

OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

PRESENT STATE

OF THE

ROYAL ACADEMY:

WITH

CHARACTERS OF LIVING PAINTERS.

BY AN OLD ARTIST.

“~~NOTHING~~ NOTHING EXTENUATE,

“NOR SET DOWN AUGHT IN MALICE.”

SHAKSPEARE.

L O N D O N :

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O B S E R V A T I O N S
O N T H E
P R E S E N T S T A T E
O F T H E
R O Y A L A C A D E M Y, &c.

THE institution of the Royal Academy is, with great propriety, considered as a national honour. It is among the glories of the present reign;—and when the future historian shall record the events of it, the Sovereign who formed this admirable establishment, will, among his other great and merited titles, be described as the nursing Father of the Arts:—A title, which, in whatever view it may be considered, must add to the dignity and reputation of the first monarch in the world.—It has increased his present fame, and will endear his memory to future ages.

Whether we consider the national splendor, the humanizing refinement, or the commercial advantages which proceed from the Arts,—the benefits arising from the cultivation of them will appear to satisfy our public pride, to improve our private manners, and increase our general interests. The establishment of the Royal Academy, may, therefore, not only be considered as arising from particular taste, but from patriot ambition and political wisdom.

To rival the nations of Europe in those works of Art which were the pride of Greece, the distinguishing boast of an Augustan age, and have given to the Medici family the bloodless and unperishable wreath of fame, is an object worthy of a wise Prince, and an enlightened people. The Royal Academy, therefore, being the first school established in this country, to nourish the infant Arts into strength and beauty, is an object of great national concern; and any circumstance which may tend to obstruct or promote its advancement, must be considered as a public evil or a public blessing.

I am not governed by a false enthusiasm for those Arts which were the study of my youth, the profession of my more advanced life, and have procured me that support which makes old age comfortable, when I deliver it as my opinion, that the present schism in the Royal Academy is a national misfortune; as it tends to disgrace a body of men on whom the cultivation of the Arts, in a great measure, depend. It is my design, therefore, to relate
with

with candour, the real history of those divisions among the Royal Academicians, which at present engage the public attention; and to hold forth to the public censure those men who have been the principal promoters of them.

In performing this task, I am neither actuated by professional envy or personal resentment: it is long since I have had the least cause for the one, and I am now arrived at a period, when it would be a crime in me to cherish the other. I am, in truth, governed by patriot motives,—by a love for the Arts, which are protected by a patriot King, and whose advancement must, for the best reasons, be the wish of every patriot mind. I shall not, surely, perform an unacceptable service in offering such a display of the illiberal professors of a liberal profession to the public, as may deter them in future from sacrificing the duty they owe to their Royal Master, the prosperity of the institution he has committed to their care, and the honourable esteem of their country, to the gratification of selfish passions; the fancies of a wayward caprice, or the views of private ambition.

The Royal Diploma elevates the person on whom it is conferred to a station of honour, which it becomes him to maintain, by fulfilling the duties of it; and the liberty of the press will be profitably employed in bringing those men, who pervert the favour of their Sovereign, and the interests of an institution of which he has appointed them the guardians, to the bar of the public. As private individuals, they may not, perhaps, justify the consequence which I

impart to them; but I call them forth, clad in the investiture of their public character, to public examination.

The immediate cause of the present disturbed state of the Royal Academy may be clearly explained, by a brief relation of the following circumstances.

Sir JOSHUA REYNOLDS possessed a very anxious desire to procure the vacant Professorship of Perspective in the Academy for Mr. *Bononi*, an Italian Architect; and as that Artist was not an Academician, it became a necessary step to raise him to that situation, in order to qualify him for the office to which Sir Joshua wished to elevate him: the President, therefore, determined, as it is called, *to carry him through*;—that is, to obtain his election as an Associate, on the first opportunity, and then to avail himself of the earliest vacancy to get him chosen an Academician:—the appointment of the Professorship was then to follow.—Such was the plan of the patronising Knight; and he, probably, expected to find a continuance of that subservient disposition among the Academicians, which he had long been accustomed to receive from them.

