JOHN GALT

THE LIFE, STUDIES, AND WORKS OF BENJAMIN WEST, ESQ.

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Содержание

John Galt
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Part I

To Alexander Gordon, Esq.
This little work
Is respectfully inscribed
By the Author.

Preface

The professional life of Mr. West constitutes an important part of an historical work, in which the matter of this volume could only have been introduced as an episode, and, perhaps, not with much propriety even in that form. It was my intention, at one time, to have prepared the whole of his memoirs, separately, for publication; but a careful review of the manuscript convinced me, that the transactions in which he has been engaged, subsequently to his arrival in England, are so much of a public nature, and belong so immediately to the history of the Arts, that such a separation could not be effected without essentially impairing the interest and unity of the main design; and that the particular nature of this portion of his memoirs admitted of being easily detached and arranged into a whole, complete within itself.

I do not think that there can be two opinions with respect to the utility of a work of this kind. Mr. West, in relating the circumstances by which he was led to approximate, without the aid of an instructor, to those principles and rules of art, which it is the object of schools and academies to disseminate, has conferred a greater benefit on young Artists than he could possibly have done by the most ingenious and eloquent lectures on the theories of his profession; and it was necessary that the narrative should appear in his own time, in order that the

authenticity of the incidents might not rest on the authority of any biographer.

April 25,1816.

John Galt.

Chap. I

The Birth and Paternal Ancestry of Mr. West. – His Maternal Family. – His Father. – The Origin of the Abolition of Slavery by the Quakers. – The Progress of the Abolition. – The Education of the Negroes. – The Preaching of Edmund Peckover. – His Admonitory Prediction to the Father of West. – The first Indication of Benjamin's Genius. – State of Society in Pennsylvania. – The Indians give West the Primary Colours. – The Artist's first Pencils. – The Present of a Box of Colours and Engravings. – His first Painting.

Benjamin West, the subject of the following Memoirs, was the youngest son of John West and Sarah Pearson, and was born near Springfield, in Chester County, in the State of Pennsylvania, on the 10th of October, 1738.

The branch of the West family, to which he belongs, has been traced in an unbroken series to the Lord Delawarre, who distinguished himself in the great wars of King Edward the Third, and particularly at the battle of Cressy, under the immediate command of the Black Prince. In the reign of Richard the Second, the ancestors of Mr. West settled at Long Crandon in Buckinghamshire. About the year 1667 they embraced the tenets of the Quakers; and Colonel James West, the friend and companion in arms of the celebrated Hampden, is said to have

been the first proselyte of the family. In 1699 they emigrated to America.

Thomas Pearson, the maternal grandfather of the Artist, was the confidential friend of William Penn, and accompanied him to America. On their first landing, the venerable Founder of the State of Pennsylvania said to him, "Providence has brought us safely hither; thou hast been the companion of my perils, what wilt thou that I should call this place?" Mr. Pearson replied, that "since he had honoured him so far as to desire him to give that part of the country a name, he would, in remembrance of his native City, call it Chester." The exact spot where these patriarchs of the new world first landed, is still pointed out with reverence by the inhabitants. Mr. Pearson built a house and formed a plantation in the neighbourhood, which he called Springfield, in consequence of discovering a large spring of water in the first field cleared for cultivation; and it was near this place that Benjamin West was born.

When the West family emigrated, John, the father of Benjamin, was left to complete his education at the great school of the Quakers at Uxbridge, and did not join his relations in America till the year 1714. Soon after his arrival he married the mother of the Artist; and of the worth and piety of his character we have a remarkable proof in the following transactions, which, perhaps, reflect more real glory on his family than the achievements of all his heroic ancestors.

