to be acknowledged among its best sources of beauty. It removes that disgusting effect, which in sound is called *monotony*; and produces, in its room, a pleasing variety on the surfaces of objects.

The illustration of these few principles (as far as a sketch, or rough drawing can illustrate them) is all that is aimed at in the drawings now offered to sale. Few of them will afford more than the *rude conception* of a landscape. They pretend to some degree of *composition* and *effect*; but to little farther. Hard lines must be excused, and an inaccurate detail. They may perhaps have somewhat more of *science* in them, than of *art*. What merit they have, is readily allowed without affectation.

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Though they cannot well claim the title of landscapes, they may furnish a few general hints; and some of them might be made pictures perhaps in the hands of a good master, who could furnish the *detail*. At the same time, thus much may be said, that we always conceive the *detail* to be the inferior part of a picture. We look with more pleasure at a landscape well designed, composed, and enlightened, though the parts are inaccurately, or roughly executed, than at one, in which the *parts* are well made out, but the *whole* ill-conceived. These ideas were once paradoxically, but well explained by a gentleman, who thought himself a better artist, after his hand began to shake, and his eyes to fail. By the shaking of my hand, he would say, my stroke, which was before formal, becomes more free: and when my eyes were good, I entered more into the *detail* of objects: now I am more impressed with the *whole*.

In *teaching* to draw, the stress is laid at first, as it ought to be, on the *parts*. If a scholar can touch a tree, or a building with accuracy, he has so far attained perfection. But it is the perfection only of a scholar. The great principles

ciples of his art are still behind. Often, however, our *riper* judgment is swayed by the excellence of the *parts*, in preference to a *whole*. The merit of a picture is fixed perhaps by the *master's touch*; or by the beauty of his *colouring*; or some other inferior excellence. But a great critic in arts, formed a different opinion;

Æmilium circa ludum faber imus, & unguis
Exprimet, & molles imitabitur ære capillos,
Infelix operis *summâ*, quia ponere *totum*
Nesciet.

A few of the drawings here exhibited, may be called *studies*; that is, the same subject hath been attempted in different ways, both with regard to *composition*, and *effect*.

In a few of them, the more redundant designs of Claude are simplified. A very numerous collection of prints were taken from the drawings of that master. Claude's originals are in the hands of the Duke of Devonshire. They exhibit many *beautiful parts*, but rarely a *simple whole*; though the collection, for what reason is not obvious, is styled *the book of truth*.

A few of the drawings here offered to sale, are slightly tinted; not as finished drawings; but

but just enough to give a distinction among objects. Yet even in these slight sketches, unless there is some appearance of *harmony*, a very little degree of colouring glares. When therefore you have put in your light and shade, with Indian ink, spread over the *whole* a slight wash of red and yellow mixed, which make an orange. It may incline either to one or the other, as may best suit your composition. A cold bluish tint may sometimes have effect. This general wash will produce a degree of *harmony*. While the sky is yet moist, tint the upper part of it, if it be orange, with blue, blending them together. Or if a little part only of the sky appear, it may be all blue, or all orange, as may have the best effect. When the sky is dry, throw a little blue, or what Reeves calls a *neutral tint**, into the distances; and over any water, that may be in the landscape. Then introduce your browns, which are of various kinds, into the foreground; but let them be introduced slightly; and when all is dry, you may touch some of the brightest parts with dead green, or a little gall-stone. Burnt terra-de-Sienna, mixed with a little gall-stone, make a good tint for foliage.

* See his box of colours.

Some apology may perhaps be necessary for the uniformity of one principle, which runs through most of the designs here exhibited; and that is the practice of *throwing the foreground into shade*. Many artists throw their *lights* on the *foreground*; and often, no doubt, with good effect. But, in general, we are perhaps better pleased with a *dark* foreground. It makes a kind of graduating shade, from the eye through the removed parts of the picture; and carries off the distance better than any other contrivance. By throwing the *light* on the *foreground*, this *gradation* is *inverted*. In many of these sketches the lights were at first left on the foreground; but on examining them with a fresh eye, they glared so disagreeably, that they were afterwards put out. — Besides, the foreground is commonly but an *appendage*. The middle distance generally makes the scene, and requires the most distinction. In history-painting it is the reverse. The *principal* part of the subject occupies the *foreground*; and the *removed* parts of the picture form the *appendages*. In a landscape too, when a building, or other object of consequence, appears on the foreground, and the distance is of little value, the light, on the same principle, may