Though an English Artist, I am, by no means, averse to the electing such foreigners into the Academic body as are qualified to do honour to the institution, and to advance the objects of it: at the same time, I do not perfectly comprehend upon what principles a foreigner should be preferred to a native of this country, when

when the latter is equally accomplished as an Artist, or a Professor. In the present instance, there was an Englishman who was already an Associate, and had supplied the vacant chair of the Professor of Perspective for a considerable time, with great ability, and general approbation. The person to whom I allude is Mr. EDWARDS,—a man of superior science in his department, of approved talents and excellent character, whose only recommendation to professional employment, is his professional skill; and whose merits, as a man, consist in nothing more than a virtuous life, and sharing the gains which his talents procure him with an aged and an helpless mother:—He has no Lord to protect and patronise him:—while Mr. Bonomi, possessing that advantage from the partial favour of the Earl of Aylesford, was most warmly supported by Sir Joshua Reynolds. The peculiar merits which have recommended the Italian Artist to the ardent patronage of the noble Lord, have not been communicated to me. What improvements he may have suggested at *Packington*, I know not; but, whatever his distinguishing excellencies may be, I will venture to assert, without the least apprehension of any authoritative contradiction, that he is not, in any degree, so well qualified for the Academical Professorship as Mr. Edwards; as I am informed, that his mode of practising perspective is derived from principles which have been exploded, to demonstration, by Mr. Brooke Taylor, in the best Treatise ever published on that branch of design.* When, therefore,

* Certain drawings of *Clerisseau*, the French Architect, which had been thrown into perspective by Mr. *Bonomi*, were given to Mr. *Malton* to copy, who found them

therefore, Sir Joshua Reynolds recommended Mr. Bonomi to be elected an Associate, as an essential step towards his appointment to the Professorship of Perspective, it was suggested, by the mild and ingenuous zeal of Mr. Paul Sandby, that the Academy already possessed an Associate (meaning Mr. Edwards), who was eminently qualified for that office; and who had, for some time, performed the duties of it, to the entire satisfaction of all who were capable of forming a right judgment of the manner in which he fulfilled them.

The President did not deny the truth of a declaration which came from such respectable authority, but silenced at once the honest opposition of the worthy Academician, by asserting, in the most positive manner, but without offering to produce any authority for his assertion, that Mr. Edwards had declined to enlist himself as a candidate with Mr. Bonomi.—It is painful for me to add, but the fact is, Sir Joshua had no justifiable authority to make such a declaration;—and, in so doing, he was guilty of a deception, as a public character, presiding in the Academy, which, I trust, he could never have brought himself to practise in his private capacity.—Indeed, he had been so long in the habit of dictating from his gilded chair, and had been so

them so unscientifically managed, that he was under the necessity of adjusting to them an entire new linear arrangement.—Some time after, they were consigned to the hammer of the Auctioneer; when Mr. Bonomi was so ignorant as not to perceive the alterations his perspective had undergone,—or so uncandid as to adopt the corrections of superior science as his own original work.

continually

continually flattered by the submission of those over whom he presided, that, perhaps, he chose rather to hazard a falsehood, though degrading to his honour, than suffer a diminution of that dignity which was so dear to his pride.

The election therefore proceeded,—and Mr. GILPIN, an artist of the first eminence in his line of painting, to the disgrace of the Academy, was, at this period of its institution, and at this period of his life, a competitor for the Associateship with the Italian Architect:—The numbers on the ballot proved equal,—and the President gave the casting vote *for his friend, Mr. Bonomi*;—who was, thereby, advanced so far towards the Professorship he was promised.—On the vacancy of an Academic seat, by the death of Mr. Meyers,—Sir JOSHUA REYNOLDS exerted all his influence to obtain it for his friend, as the final qualification for the office to which he had destined him:—But a spirit of resistance appeared, which made him tremble for the success of his design:—He, therefore, employed art, stratagem, and menace*, to effect those purposes which he could not obtain by the fair solicitation of an honourable canvass.

On the evening of the election, he had ordered certain drawings of his favourite candidate to be placed in the Council-room, for

* Sir Joshua's friends do not deny his declaration, that if Mr. Bonomi was not elected an Academician, he would withdraw himself from the Academy.

the inspection of the electors, and, if possible, to create a bias, of some kind or other, in favour of the designer of them.—Such a proceeding had no precedent in the practice of Academic elections, and was founded in the most evident partiality and injustice. The object of the meeting was to chuse an Academician, and the being an Associate was the only qualification required, by the laws of the institution, to become a candidate for that honour. The possession of professional ability and science, is presupposed, by the having been elected an Associate ;—so that foisting in any professional specimen of the talents of any one candidate, was a most flagrant injustice to every other, as well as a very gross insult to the Academy itself.

