

## Account Books for 1789.

*Three Essays on Picturesque Beauty, on Picturesque Travels, and on sketching Landscape—to which is added a Poem on Landscape Painting.* By William Gilpin, M. A. Prebendary of Sarum, and Vicar of Boldre in New Forest near Lymington.

THE author of the picturesque tours through Great Britain hath been many years most successfully engaged in delineating the infinitely varied scenery of his native country, as it presented itself to him in its most sublime and beautiful forms, of mountain, wood, lake, river, sea views, a continually diversified level, and what gives the most enchanting effect to the whole, that exquisite verdure, conveying the united ideas of beauty and fertility, in which respect it shines unrivalled by any other climate.—The powers of his pen and pencil have been combined in illustrating a subject so worthy of them, and it is hard to determine, whether the skill of the artist has been more happily displayed in sketching objects, than in the taste of the writer in the energy and perspicuity of his verbal delineation. There subsists undoubtedly a strict analogy between the arts of painting and fine writing—he who admires one, has invariably an exquisite relish of the other. Of the mutual light and reciprocal assistance they may afford each other, our author has given us

a striking instance in his remarks at p. 18. “Language,” he observes, “like light, is a medium; and the true philosophic style, like light from a north window, exhibits objects clearly and distinctly, without soliciting attention to itself. In painting subjects of amusement indeed, language may gild somewhat more, and colour with the dies of fancy: but where information is of more importance than entertainment, though you cannot throw too strong a light, you should carefully avoid a coloured one. The style of some writers resembles a bright light placed between the eye and the thing to be looked at; the light shews itself, and hides the object; and it must be allowed, the execution of some painters is as impertinent as the style of such writers.

Mr. G. by the extent and variety of his classical learning, hath been enabled to open the great storehouse of picturesque description, which the Greek and Roman poets have so amply supplied, more eminently Homer and Virgil, who were never so delightfully engaged as in painting the sublimity and simplicity of nature.

But though the scientific painter, and all whose taste has been cultivated on the true principles of the art, have long known how to appreciate the value of Mr. Gilpin's works, and have long acknowledged their consummate merit: it must be confessed that the author appeals with

with great disadvantage to the ordinary opinion of the public, who are contented to admire without discrimination general objects of beauty, as affording equal sources of amusement—while the eye well practised in the art, is pleased only with things as they are properly disposed for the pencil, and examines the face of nature only by the rules of painting, the ordinary reader, accustomed to derive exquisite relish from a general survey of things, was offended to be told, that his views were misdirected and his sensations of nature's beauty false and ill founded, that he must not judge of beauty till he is grown scientific, and has formed his acquired taste by artificial rules dictated by his instructor.—In the order of things perhaps these essays, which chiefly contain a summary of scientific principles, might with more propriety have preceded the publication of his tours, which present a practical illustration of these principles by example—he might previously and gradually have unfolded his design, and prepared the eye to survey proper objects in their due positions and lights—he might thus have easily obviated much misconception and much prejudice resulting from it.

The purport of the first essay is to mark the distinguishing characteristic of such beautiful objects as are suited to the pencil. To avoid confusion, and correct misapprehension, he holds it necessary to separate what is simply beautiful from what is strictly picturesque—that which pleases the eye in its natural state, from that which has a quality capable of being illustrated in painting.—Ideas of beauty vary with the object and the eye of the spectator, and

those artificial forms are the most beautiful to each eye respectively, which are most habitual. The stonemason admires a well jointed wall, which the architect overlooks. As there exists a real difference between the beautiful and the picturesque, it is worth while to enquire what is that quality in the constitution of objects which particularly marks them as picturesque.—The real object affords one source of beauty in that species of elegance we call smooth or neat; we see it in the polish of the marble and glitter of the silver, and in the brightness of the mahogany, as if the eye delighted to glide smoothly over the object. But in picturesque representation he rejects neat and smooth from any pretensions to beauty; on the contrary, he makes roughness or ruggedness the essential difference of the beautiful picturesque, and contends that this particular quality makes the object pleasing in painting, whether it be in the outline and bark of a tree or in the rude summit and craggy sides of a mountain. Apply this theory to experience. Introduce the most elegant piece of Palladian architecture into a picture, and it becomes a formal object. To give it picturesque beauty, you break it into heaps of ruin; instead of smooth, you make it rough, and it becomes picturesque. The human form in a quiescent state admits of high beauty; yet when it is agitated with passion, and its muscles swollen with strong exertion, the frame is then shewn to great advantage, and becomes picturesque; we admire the Laocoon more than the Antigonus—we admire the horse as a real object, his elegant form and his gloss coat; but in the picture of Berghem, you still more admire the worn-out cart-horse, whose harder lines