As a part of the marriage portion of Mrs. West he received

a negro slave, whose diligence and fidelity very soon obtained his full confidence. Being engaged in trade, he had occasion to make a voyage in the West Indies, and left this young black to superintend the plantation in his absence, During his residence in Barbadoes, his feelings were greatly molested, and his principles shocked, by the cruelties to which he saw the negroes subjected in that island; and the debasing effects were forcibly contrasted in his mind with the morals and intelligence of his own slave. Conversing on this subject with Doctor Gammon, who was then at the head of the community of Friends in Barbadoes, the Doctor convinced him that it was contrary to the laws of God and Nature that any man should retain his fellow-creatures in slavery. This conviction could not rest long inactive in a character framed like that of Mr. West. On his return to America he gave the negro his freedom, and retained him as a hired servant.

Not content with doing good himself, he endeavoured to make others follow his example, and in a short time his arguments had such an effect on his neighbours, that it was agreed to discuss publicly the general question of Slavery. This was done accordingly; and, after debating it at many meetings, it was resolved by a considerable majority THAT IT WAS THE DUTY OF CHRISTIANS TO GIVE FREEDOM TO THEIR SLAVES. The result of this discussion was soon afterwards followed by a similar proposal to the head meeting of the Quakers in the township of Goshen in Chester County; and the cause of Humanity was again victorious. Finally, about the year 1753,

the same question was agitated in the annual general assembly at Philadelphia, when it was ultimately established as one of the tenets of the Quakers, that no person could remain a member of their community who held a human creature in slavery. This transaction is perhaps the first example in the history of communities, of a great public sacrifice of individual interest, not originating from considerations of policy or the exigences of public danger, but purely from moral and religious principles.

The benevolent work of restoring their natural rights to the unfortunate Negroes, did not rest even at this great pecuniary sacrifice. The Society of Friends went farther, and established Schools for the education of their children; and some of the first characters among themselves volunteered to superintend the course of instruction.

In the autumn of 1738, Edmund Peckover, a celebrated Orator among the Quakers, came to the neighbourhood of Springfield, and on the 28th of September preached in a meeting-house erected by the father of Mrs. West at the distance of about a mile and a half from his residence. Mrs. West was then the mother of nine children, and far advanced in her pregnancy with Benjamin. – Peckover possessed the most essential qualities of an impressive speaker, and on this occasion the subject of his address was of extraordinary interest to his auditors. He reviewed the rise and progress of society in America, and with an enthusiastic eloquence which partook of the sublimity and vehemence of the prophetic spirit, he predicted the future

greatness of the country. He described the condition of the European nations, decrepid in their institutions, and corrupt in their morality, and contrasted them with the young and flourishing establishments of the New World. He held up to their abhorrence the licentious manners and atheistical principles of the French, among whom God was disregarded or forgotten; and, elevated by the importance of his subject, he described the Almighty as mustering his wrath to descend on that nation, and disperse it as chaff in a whirlwind. He called on them to look towards their home of England, and to see with what eager devotion the inhabitants worshiped the golden image of Commerce, and laid the tribute of all their thoughts on its altars; believing that with the power of the idol alone, they should be able to withstand all calamities. "The day and the hour are, however, hastening on, when the image shall be shaken from its pedestal by the tempest of Jehovah's descending vengeance, its altars overturned, and the worshipers terribly convinced that without the favour of the Almighty God there is no wisdom in man! But," continued this impassioned orator, "from the woes and the crimes of Europe let us turn aside our eyes; let us turn from the worshipers of Commerce, clinging round their idols of gold and silver, and, amidst the wrath, the storm, and the thunder, endeavouring to hold them up; let us not look at the land of blasphemies; for in the crashing of engines, the gushing of blood, and the shrieking of witnesses more to be pitied than the victims, the activity of God's purifying displeasure will be heard; while

turning our eyes towards the mountains of this New World, the forests shall be seen fading away, cities rising along the shores, and the terrified nations of Europe flying out of the smoke and the burning to find refuge here." – All his auditors were deeply affected, particularly Mrs. West, who was taken with the pains of labour on the spot. The meeting was broken up; the women made a circle round her as they carried her home, and such was the agitation into which she was thrown, that the consequences had nearly proved fatal both to the mother and the infant, of which she was prematurely delivered.