The President, nevertheless, placed the drawings on the table with his own hands, acknowledged that they were brought to the Council-room by his orders, and he would probably have proceeded to expatiate on the merits of them, when it was suggested, by a very respectable member, that they were assembled to elect an Academician, and not a Professor of Perspective ; and that, consequently, the introduction of the drawings, then before them, was a premature, a partial, and an unjust measure, which he should oppose, by moving that they be immediately removed.

I shall not endeavour to describe the amiable ardor of Mr. BARRY'S eloquence, in controverting this proposition.—He, who had formerly, with his fist clenched in the very face of the
 President,

President, threatened him with a personal assault when his measures were right, now seemed disposed to offer the same insult to any one who should dare to oppose them; when they were wrong.—I have, indeed, reserved a page for the portrait of this furious artist, where he shall appear with that glow of colouring, which, even his inflammatory genius has never been able to communicate to any canvas. The motion, however, was carried, the drawings were of course removed, and Mr. FUSELI was elected an Academician, by a majority of two to one.—The President then quitted the chair with an air of indignant dissatisfaction, and, as it has since appeared, with a determination never to resume it.

On the following day, as I have been credibly informed, he sent a letter of resignation to the Secretary of the Academy, which, from the intemperate language of it, he was persuaded to withdraw; and another, to the same effect, but written in terms that approached somewhat nearer to propriety and moderation, was substituted in its stead.—But still he thought proper to let it appear that he quitted the Presidency of the Academy, because he could no longer be the tyrant of it.—The resolution which he had taken, he was determined to maintain;—the wishes of the King, that he should recall his resignation, and which were conveyed to him in the most flattering manner, were resisted;—the condescension of his Sovereign could not heal his wounded pride;—and, in a short time, the name of Sir Joshua Reynolds

Reynolds will no longer be seen among the Academicians of Great Britain.

Having offered this short, but, I believe, correct history of the late secession of Sir Joshua Reynolds from the Royal Academy, I shall proceed to consider him a little more at large, in the distinct characters of a Gentleman, an Artist, a Critic, and a President of the Institution from which he has withdrawn himself

In representing him in the first of these characters, I do not mean, in the most distant manner, to suggest, that other Artists have not a claim to that title; but Sir Joshua Reynolds, from some fortunate connections which he made in the early part of his life,—from his eminence as a Portrait Painter,—the fortune he acquired by his art,—his elegant mode of living,—his general information, with the candour in which he knows how to clothe his opinions, and the amiable manners he can, at any time, assume,—as well as from his courtly disposition to pay all due respect to persons in superior station, he most certainly contrived to move in a sphere of society in which no other Painter was seen to accompany him. Here then he was only known as an Artist of superior talents, and as a man of the most mild and pleasing demeanour; and they, who never saw him in any other position, are justified in supporting the eulogiums which it has been the fashion, among the elegant literati, both male and female, to pass upon him. The tricks of his pencil,—the prejudice

dice

dice of his criticism, and his over-bearing love of power, are not known, or at least believed among them; and if the voice of truth were to censure, but in a whisper, the favourite Artist, it would be mistaken by his fashionable admirers for the tongue of envy. Hence it is, that the amiable Muse of Mr. Jerningham has been induced to throw away her beauties on a subject of which she was not correctly informed.—She compares the Members of the Royal Academy to the Children of Lear, who turned their aged and bounteous father out of doors;—but the inaccuracy of this comparison cannot be mistaken, when it is considered, that the maddening King hurried from the palaces of his ungrateful daughters, because he had given every thing *to them*,—while the angry President withdraws from the Royal Academy, because he could not keep every thing *to himself*.

A sketch of Sir Joshua Reynolds as an Artist, must now be attempted.

The opinion he has given of RAPHAEL may, with justice, be applied to himself—“ That his materials were generally borrowed, but the noble structure was his own.” No one ever appropriated the ideas of others to his own purpose with more skill, than the late President. He possessed the alchymy of painting, by converting, as it were, whatever he touched into gold. From a wooden print at the top of an halfpenny ballad he would form a very beautiful picture. The works of PARMECIANO, in particular, have proved an exhaustless mine to him, and afforded

much, if not all, of that grace, which so eminently distinguishes his *female* portraits. Some of the works of this Master, as well as of Michael Angelo and Polidore, he has copied, on his own canvas, line for line, without any thing like an attempt to hide the plagiarism of his pencil ; though in one of his lectures, when he is recommending to the students the practice of stealing, he offers the example of the Lacedæmonians, who never punished theft, but the want of skill to conceal it. Sir Joshua, therefore, is deficient in the faculty of invention ; but it is, nevertheless, well supplied by the superior judgment and taste with which he makes his selections from the works of his predecessors in the Art.

