

THE
AMATEUR'S ASSISTANT
OR,
A SERIES OF INSTRUCTIONS

IN
SKETCHING FROM NATURE, THE
APPLICATION OF PERSPECTIVE,
TINTING OF SKETCHES,
DRAWING IN WATER-COLOURS,
TRANSPARENT PAINTING,
&c. &c.

TO ACCOMPANY THE SUBJECTS WHICH FORM
THE PORTABLE DIORAMA

By JOHN CLARK.

He who enlarges his curiosity after the works of Nature,
demonstrably multiplies the inlets to happiness.

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Dr. JOHNSON.

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ON SKETCHING FROM NATURE.

THE taste for drawing, which so generally prevails, is calculated to increase the desire of the amateur and the tourist to retain remembrances of the *spots* they have visited. Sketching from nature may be considered one of those acquirements which a little application will place within our reach.

Mr. Nicholson, in the Introduction to his admirable Series of Instruction in Drawing in Water-Colours, says, "Many of the advantages of travel are lost to, or beyond the reach of, those who are not qualified by some knowledge of art to delineate on the spot a beautiful scene in nature, or the interesting remains of ancient magnificence; a power which, by moderate application, any person may acquire." Sir Joshua Reynolds, in his discourses delivered at the Royal Academy, says, "When the arts were in their infancy, the power of merely drawing the likeness of any object. was considered as one of its greatest efforts: the common people, ignorant of the principles of art, talk the same language even to this day; but when it was found that every man could be taught to do this merely by the observance of certain precepts, the name of genius then shifted its application, and was given only to those who added the peculiar character of the object they represented; to those who had invention, expression, grace, or dignity; or, in short, such qualities or excellences, the production of which could not then be taught by any known and promulgated rules."

The great and liberal mind of Reynolds sought not to conceal from others the lights which he had perceived and felt; he therefore declared, "that nothing was denied to well-directed labour."

"Labour" may be a term perhaps irreconcilable to those who imagine, that by genius alone the art of delineating from nature can be acquired: alas! want of application is a real deficiency of genius! The attainment of the higher departments of art may perhaps require as much genius as knowledge; but to such extended pursuits these observations are not directed.

Dr. Knox says, "They whose natural feelings have been improved by culture, know from experience how the manners are polished, and the temper sweetened, by a well-directed study of the art of imitation."

Perhaps no quotation is necessary to shew the value of the ability to transfer to a sketch-book the resemblance of scenes or objects we shall probably have but one opportunity of beholding in nature: it is pre-eminently desirable, and it is unquestionably attainable; or if there be a preventive to the universal diffusion of the art of sketching from nature, it is to be found in imaginary difficulties.

The art by which an idea is conveyed from "Indus to the Pole" was formerly an acquisition so great that its possessor ranked above his fellows; Time rolled on; the knowledge of writing became so widely diffused, that disgrace was attached to those who were not masters of it. This was not the effect of all-powerful genius, but of well-directed perseverance, before which a host of difficulties will quickly vanish.

Sketching from nature is without doubt a portion of the Fine Arts easily attained by all who wish to exercise the pencil for their amusement. The inducements are various, and the gratification is of a superior order. A few lines will give a better idea of a distant scene than pages of elaborate description; every effort is attended by proportionate increase of knowledge, and what is thus obtained is permanent.

Copying from nature requires no greater mental exertion than copying from a print or a drawing; and the advantages of the former are sufficiently obvious.

The pleasure derived from the sketch-book is universally acknowledged: when it is opened, who is not anxious to examine its contents? who is not delighted, if not instructed, by the information it communicates? Indeed the general concurrence of polished society has given to this department of the Fine Arts an elevation of character that places it in a prominent situation amongst those pursuits which embellish and render life delightful.

The desire to possess the power of sketching from nature, to be enabled to feel and to retain the appearances of objects, is frequently expressed: the taste and intellectual curiosity, which this desire

evinces, cannot fail to meet with ample gratification; a little perseverance will prove how easily the supposed impediments may be overcome; how soon the eye and the hand become familiar with the means by which the outlines of objects are acquired.

There are some particulars worthy of notice respecting the degree of acquirement in the use of the pencil, obtained either from having received the rudiments of drawing from a master, or from the practice of copying the works of others as an amusement directed solely by tasteful inclination: in the former, what may be termed the mechanism of the art will have been obtained; in the latter, from the variety of styles that may have been imitated, a considerable knowledge of opposition of form and character will have been acquired: if to either of these be added an intimacy with art arising from an attentive examination of the productions of different artists, or what may be more valuable, the contemplation of those instructive pictures which nature exhibits, it will be of the greatest importance to the attainment of success in sketching from nature.

In the absence of all knowledge of design, if there be inclination to pursue the study, there must be taste; and as application renders the use of the pencil, familiar, the judgment will assist in communicating a manner by which to express the outlines of forms.

Let the simple subject of No.1. Plate I be considered as a few lines expressive of memorial, or the stenography of the view of a cottage: if it be copied, the mind should be occupied upon what each particular line is to portray, the intention of the line, and the reasons for the variety of lines; all of which tend to increase the intimacy with the subject, and prevent absurd deviations; since it cannot be supposed that a line, as exhibited at the angle of a house while thought was occupied upon it could be imitated by any other than a perpendicular line.

Diagonals and curves are subjected to similar results; proportions and relative situations of parts present themselves to the mind, if the process of copying be regulated by adherence to the due understanding of a line before it is committed to the paper. The eye and the hand are necessary to the machinery; but judgement is the directing agent: judgment improves in proportion as it is exercised; to it the eye and the hand are obedient; and, that practice makes perfect, is to be admitted in sketching from nature as readily as in any other branch of education.

Like all other studies, the art of sketching must be progressively acquired; but a pleasing style or taste in delineation is less difficult of attainment perhaps than an equal degree of proficiency in many other branches of polite, education.

They who have never observed the gradations by which art is acquired, who see only what is the result of labour and application, conclude, from their inability to do the same at once, that it is not only unattainable by them, but that it can only be performed by those who have the gift of inspiration. Such untaught minds find a vast gulf between their own powers and those of complicated art which they are

utterly unable to fathom; and they suppose that such a void can be passed only by supernatural powers." Such were the remarks of Sir Joshua Reynolds; and they may still be reiterated, notwithstanding the advancement of general learning since the days of that great man.