may then fall on the *foreground*: though a building is sometimes thrown, even in that case, with more effect into shadow. — In most of these sketches it may be added, that the foreground is only just *washed in*. If the drawings had been *finished*, the foregrounds should have been broken into parts. But the author vies for candour on the head of *finishing*.

An apology may perhaps be due, on the other side also, for preserving too strong a light on some of the removed parts of the composition. In general, no part of the surface of a country (except, here and there, the reflected parts of water) should be so light, as the lightest parts of the sky. But this rule is not always observed in these sketches; partly because in work so slight, it might induce heaviness; and partly, because a little colour might easily supply the want of shade, if these sketches should ever be honoured with painting from them.

With regard to *figures* introduced in landscape, there is often great deformity. Bad appendages of this sort are very disgusting: and yet we often see views enlivened, (if it can be called

called enlivening) with ill-drawn figures of men, horses, cows, sheep, waggons, and other objects, which have not even the *air* of the things they represent. Or perhaps if the figures of a landscape are tolerably touched, too great a *number* of them are introduced; or they are *ill put together*; or perhaps *ill-suited* to the scene. Some of these circumstances are too often found in the best landscapes — as often in those of Claude, as of any other master. And yet I have heard, that Claude had a higher opinion of his own excellence in figures, than in any other part of his profession. Sir Peter Lely, we are told, wished for one of Claude's best landscapes; but delicately hinted to him, that he should rather chuse it without figures. Claude felt himself hurt at Sir Peter's depreciating that excellence, which he himself valued. He filled his landscape therefore with more figures, than he commonly introduced; and desired Sir Peter, if he did not like it, to leave it for those who understood the composition of landscape better. — This picture, is at present, I am told, in the hands of Mr. Agar in London; and the history of it affords good instruction to such conceited artists as value

themselves on what nobody else values. Many landscape painters however might be named, who knew how to touch a small figure, and could people their landscapes with great beauty. Among these the late Mr. Wilson, one of the best landscape-painters, that hath appeared in our days, might be mentioned. Other painters, who could not paint figures themselves, have borrowed assistance from those who could. The late ingenious Mr. Barret, who painted every part of inanimate nature with singular beauty, had the discretion to get his landscapes generally peopled by a better hand than his own.

It cannot be supposed, the figures in these sketches are set up as models. So far from it, that they do not even pretend to the name of *figures*. They are meant only as substitutes to shew, where two or three figures might be placed to advantage. And yet even such figures are better than those, in which *finishing* is attempted and legs and arms set on without either life, air, or proportion. Indeed the figures here introduced, are commonly dressed in cloaks, which conceal their deformities. If legs and arms be not well set on, they are certainly better concealed.

As I can say nothing myself therefore on the subject of figures, I have gotten a few hints, and examples from my brother, Mr. Sawrey Gilpin; who, if my prejudices do not mislead me, is well skilled in this part of his art.