The compositions of his portraits are unquestionably excellent ;— those of his historical pictures extremely defective, which too often consist of borrowed parts, not always suited to each other. As in his general practice he had little or no occasion for anatomical knowledge, he never applied himself to the acquisition of it. When, however, some attention to this branch of science was necessary to his historical subjects, it was his custom to have recourse to prints, from whence he borrowed as his judgment or fancy directed him ; and though they are both of a superior cast, yet the best possible arrangement, upon such principles, could never produce that *tout ensemble*—that *entire whole*—which constitutes the merit of a perfect composition.

For similar reasons he is equally deficient in design. If Sir Joshua Reynolds had studied drawing, he might have rivalled

MICHAEL

MICHAEL ANGELO himself;—but, as anatomical skill is not essential to drapery, he never troubled himself about it.

In light and shade, in colouring and expression, the late President stands without a rival.—His lights display the drawing he knows, and his shades conceal his defects. Whether we consider the power, the brilliance, or the form of his lights;—the transparency and depth of his shadows, with the just quantities of each, and the harmony, richness and full effect of the whole, I am most willing to declare, that, in my opinion, he has not only far transcended every modern master, but, that his excellencies, in these captivating parts of painting, vie with the works of the great models he has emulated.—To the grandeur, the truth, and the simplicity of **TITIAN**, he has united the chasteness and delicacy of **VANDYKE**, with the daring strength of **REMBRANDT**.—Delighted with the picturesque beauties of **RUBENS**, he was the first that attempted a bright and gay background; and, defying the dull and ignorant rules of his master, he, at a very early period of his life, emancipated his art from the shackles with which it had been encumbered in the school of **HUDSON**.—Indeed, from the time he left it, I have reason to believe, that he very rarely, if ever, copied a single picture of any master;—imitate them all he certainly did; and his versatility, in this respect, is equalled only by the susceptibility of his feelings, the quickness of his comprehension, and the ardor which prompted his efforts.—His principal aim, however, was colour and effect, which he always varied as the subject required;

quired; and that right judgment which accompanied him in the business of obscuring, with shadow, those parts he could not draw, assisted him in adopting such pictures for imitation, as were congenial to the character he was about to represent.—This practice is evident in almost every production of his pencil;—but it should, at the same time, be observed, that, though a fervile imitator of forms, he never adopted more than the general character of colour:—For forms are only to be acquired by continual practice, and Sir Joshua had never taken the trouble to acquire them; while the power of colouring may be obtained by the more tranquil operations of reason and observation;—and it is a principle common to the art, and of course known to every Artist, that the mass of colour which predominates in a picture, is, as it were, a key for every other part of it. Hence it appears, that whatever deficiencies there may be in the design of this great living master, no Painter, of any period, better understood the principles of colouring; and, that he has carried that branch of the art to a very high degree of perfection.

But alas, while we are thus delighted with the beauties of his pencil, we sigh with the melancholy sentiment of Xerxes, that, in a few short years, they will be seen no more.—My pen almost refuses to compose the reflection, that many of his best pictures will be faded away before the present rising generation shall be qualified to judge of, and to be charmed by them.—Wax and varnish enabled him to give every thing that could be desired in
colour;

colour;—but wax will reassume its natural opacity, and the beautiful tints quit their short-lived lustre for ever. The *Nativity*, at *Belvoir Castle*, a picture which maintains a splendid situation, though surrounded by some of the best works of the greatest masters;—a picture on which Sir Joshua declared to the noble purchaser, that he depended for the praise of posterity, is already advancing to decay.

As for his portraits—those of dignified characters have a certain air of grandeur; and those of women and children possess a grace, beauty, and simplicity, which have seldom been equalled, and never surpassed; and though, sometimes, in his attempts to give character, where it did not exist, he has lost likeness, the deficiencies of the portrait were often compensated by the beauty of the picture.