This occurrence naturally excited much attention, and became the subject of general conversation. It made a deep impression on the mind of Mr. West, who could not divest himself of a feeling that it indicated something extraordinary in the future fortunes of his child; and when Peckover, soon afterwards, on his leaving that part of the country, paid him a farewell visit, he took an opportunity of introducing the subject. The warm imagination of the Preacher eagerly sympathised with the feelings of his friend. He took him by the hand, and, with emphatic solemnity, said that a child sent into the world under such remarkable circumstances would prove no ordinary man; and he charged him to watch over the boy's character with the utmost degree of paternal solicitude. It will appear in the sequel, that this singular admonition was not lost on Mr. West.

The first six years of Benjamin's life passed away in calm uniformity; leaving only the placid remembrance of enjoyment.

In the month of June 1745, one of his sisters, who had been married some time before, and who had a daughter, came with her infant to spend a few days at her father's. When the child was asleep in the cradle, Mrs. West invited her daughter to gather flowers in the garden, and committed the infant to the care of Benjamin during their absence; giving him a fan to flap away the flies from molesting his little charge. After some time the child happened to smile in its sleep, and its beauty attracted his attention. He looked at it with a pleasure which he had never before experienced, and observing some paper on a table, together with pens and red and black ink, he seized them with agitation, and endeavoured to delineate a portrait: although at this period he had never seen an engraving or a picture, and was only in the seventh year of his age.

Hearing the approach of his mother and sister, he endeavoured to conceal what he had been doing; but the old lady observing his confusion, enquired what he was about, and requested him to show her the paper. He obeyed, entreating her not to be angry. Mrs. West, after looking some time at the drawing with evident pleasure, said to her daughter, "I declare he has made a likeness of little Sally," and kissed him with much fondness and satisfaction. This encouraged him to say, that if it would give her any pleasure, he would make pictures of the flowers which she held in her hand; for the instinct of his genius was now awakened, and he felt that he could imitate the forms of those things which pleased his sight.

This curious incident deserves consideration in two points of view. The sketch must have had some merit, since the likeness was so obvious, indicating how early the hand of the young artist possessed the power of representing the observations of his eye. But it is still more remarkable as the birth of the fine arts in the New World, and as one of the few instances in the history of art, in which the first inspiration of genius can be distinctly traced to a particular circumstance. The drawing was shown by Mrs. West to her husband, who, remembering the prediction of Peckover, was delighted with this early indication of talent in his son. But the fact, though in itself very curious, will appear still more remarkable, when the state of the country at that period, and the peculiar manners of the Quakers, are taken into consideration.

The institutions of William Penn had been sacredly preserved by the descendants of the first settlers, with whom the remembrance of the causes which had led their ancestors to forsake their native country, was cherished like the traditions of religion, and became a motive to themselves, for indulging in the exercise of those blameless principles, which had been so obnoxious to the arrogant spirit of the Old World. The associates of the Wests and the Pearsons, considered the patriarchs of Pennsylvania as having been driven from England, because their endeavours to regulate their conduct by the example of Jesus Christ, mortified the temporal pretensions of those who satisfied themselves with attempting to repeat his doctrines; and they thought that the asylum in America was chosen, to

facilitate the enjoyment of that affectionate intercourse which their tenets enjoined, free from the military predilections and political jealousies of Europe. The effect of this opinion tended to produce a state of society more peaceful and pleasing than the World had ever before exhibited. When the American Poets shall in future times celebrate the golden age of their country, they will draw their descriptions from the authentic history of Pennsylvania in the reign of King George the Second.

From the first emigration in 1681, the colony had continued to thrive with a rapidity unknown to the other European Settlements. It was blessed in the maxims upon which it had been founded, and richly exhibited the fruits of their beneficent operation. At the birth of Benjamin West it had obtained great wealth, and the population was increasing much more vigorously than the ordinary reproduction of the human species in any other part of the world. In the houses of the principal families, the patricians of the country, unlimited hospitality formed a part of their regular economy. It was the custom among those who resided near the highways, after supper and the last religious exercise of the evening, to make a large fire in the hall, and to set out a table with refreshments for such travellers as might have occasion to pass during the night; and when the families assembled in the morning they seldom found that their tables had been unvisited. This was particularly the case at Springfield. Poverty was never heard of in the land. The disposition to common charity having no objects, was