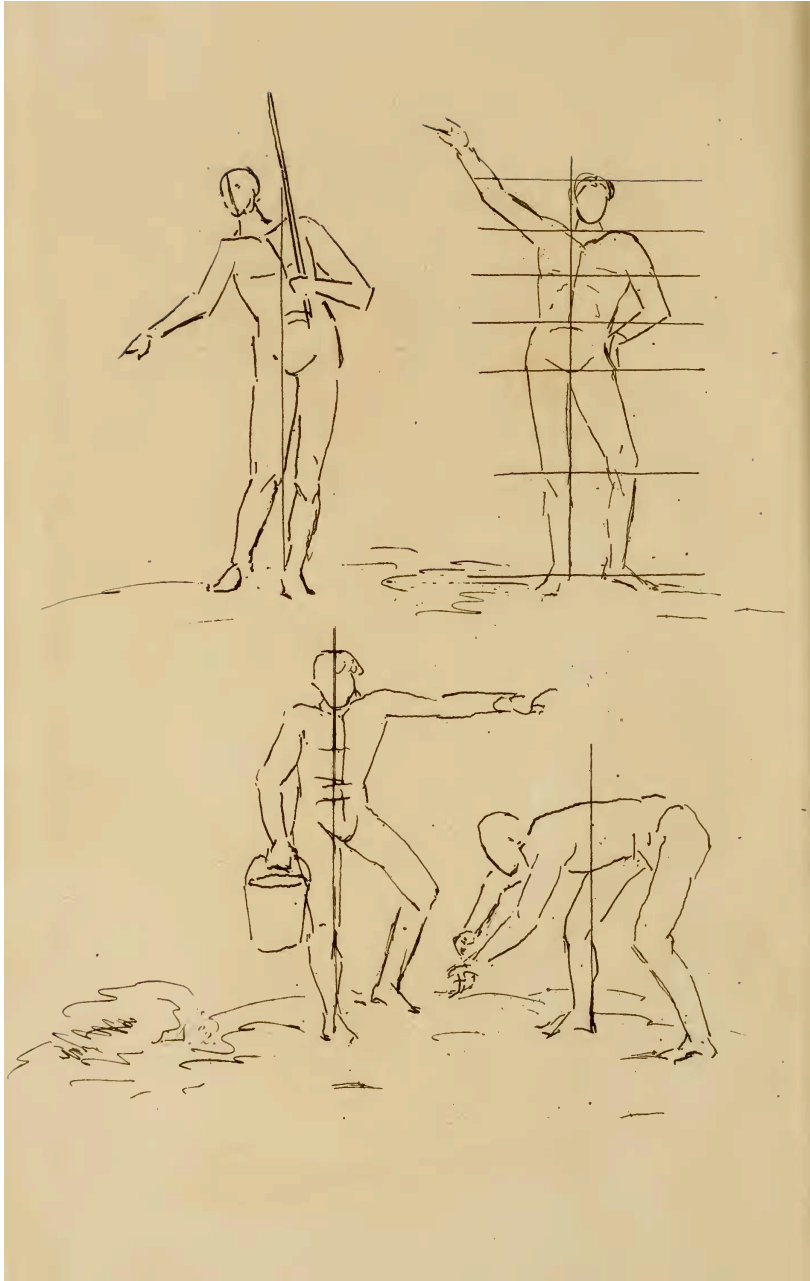
These hints respect the *size*, the *relative proportion of the parts*, the *balance of figures at rest, or in motion*; and what appears to him the easiest mode of sketching figures*: to which are added a few of such groups as may be introduced in landscape.