As a critic—I speak of professional criticism—he was frequently mistaken, and sometimes prejudiced.—His lectures possess considerable merit, though his present champion, Mr. *Barry*, has formerly treated them with a degree of contempt, that most of his own paintings would scarcely be thought to deserve.—His observations on the old masters are equally just and ingenious. Some branches of his theory are treated with judgment and ability; nevertheless, Sir Joshua has been known to purchase copies, instead of originals—and to deviate, in his own pictures, from those instructions of his Academic chair, which were to guide the students of the present period.—In stealing from former
masters,

masters, he recommends concealment, and he himself disdains to hide his thefts.—He tells us, that, except in ludicrous subjects, none of the personages of a picture ought to be represented as looking out of it:—His Nativity, therefore, according to this rule, is a ludicrous subject, as Joseph is looking at the spectator, and pointing to the infant.

With respect to living Artists, he has ever been cautious and circumspect, both as to his praise or censure:—Like the Egyptians of old, he waits till death has consigned a brother painter to the tomb, before he ventures to try his living merits.—I am not afraid to risk the assertion that, during Mr. *Wilson's* life, the President would not have dared to broach the opinion concerning the works of that eminent Artist, which, since his death, he has hazarded, in a lecture delivered to the students of the Royal Academy*.—I shall not hesitate to declare it to be a mean, insidious and false attack upon the professional reputation of one of the first Landscape-painters of this or any other country.—The ridicule, however, which he endeavours to throw on Mr. *Wilson*, retorts upon himself;—for, surely, if the introduction of Pagan divinities are heterogencous to the character of landscape, the inventions of Christian superstition are equally inadmissible in historical design: and, if this be true, what becomes of the imp, or demon, or fiend, or devil, call it which you will, that Sir Joshua has thought proper to place at the bolster of Cardinal Beaufort, in his very fine picture, in the SHAKSPEARE GALLERY!—

* See the last Lecture delivered by Sir Joshua Reynolds.

In the same lecture he certainly bestowed, to all appearance, a very flattering eulogium on the talents of the late Mr. *Gainsborough*, but it is wholly confined to his merit as a Landscape-painter, in which he could not rival that of the President; and was so artfully managed as to condemn him in the character of a Painter of Portraits, in which he had, for many years interfered, not only with Sir Joshua's professional reputation, but the emoluments he derived from it.—The friends of the late President may, indeed, wish to have him considered, rather as a bad critic than a bad man, and no endeavours of mine shall be employed to influence their choice.

As President of the Royal Academy, the love of power,—the thirst of rule,—and a dictatorial spirit have been evident, from the beginning of his administration to the close of it.—I shall not enter on the unpleasing task of enumerating proofs which are in my recollection.—It is sufficient, at present, that I have made the assertion, which they shall be brought forward to support, if any one shall hazard a public contradiction of it*.

It would be folly in the extreme to deny, as Mr. BARRY has so often done, at former periods, that Sir Joshua has procured for the profes-

* They who have been honoured by an occasional intimacy with Mr. Barry, will not be at a loss for examples.—The manner in which the President's conduct, on the attempt to remove Mr. Sheldon from the Anatomical Professorship, was, for some time, represented by Mr. Barry's eloquence, is, I believe, in the remembrance of many very worthy, and very astonished people.

fors of the Arts, a consequence and a reception which they did not possess, but with very few exceptions, before the period when he first rose into eminence.—It must be acknowledged also, that, at the establishment of the Royal Academy; he was the most fit, if not the only person, properly qualified, every circumstance considered, to be the President of it: nor shall I refuse to admit, that, from his professional rank, his large fortune, the circle of society in which he moved, and the manner in which he lived, as well as the personal consequence attached to the President's chair, he naturally and properly possessed a certain leading influence in the Councils of the Royal Academy;—an influence which, if it had been employed with moderation, would never have been opposed; and even exercised as it was, with frequent partiality and injustice, was, in a great measure submitted to, from the first establishment of the Academy to the election of Mr. *Fuseli*.

But I cannot assent to the opinion of Sir Joshua's particular Academical adherents, and of many respectable persons, who have only seen him in his works, or known him in private society, that his secession from the Academy will occasion the downfall of it.—Nay, I cannot consider the event even as a misfortune;—on the contrary, I really and firmly believe that it will turn out to the advantage of the Royal Institution; as an influence, which has predominated to the selfish purposes of particular patronage, caprice, and ambition, will be removed; and, of course, the natural equality of power which belongs to the society

ciet̄y at large, be no longer swallowed by one overbearing and tyrannical individual.—In fact, the name of Sir Joshua Reynolds and that of the Royal Academy seem to have been considered by the generality of the nation, as synonymous expressions; as if the latter had been established for no other purpose than to gratify the pride, and elevate the name of the former; for, as the power of the Academy was drawn to the vortex of Sir Joshua's ambition, the merits of its members seem to have been thrown into shadow, and the brilliance of the Academic picture to have rested only on the figure of the President.