lines and rougher coat better express the graces of the pencil. The lion with his rough mane, the bristly boar, the ruffled plumage of the eagle, are all objects of this sort. It is not for the greater ease of execution, as some suppose, that the artist prefers the rough to the smooth object; his composition requires it. If the history painter threw all his draperies smooth over his figures, his groups would be very awkward. In landscape painting smooth objects would produce no composition at all. Variety and contrast too he finds in rough objects, and none at all in the smooth—the effect of light and shade, the richness of a surface and the catching light, all result from rough objects.—These only give the advantage of colouring, while smooth bodies afford a uniform colour as well as surface. Not that we are to exclude every idea of smoothness from picturesque beauty.—The smooth lake, the marmoræum æquor we acknowledge to be picturesque, tho' it subsists more in reality than appearance. Were the lake spread on the canvas in one simple hue, it would be a dull object; to the eye it appears broken by various shades, by the undulations of water and the reflection of rough objects around it—it is in fact chiefly picturesque by contrast, as the beauty of an old head is improved by the smoothness of the bald pate.—If we ask why the quality of roughness makes the essential difference between the beautiful and the picturesque; after a variety of conjectures, the author shrinks from the investigation. We are baffled in our search after first principles: “in philosophy, in physics, in metaphysics, and even in the polite arts, the enquiry is equally vague, we are puzzled and bewild-

ered but not informed.”—It appears, that Sir J. Reynolds, in his letter to Mr. G. understood the term *picturesque* as synonymous with *taste*, and so applicable to Rubens and the Venetian school, not to Raphael or Michael Angelo; as it might be applied to Pope and Prior and not to Homer and Milton.—Mr. G. uses it merely to denote such objects as are proper subjects for painting, the cartoons or a flower piece being, according to his definition, equally picturesque.

In treating of picturesque travel, in the second essay, he considers first its object and then its sources of amusement.—Its object is beauty of every kind, either in art or nature; but chiefly of the species last considered.—The picturesque traveller pursues it through the scenery of nature, and tries it by the rules of painting; he seeks it among all the ingredients of *landscape*, which in themselves are infinitely varied; they are varied secondly by combinations, and again almost as much by lights and shades and other aerial effects.—Sometimes they exhibit a whole, but oftener only beautiful parts.—Sublimity alone does not make an object of picturesque, it must necessarily be connected with some degree of beauty, as the ocean, unaccompanied by circumstances, loses its sublime character.—The curious fantastic forms of nature, the spiry pinnacle and castle-like rock, do not please the picturesque eye: it is fond of the simplicity of nature, and sees most beauty in her most usual forms: the Giants' Causeway strikes as a novelty, the Lake of Killarney gives delight: it would repose in the sweet vales of Switzerland, but glances only through the glaciers of Savoy. But it examines not

not only the form and composition of objects, it connects them with the infinitely varied effects of the atmosphere.—Besides the inanimate face of nature, and its living forms of men and animals and every shape of being, it ranges also through the limits of the arts, and surveys the picture, the statue, the garden: it is most eagerly inquisitive after the elegant relics of ancient architecture, the gothic arch, the ruined castle and abbey.—From the objects of picturesque travel we turn to its sources of amusement, or, what is higher than amusement, when in the search of beauty we look up to the great origin of all beauty, the first good, first perfect and first fair.—The primary source of amusement to the picturesque traveller is the pursuit of his object, when novelty meets him at every step, and every distant horizon promises a fresh gratification.—After the pursuit we attain the object; we now examine the scenes we have discovered, we examine them as a whole, the composition, colouring and light under one comprehensive view. But we are more commonly employed in analysing the parts of scenes, we try to amend the composition, to find how little is wanting to reduce it to the rules of our art, and how slight the limit between beauty and deformity.—But our supreme delight arises, where a grand scene opens to the eye and arrests every faculty of the soul, when we rather feel than survey it.—Our next amusement is to enlarge and correct our general stock of ideas; by acquisition and comparison we grow learned in nature's works, and become more familiarly and accurately acquainted with her.—We may amuse ourselves too to sketch out with a few strokes

those ideas that have most pleased us, to recal and retain the scenery, and even the splendid colouring which existed in the real scene.—By a correct knowledge of objects we have the power of creating and representing scenes of fancy, yet suitable to the reality of nature, when aided by the cultivation of taste and chastened by the rules of art, and by the vigorous powers of imagination we can convert the barren waste into a fruitful source of amusement.

The third essay comprises a great number of minute rules for the practice of sketching and colouring, and the art of perspective—which being very concise in themselves are not susceptible of abridgment. They appear to be directed by the nicest skill and taste, grounded on his own happy experience, and accompanied with a few prints well calculated to illustrate the rules by an immediate example.—There follows a didactic poem of considerable length, in which while he displays the science of a painter, he gives very happy proofs that he possesses the kindred spirit of a poet. The poem receives much additional value from the commentary annexed.

But the best illustration of the author's ideas will be found in the elegant publications, to which we shall refer the reader—these consist of the following works.

*Observations on the river Wye and several parts of South Wales, &c. relative chiefly to picturesque beauty, made in the summer of the year 1770. Northern Tour, made in the year 1772.*

*Observations on several parts of Great Britain, particularly the Highlands of Scotland—made in the year 1776.*

Remarks