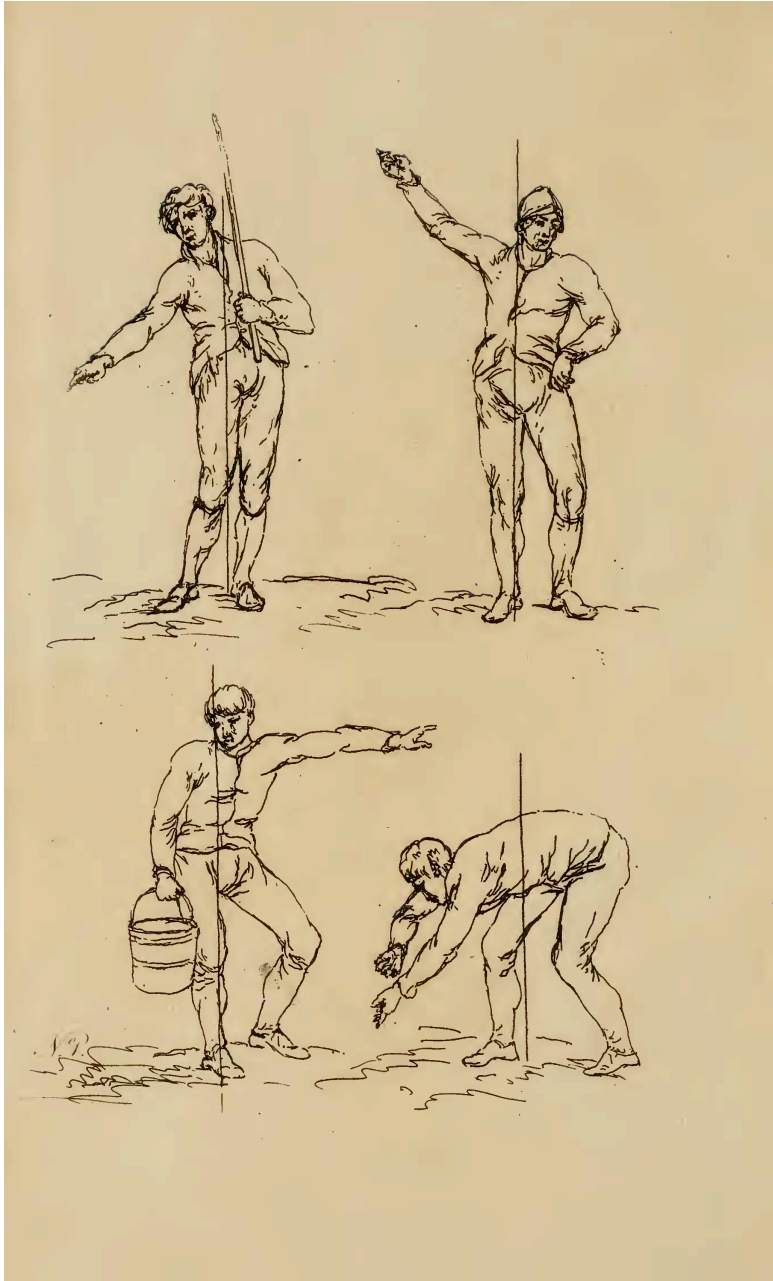
In the first place, with regard to the *size* of figures, as the known dimensions of the human body give a scale to the objects around, exactness in this point is a matter of no little consequence. If the figure be too large, it diminishes the landscape— if too small, it makes it enormous: and yet it seems no very

* Mr. S. G. had once thoughts of giving the public a few remarks on landscape-figures, both human and animal; and illustrating his remarks by a variety of etched examples. It would be a work (in my opinion at least) highly useful to all, who draw or paint landscape. But I fear his engagements will prevent his ever bringing this work to such perfection, as would satisfy himself; and this little extract from it is probably the only part of it that will ever appear.

difficult matter to adjust the proportion, by comparing the figure with some object on the same ground.

Though in figures, meant only to adorn landscape, the exactness of *anatomy* is not required, yet a small degree of *disproportion* strikes the eye with disgust, even in a sketch—in the *head* and *limbs* especially. The body naturally forms itself into two parts of equal length. From the crown of the head to the point where the limbs divide, is one half. This may be subdivided into four parts. The head and neck to the top of the shoulder make one of these sub-divisions: from the top of the shoulder to the lower line of the muscle of the breast we measure another: from thence to the hips a third; and from the hips to the point where the limbs divide, a fourth. The *legs* and *arms* admit each of a division into two parts. In the former, the upper part of the knee is the point of division; as the elbow is in the latter, when the hand is closed. When the arm hangs down, and the fingers are extended, their points will reach the middle of the thigh. But though we have no occasion to observe this division accurately in ornamental figures,





it may be useful to have a *general idea* of it.

The *balance*, however, of a figure, even in landscape, is matter of great consequence. If every thing else were right but this, the effect of the figure would be destroyed. A figure intended to be in *motion*, from an unhappy poise of its limbs, would appear to *stand still*. And from the same cause, a *standing* figure would appear to be a *falling* one. The balance of *standing* figures may be regulated by a supposed perpendicular dividing the body, from the crown of the head, into two parts. If the legs bear equal weight, this line will fall exactly between them. If the weight is borne unequally, the line will fall nearer that leg which bears the greatest proportion: and if the whole burden be thrown on one leg, the line will pass through the centre of its heel. When the weight is thus unequally distributed, the shoulder on one side forms a counterpoise to the hip on the other: and when the shoulder is not a sufficient counterpoise, as in the case of bearing a weight in one hand, the contrary arm is thrown out to restore the balance.—*Sloping* figures come under the same rule; only