In the annual Exhibitions people have, somehow or other, been habituated to reserve all their admiration for the pictures of *Reynolds*; and methods have been contrived to disgust many of those Artists who would have divided the public applause with him:—Mr. *Gainsborough*, for many years before his death, had refused to exhibit any of his admirable Paintings;—and many others, whose works are an honour to their art, and favoured with the public applause, have complained, without reserve and without refutation, of the strange neglect and pointed inattention of the Royal Academy. Hence it is, that for some years past, the *public Exhibitions at Somerset-house* have been disgraceful to the British School:—But Sir Joshua Reynolds very well knew, that a man of the largest human growth, must be surrounded with pigmies to appear a Colossus.

It is loudly vociferated, by some of the late President's advocates, that, among other distressing consequences, his withdrawing himself from the Academy will cause it to be no longer regarded by the numerous great and noble characters whom he had enlisted among its friends.—It is almost beneath me to give an answer to such a senseless opinion; and, if it were not among the proofs that it had been the constant object of Sir Joshua Reynolds to make himself considered as the main support of the institution, I should not have favoured it with a moment's attention.—Indeed, I do not know, or understand, in what manner he has attached the first people of this country to the interests of the Academy, unless he conceived, which, by the bye, is not improbable, that every person who sat to him for a portrait, added another name to the list of its protectors.—The Prince of Wales is one of the number.—His Royal Highness has also frequently honoured the annual Academical dinner with his presence; nevertheless, I do not find that the Academy has derived any benefit from these compliments which he has condescended to pay to the President of it.—The improvements and re-improvements of Carlton-house, have given employment, I believe, but to one Academician; and the conduct of the Prince, in chusing an *Academic* Miniature-painter, though of the first eminence, to paint a ceiling, is as injudicious as the employing an *un-academic* Architect, of no eminence at all, to build his palace.—Of the work of the former I can only express my apprehension, as I have never seen it;—of the abilities of the latter, with which every one is acquainted who passes through
Pall-Mall,

Pall-Mall, I entertain an opinion in common with the rest of mankind.—Nay, so very mean an idea does the Prince entertain of the whole class of British Artists, that the decorations of Carlton-house are consigned to the arrangement and taste of foreigners, expressly invited into this country, to be employed in his Royal service.—This circumstance I believe is notorious; and Mr. Holland himself ventures to complain of it.—Several of the Bishops are also among the old and boasted friends of Sir Joshua Reynolds; nevertheless, the gratuitous offer of the Academic body to decorate St. Paul's, has been piously refused.

The Academy, however, possesses the Royal Patronage of its Founder, which, taken in all its consequences, is sufficient protection;—and, as long as its members are Artists of the first eminence, it will command the support of the nation.—Its honour and its prosperity are in its own power, as they depend on the talents and conduct of those who compose it;—and, while public spirit prevails over private cabal in its regulations and elections, its character will be maintained, its utility advanced, and the end of its establishment be fully answered.—Besides,—the President has quitted the chair in a manner which will not justify the partial and powerful friends he is said to possess, in professing any other sentiment on the occasion than that of concern and compassion.—He has not retired from his public situation with the dignity of a great character, but with the petulance of a little mind.—He seems to have acted with that spirit
of

of unreflecting resentment, which actuates the soul of an angry, jealous, violent and doting lover, when he gives back the portrait of his mistress, whom he at once hates and adores.

But, after all, what or where is this vaunted patronage of the great?—And to whom, among the rich and titled men of this country, are the arts invited to look up as their patrons and protectors?—I am sorry to confess that it is not in my power to answer the question. Nay, it appears to me, that the *BOYDELLS*, by their establishment of the *SHAKSPEARE* Gallery, have a better claim to the homage of the Arts, than the aggregate body of the nobility and gentry of Great Britain.

In short, I cannot but think, that if the late President had possessed any friends of high rank, or great character, who feel themselves interested to preserve his honour, they would have exerted their influence to have averted his present disgrace.—Nor would they have left his cause to the support, and his conduct to the justification of Artists alone; and such Artists as *Barry*, *Opie*, and *Northcote*.—But so it is; and, as these men are the only avowed and clamorous champions of his cause, I shall beg leave to consider how far they do honour to it,—and what rank they are entitled to hold in Sir Joshua's profession.