blended with the domestic affections, and rendered the ties of friendship and kindred stronger and dearer. Acts of liberality were frequently performed to an extent that would have beggared the munificence of the Old World. With all these delightful indications of a better order of things, society in Pennsylvania retained, at this time, many of those respectable prejudices which gave a venerable grace to manners, and are regarded by the practical philosopher as little inferior in dignity to the virtues. William Penn was proud of his distinguished parentage, and many of his friends traced their lineage to the antient and noble families of England. In their descendants the pride of ancestry was so tempered with the meekness of their religious tenets, that it lent a kind of patriarchal dignity to their benevolence.

In beautiful contrast to the systematic morality of the new inhabitants, was the simplicity of the Indians, who mingled safe and harmless among the Friends. In the annual visits which they were in the practice of paying to the Plantations, they raised their huts in the fields and orchards without asking leave, nor were they ever molested. Voltaire has observed, that the treaty which was concluded between the Indians and William Penn was the first public contract which connected the inhabitants of the Old and New World together, and, though not ratified by oaths, and without invoking the Trinity, is still the only treaty that has never been broken. It may be further said, that Pennsylvania is the first country which has not been subdued by the sword, for the inhabitants were conquered by the force of Christian

benevolence.

When the great founder of the State marked out the site of Philadelphia in the woods, he allotted a piece of ground for a public library. It was his opinion, that although the labour of clearing the country would long employ the settlers, hours of relaxation would still be requisite; and, with his usual sagacity, he judged that the reading of books was more conducive to good morals and to the formation of just sentiments, than any other species of amusement. The different counties afterwards instituted libraries, which the townships have also imitated: where the population was insufficient to establish a large collection of books, the neighbouring families formed themselves into societies for procuring the popular publications. But in these arrangements for cultivating the powers of the understanding, no provision was made, during the reign of George the Second, for improving the faculties of taste. The works of which the libraries then consisted, treated of useful and practical subjects. It was the policy of the Quakers to make mankind wiser and better; and they thought that, as the passions are the springs of all moral evil when in a state of excitement, whatever tends to awaken them is unfavourable to that placid tenour of mind which they wished to see diffused throughout the world. This notion is prudent, perhaps judicious; but works of imagination may be rendered subservient to the same purpose. Every thing in Pennsylvania was thus unpropitious to the fine arts. There were no cares in the bosoms of individuals

to require public diversions, nor any emulation in the expenditure of wealth to encourage the ornamental manufactures. In the whole Christian world no spot was apparently so unlikely to produce a painter as Pennsylvania. It might, indeed, be supposed, according to a popular opinion, that a youth, reared among the concentrating elements of a new state, in the midst of boundless forests, tremendous waterfalls, and mountains whose summits were inaccessible to "the lightest foot and wildest wing," was the most favourable situation to imbibe the enthusiasm either of poetry or of painting, if scenery and such accidental circumstances are to be regarded as every thing, and original character as nothing. But it may reasonably be doubted if ever natural scenery has any assignable influence on the productions of genius. The idea has probably arisen from the impression which the magnificence of nature makes on persons of cultivated minds, who fall into the mistake of considering the elevated emotions arising in reality from their own associations, as being naturally connected with the objects that excite them. Of all the nations of Europe the Swiss are the least poetical, and yet the scenery of no other country seems so well calculated as that of Switzerland to awaken the imagination; and Shakespeare, the greatest of all modern Poets, was brought up in one of the least picturesque districts of England.