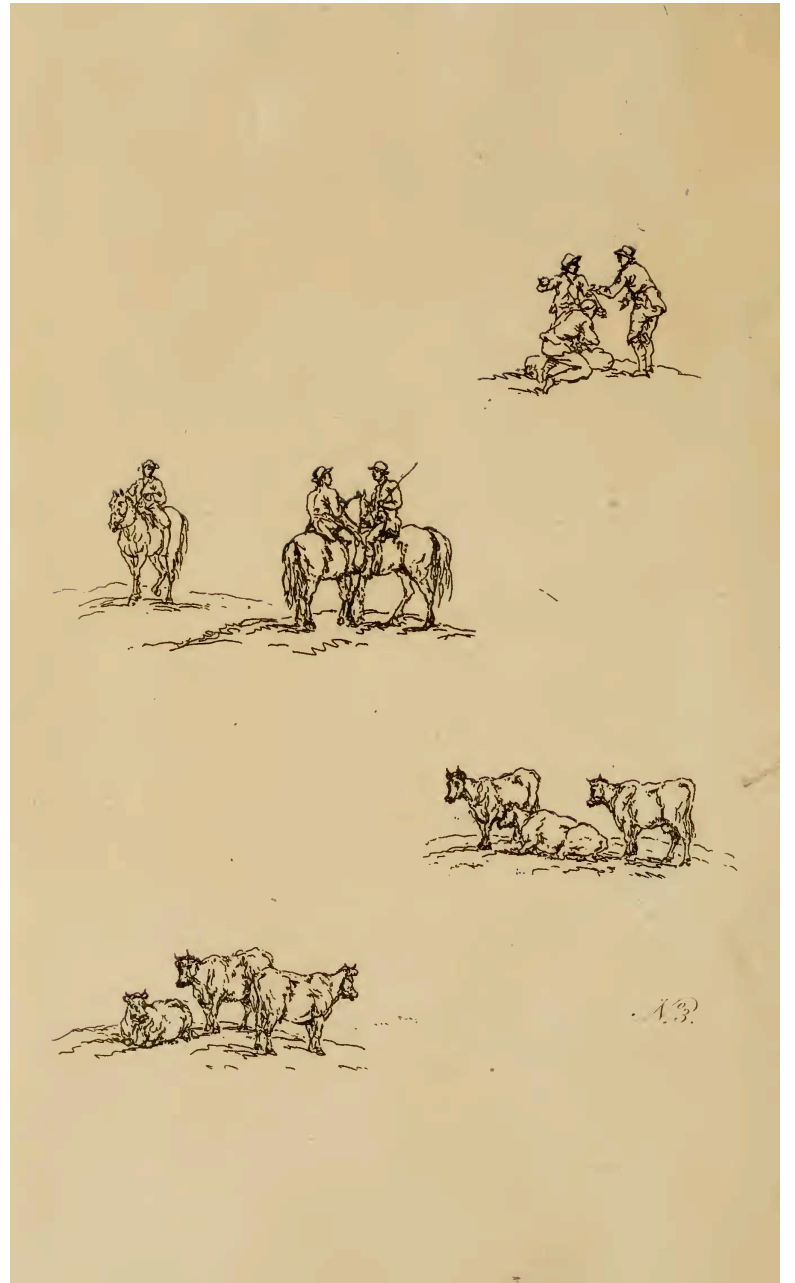
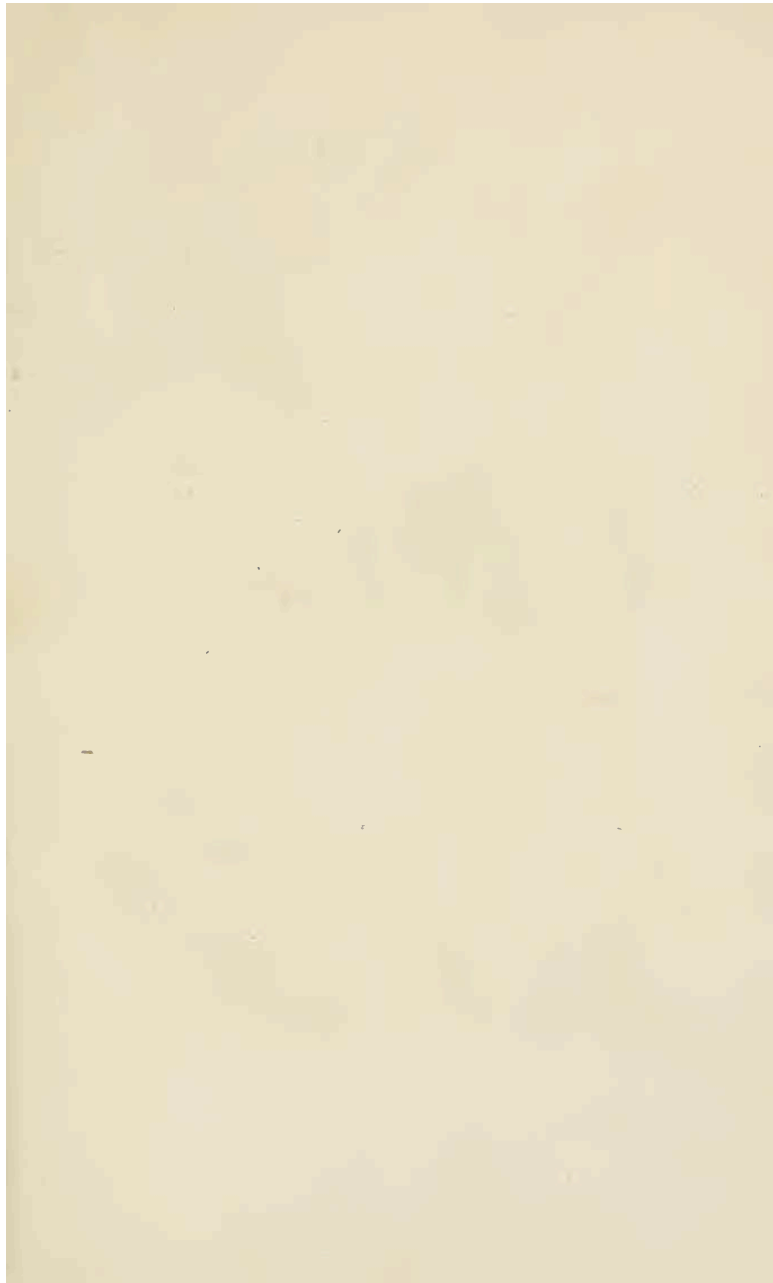
only the perpendicular will arise from the centre of gravity, at the feet of the figure, and divide it into equal parts. The *progressive* motion of figures may also be adjusted by a perpendicular, drawn from the foot, that bears the weight; the figure being projected beyond it in proportion to the velocity, with which it is represented to move*.

A few words may be added with regard to the *easiest manner of sketching slight figures in landscape*. To attempt finishing the limbs at first, would lead to stiffness. If the figures are placed near the eye, a little attention to *drawing* is requisite: and the simplest, and perhaps the best method will be, to sketch them in lines nearly straight, under the regulations above given. A little swelling of the muscles, and a few touches to mark the extremities, the articulation of the joints, and the sharp folds of the drapery, may afterwards be given, and will be sufficient †.

After gaining a knowledge in the *form* of figures, the next point is to *group* them. The form depends on *rule*; the group more on

* To illustrate these remarks, see plate 1.

† To illustrate these remarks, see plate 2.



taste. A few landscape-groups are here specified, which may assist the young artist in combining his figures*.

With regard to his own *drawings*, the author hath only to observe farther, that they will appear to most advantage, if they are examined by candle-light; or, if in day-light, by intercepting a strong light. This mode of viewing them will best shew the *effect*, in which chiefly consists the little merit they have; and will likewise conceal the faultiness of the *execution* in the several details. Such of these drawings however as are tinted, cannot be examined by candle-light.

* See plate 3.

THE END.