BARRY has not an eye for colour, or he considers it as beneath his notice.—Not one solitary example of tolerable colouring has
been

been produced by his pencil*.—His compositions are, in general, as eccentric as himself.—But his design is oftentimes good, and frequently possesses somewhat of style and grandeur. He has studied the antique, and understands it.—Indeed it is the only branch of his art for which he has any feeling; and, when he is engaged in subjects where he cannot apply it, he sinks into the lowest rank of Artists.—It is then that he paints such pictures as the *Death of General Wolfe*, and *Dr. Burney* sporting with the *Water-nymphs*.—Yet this is the man who, with a degree of arrogance which no knowledge or talents can justify, holds himself forth as a Painter of the first class, and as a writer of the first genius; as a man of candor and elegance, of justice and moderation!

The Lectures which he delivers, as Professor of Painting in the Royal Academy, are blessed with all the peculiarities of his character.—Among other advantages which the Academic students may reap from them, they are laboriously instructed to hold in contempt the works of Sir Joshua Reynolds;—and there is one lecture, so expressly calculated to depreciate and ridicule the talents and genius of the late President, that he has always thought it prudent to absent himself from the Academy on the evening of its delivery.—Yet this is the man, who is now become as violent in the praise, and as mean in the adulation of Sir Joshua, as he had formerly been in abusing and insulting him.—I rejoice in

* It should seem as if the only patches on his pallet were white, burnt umber and terra vert.

the conversion,—but, in the cant of Methodism, I am afraid of his being re-converted.—Nay, it is by no means improbable, that the man who now mourns over the President's chair, may be, hereafter, seen to stamp upon his grave.

I cannot mention Messrs. *Opie* and *Northcote*, the other component parts of this respectable *trio*, in any other view than as mere painters, who are taught, as I suppose, by their leader, to lament the tottering state of the Royal Academy, and to threaten that they will compleat the *downfall of its dignity*, by withdrawing themselves from its councils.

Opie is heavy, inelegant, and accidental in his characters.—If the blackguard, from whom he paints, happens to possess a head that hits his fancy, he imitates it, without any thing like discrimination—His *David Rizzio* is a dirty drayman;—his *Mary Queen of Scots* a common barrow-woman, and her lady of honour a furious lady of the town.—Yet the execution of them is bold and natural, as far as relates to simple imitation: for, to that alone are the works of his pencil confined.—He has not a mind to go beyond it.

The costive brains of *Northcote*, after much laborious exertion, produce a work, perhaps of some effect, but without taste, genius, or elegance.—As he pretends to despise the rules of art—he proceeds in defiance of them.—His *best heads* are those of affassins
and

and tyrants; which is rather an unfortunate circumstance, as he is generally said to paint them *from his own**.

I am disposed to amuse myself with the expectation that these three great Artists will employ their united powers in painting the Apotheosis of the late President.—The upper part of the picture, where Sir Joshua will be borne in due solemnity to the skies, must be consigned to the sublime genius of Mr. Barry.—The lower part of the canvas, offering a view of hell, with the Academicians who voted against Mr. Bonomi, grinning in torment, must owe all its horrors to the damning pencils of Messrs. *Opie* and *Northcote*;—and, if they should want a fiend or two to complete the whole, they may sit to each other.—Mr. *Fuseli* will then, I trust, revenge the treatment of his friends, by painting a scene in *Measure for Measure*, where he will represent the three foregoing Painters as inhabitants of “*the thrilling regions of thick-ribbed ice.*”

Having described the present state of the Royal Academy, and considered the conduct and character of the late President, and

* It is said that these Painters have the following peculiar method of composing their subjects.—They paint a great variety of heads, on separate pieces of paper, which they fix on their picture; and they fasten that which happens to suit their taste, in a hole, cut in the place it is intended to occupy.—If the account of this ingenious contrivance should be a misrepresentation, it may be easily confuted;—but, if it should be a fact, it ought to be made known, for the advancement and honour of the Art.

his particular adherents—I shall now proceed to give a slight sketch of that Artist whom, it is generally understood, the Academicians will elect to succeed him.

The invention of Mr. *West*, if I may use the expression, has no other object but mere composition.—Justness of character, fine sentiment, and the variety of expression necessary to represent the human passions, all of which are so essential to make a picture interesting, are either totally neglected, or not understood by him.