Soon after the occurrence of the incident which has given rise to these observations, the young Artist was sent to a school in the neighbourhood. During his hours of leisure he was permitted to

draw with pen and ink; for it did not occur to any of the family to provide him with better materials. In the course of the summer a party of Indians came to pay their annual visit to Springfield, and being amused with the sketches of birds and flowers which Benjamin shewed them, they taught him to prepare the red and yellow colours with which they painted their ornaments. To these his mother added blue, by giving him a piece of indigo, so that he was thus put in possession of the three primary colours. The fancy is disposed to expatiate on this interesting fact; for the mythologies of antiquity furnish no allegory more beautiful; and a Painter who would embody the metaphor of an Artist instructed by Nature, could scarcely imagine any thing more picturesque than the real incident of the Indians instructing West to prepare the prismatic colours. The Indians also taught him to be an expert archer, and he was sometimes in the practice of shooting birds for models, when he thought that their plumage would look well in a picture.

His drawings at length attracted the attention of the neighbours; and some of them happening to regret that the Artist had no pencils, he enquired what kind of things these were, and they were described to him as small brushes made of camels' hair fastened in a quill. As there were, however, no camels in America, he could not think of any substitute, till he happened to cast his eyes on a black cat, the favourite of his father; when, in the tapering fur of her tail, he discovered the means of supplying what he wanted. He immediately armed himself with

his mother's scissors, and, laying hold of Grimalkin with all due caution, and a proper attention to her feelings, cut off the fur at the end of her tail, and with this made his first pencil. But the tail only furnished him with one, which did not last long, and he soon stood in need of a further supply. He then had recourse to the animal's back, his depredations upon which were so frequently repeated, that his father observed the altered appearance of his favourite, and lamented it as the effect of disease. The Artist, with suitable marks of contrition, informed him of the true cause; and the old gentleman was so much amused with his ingenuity, that if he rebuked him, it was certainly not in anger.

Anecdotes of this kind, trifling as they may seem, have an interest independent of the insight they afford into the character to which they relate. It will often appear, upon a careful study of authentic biography, that the means of giving body and effect to their conceptions, are rarely withheld from men of genius. If the circumstances of Fortune are unfavourable, Nature instructs them to draw assistance immediately from herself, by endowing them with the faculty of perceiving a fitness and correspondence in things which no force of reasoning, founded on the experience of others, could enable them to discover. This aptness is, perhaps, the surest indication of the possession of original talent. There are minds of a high class to which the world, in the latitude of its expressions, often ascribes genius, but which possess only a superior capacity for the application of other men's notions, unconnected with any unusual portion of the inventive faculty.

In the following year Mr. Pennington, a merchant of Philadelphia, who was related to the West family, came to pay a visit to Mr. West. This gentleman was also a member of the Society of Friends, and, though strictly attentive to the peculiar observances of the sect, was a man of pleasant temper and indulgent dispositions. He noticed the drawings of birds and flowers round the room, unusual ornaments in the house of a Quaker; and heard with surprise that they were the work of his little cousin. Of their merit as pictures he did not pretend to judge, but he thought them wonderful productions for a boy only entering on his eighth year, and being told with what imperfect materials they had been executed, he promised to send the young Artist a box of paints and pencils from the city. On his return home he fulfilled his engagement, and at the bottom of the box placed several pieces of canvass prepared for the easel, and six engravings by Grevling.

The arrival of the box was an æra in the history of the Painter and his art. It was received with feelings of delight which only a similar mind can justly appreciate. He opened it, and in the colours, the oils, and the pencils, found all his wants supplied, even beyond his utmost conceptions. But who can describe the surprise with which he beheld the engravings; he who had never seen any picture but his own drawings, nor knew that such an art as the Engraver's existed! He sat over the box with enamoured eyes; his mind was in a flutter of joy; and he could not refrain from constantly touching the different articles, to ascertain that