Sir *Josua Reynolds* contends that there is no such thing as genius;—Mr. *West*, therefore, may avail himself of that opinion, on the principle that we can have no occasion for a thing that does not exist.—He is perfectly satisfied when he perceives that his composition is according to the rules of art, which no one understands better than himself.—If his light makes a pleasant shape, and the whole has a *strikingly pretty effect* on the eye, at the first *coup de œil*, his object is attained.

In design he is far superior to every modern Artist;—no one can draw with more accuracy from his model; but, unfortunately, that model is always common nature, even for the most exalted subjects.—He does not attempt at style, properly so called;—neither does he select, combine, or diversify;—and, so far from approaching, with awful step, the Grecian school, he has never produced a single picture which could induce any one to imagine that he understood its principles.—His colouring is crude and unharmonious;

harmonious ;—his shadows are black and earthy ; and his outline hard and dry.—His colours, however, are always weighed out and distributed about his picture in the nicest proportions.—In short, it may be said of Mr. *West*, as Sir Joshua Reynolds has observed of Carlo Maratti, “ that he has no great defects, nor any striking beauties.”

Such is his professional character ;—but the rank he holds in the Arts,—his station as an historical-painter to the King, with the partial favour of his Sovereign, which he is known to possess, and above all, *his superior knowledge of design**, are circumstances that render him the fittest person to succeed to the Chair of the Royal Academy.—On the general, and, as I presume, well-grounded belief that he will be shortly seated there, I shall conclude these observations by suggesting to him that line of conduct which will do honour to himself, add dignity to his office, and promote the prosperity of the Royal Establishment.

* It is this qualification of Mr. West, which, considering the Royal Academy as a school of painting, will enable him, both as an example and an instructor, to be a more useful President than Sir Joshua Reynolds.—The latter is all Mind ; the former is all Art ;—and it is Art which the scholar is to learn, and not genius.—Sir Joshua disdains the rules of Art, and snatches those graces which are beyond the reach of them ;—the young Painter, therefore, who daubs, because Sir Joshua has daubed, is like the fool who purchased the lamp of Epictetus.—Nevertheless, there are too many of that description ; and I am not afraid to assert, that the example of the late President, as an Artist, has been injurious to the British School of Painting.

“ In the first place, Sir, you will do well to examine and
 “ consider the conduct of your predecessor, in order that you
 “ may adopt the wise, and avoid the mistaken parts of it.—If he
 “ should have manifested an inordinate love of power, you must
 “ act with moderation.—If he should have practised any little
 “ clandestine arts, you must adopt the better mode of open-deal-
 “ ing and sincerity.—If he should have been, at times, led away
 “ by unreflecting, or unbecoming partiality, you must be steady
 “ in the unassuming practice of candour and of justice.—If he
 “ should have made the Academy the stalking-horse of his repu-
 “ tation, you must, if circumstances should require, sacrifice
 “ your own interests to those of the Academy.

“ In your private situation, envy is undoubtedly a vice; but
 “ in that to which you will be shortly elevated, it will be-
 “ come a crime.—As an individual Artist, the means which
 “ are too often employed, in this dirty world, to promote our
 “ advantage, may be pardoned in you;—but, in a short time,
 “ you will be the mouth of the Arts, and your tongue must
 “ not utter a whisper of misrepresentation.—You know that
 “ Sir Joshua Reynolds is the first Portrait-Painter in the
 “ world, and that truth must be no longer concealed from
 “ your Royal Master.—And whenever the office of Librarian to
 “ the Academy shall again become vacant, you must not pro-
 “ mise your interest with his Majesty to two Academicians,
 “ nor

“ nor receive the separate acknowledgments of them both, for
 “ those zealous endeavours which you had employed for neither.
 “ You must study the real interest and prosperity of the Institu-
 “ tion over which you will be called to preside,—and maintain
 “ them both with dignity and with truth.—Thus will the
 “ close of your life be honourable,—and, when you are con-
 “ signed to your tomb, the Arts will adorn it.”——I am old,—
 and the period of my life is advancing fast upon me;—but, while
 I live, it will be my constant prayer that the arts may flourish,—
 that they may add to the glory of my country:—and of the
 Royal Academy, which is the nursery of them, I shall never
 cease to exclaim, *ESTO PERPETUA!*

AN OLD ARTIST.