they were real. At night he placed the box on a chair near his bed, and as often as he was overpowered by sleep, he started suddenly and stretched out his hand to satisfy himself that the possession of such a treasure was not merely a pleasing dream. He rose at the dawn of day, and carried the box to a room in the garret, where he spread a canvass, prepared a pallet, and immediately began to imitate the figures in the engravings. Enchanted by his art he forgot the school hours, and joined the family at dinner without mentioning the employment in which he had been engaged. In the afternoon he again retired to his study in the garret; and for several days successively he thus withdrew and devoted himself to painting. The schoolmaster, observing his absence, sent to ask the cause of it. Mrs. West, affecting not to take any particular notice of the message, recollected that she had seen Benjamin going up stairs every morning, and suspecting that the box occasioned his neglect of the school, went to the garret, and found him employed on the picture. Her anger was appeased by the sight of his performance, and changed to a very different feeling. She saw, not a mere copy, but a composition from two of the engravings. With no other guide than that delicacy of sight which renders the Painter's eye, with respect to colours, what the Musician's ear is with respect to sounds, he had formed a picture as complete, in the scientific arrangement of the tints, notwithstanding the necessary imperfection of the pencilling, as the most skilful Artist could have painted, assisted by the precepts of Newton. She kissed him with transports of

affection, and assured him that she would not only intercede with his father to pardon him for having absented himself from school, but would go herself to the master, and beg that he might not be punished. The delightful encouragement which this well-judged kindness afforded to the young Painter may be easily imagined; but who will not regret that the mother's over-anxious admiration would not suffer him to finish the picture, lest he should spoil what was already in her opinion perfect, even with half the canvass bare? Sixty-seven years afterwards the writer of these Memoirs had the gratification to see this piece in the same room with the sublime painting of "Christ Rejected," on which occasion the Painter declared to him that there were inventive touches of art in his first and juvenile essay, which, with all his subsequent knowledge and experience, he had not been able to surpass.

Chap. II

The Artist visits Philadelphia. – His second Picture. – Williams the Painter gives him the works of Fresnoy and Richardson. – Anecdote of the Taylor's Apprentice. – The Drawings of the Schoolboys. – Anecdote relative to Wayne. – Anecdote relative to Mr. Flower. – Anecdote relative to Mr. Ross, – Anecdote of Mr. Henry. – The Artist's first Historical Picture. – Origin of his Acquaintance with Dr. Smith of Philadelphia. – The friendship of Dr. Smith, and the character of the early companions of West. – Anecdote of General Washington.

In the course of a few days after the affair of the painting, Mr. Pennington paid another visit to Mr. West; and was so highly pleased with the effect of his present, and the promising talents of his young relation, that he entreated the old gentleman to allow Benjamin to accompany him for a few days to Philadelphia. This was cheerfully agreed to, and the Artist felt himself almost, as much delighted with the journey as with the box of colours. Every thing in the town filled him with astonishment; but the view of the shipping, which was entirely new, particularly attracted his eye, and interested him like the imaginary spectacles of magic.

When the first emotions of his pleasure and wonder had subsided, he applied to Mr. Pennington to procure him materials

for painting. That gentleman was desirous of getting possession of the first picture, and had only resigned what he jocularly alleged were his just claims, in consideration of the mother's feelings, and on being assured that the next picture should be purposely painted for him. The materials were procured, and the Artist composed a landscape, which comprehended a picturesque view of a river, with vessels on the water, and cattle pasturing on the banks. While he was engaged in this picture, an incident occurred which, though trivial in itself, was so much in unison with the other circumstances that favoured the bent of his genius, that it ought not to be omitted.

Samuel Shoemaker[1] , an intimate friend of Mr. Pennington, one of the principal merchants of Philadelphia, happened to meet in the street with one Williams, a Painter, carrying home a picture. Struck by the beauty of the performance, he enquired if it was intended for sale, and being told that it was already disposed of, he ordered another to be painted for himself. When the painting was finished, he requested the Artist to carry it to Mr. Pennington's house, in order that it might be shewn to young West. It was very well executed, and the boy was so much astonished at the sight of it, that his emotion and surprise attracted the attention of Williams, who was a man of observation, and judged correctly in thinking that such an uncommon manifestation of sensibility in so young a boy,

[1] This gentleman was afterwards introduced by Mr. West to the King, at Windsor, as one of the American Loyalists.

indicated something extraordinary in his character. He entered into conversation with him, and enquired if he had read any books, or the lives of great men, The little amateur told him that he had read the Bible, and was well acquainted with the history of Adam, Joseph, David, Solomon, and the other great and good men whose actions are recorded in the Holy Scriptures. Williams was much pleased with the simplicity of the answer; and it might have occurred to him that histories more interesting have never been written, or written so well. Turning to Mr. Pennington, who was present, he asked if Benjamin was his son; advising him at the same time to indulge him in whatever might appear to be the bent of his talents, assuring him that he was no common boy.

This interview was afterwards much spoken of by Williams, who in the mean time lent him the works of Fresnoy and Richardson on Painting, and invited him to see his pictures and drawings. The impression which these books made on the imagination of West finally decided his destination. He was allowed to carry them with him into the country; and his father and mother, soon perceiving a great change in his conversation, were referred to the books for an explanation of the cause. They read them for the first time themselves, and treasuring in their minds those anecdotes of the indications of the early symptoms of talent with which both works abound, they remembered the prophetic injunction of Edmund Peckover.

The effect of the enthusiasm inspired by Richardson and Fresnoy may be conceived from the following incident. Soon

after the young Artist had returned to Springfield, one of his schoolfellows, on a Saturday's half holiday, engaged him to give up a party at trap-ball to ride with him to one of the neighbouring plantations. At the time appointed the boy came, with the horse saddled. West enquired how he was to ride; "Behind me," said the boy; but Benjamin, full of the dignity of the profession to which he felt himself destined, answered, that he never would ride behind any body. "O! very well then," said the good-natured boy, "you may take the saddle, and I will get up behind you." Thus mounted, they proceeded on their excursion; and the boy began to inform his companion that his father intended to send him to be an apprentice. "In what business?" enquired West; "A taylor," answered the boy. "Surely," said West, "you will never follow that trade;" animadverting upon its feminine character. The other, however, was a shrewd, sound-headed lad, and defended the election very stoutly, saying that his father had made choice of it for him, and that the person with whom he was to learn the business was much respected by all his neighbours. "But what do you intend to be, Benjamin?" West answered, that he had not thought at all on the subject, but he should like to be a painter. "A painter!" exclaimed the boy, "what sort of a trade is a painter? I never heard of such a thing." "A painter," said West, "is a companion for Kings and Emperors." "Surely you are mad," replied the boy, "for there are no such people in America." "Very true," answered Benjamin, "but there are plenty in other parts of the world." The other, still more amazed at the apparent

absurdity of this speech, reiterated in a tone of greater surprise, "You are surely quite mad." To this the enthusiast replied by asking him if he really intended to be a taylor. "Most certainly," answered the other. "Then you may ride by yourself, for I will no longer keep your company," said West, and, alighting, immediately returned home.

The report of this incident, with the affair of the picture, which had occasioned his absence from school, and visit to Philadelphia, made a great impression on the boys in the neighbourhood of Springfield. All their accustomed sports were neglected, and their play-hours devoted to drawing with chalk and oker. The little president was confessedly the most expert among them, but he has often since declared, that, according to his recollection, many of his juvenile companions evinced a degree of taste and skill in this exercise, that would not have discredited the students of any regular academy.

Not far from the residence of Mr. West a cabinet-maker had a shop, in which Benjamin sometimes amused himself with the tools of the workmen. One day several large and beautiful boards of poplar tree were brought to it; and he happening to observe that they would answer very well for drawing on, the owner gave him two or three of them for that purpose, and he drew figures and compositions on them with ink, chalk, and charcoal. Mr. Wayne, a gentleman of the neighbourhood, having soon after occasion to call at his father's, noticed the boards in the room, and was so much pleased with the drawings, that he begged the

young Artist to allow him to take two or three of them home, which, as but little value was set on them, was thought no great favour, either by the painter or his father. Next day Mr. Wayne called again, and after complimenting Benjamin on his taste and proficiency, gave him a dollar for each of the boards which he had taken away, and was resolved to preserve. Doctor Jonathan Moris, another neighbour, soon after, also made him a present of a few dollars to buy materials to paint with. These were the first public patrons of the Artist; and it is at his own request that their names are thus particularly inserted.

About twelve months after the visit to Philadelphia, Mr. Flower, one of the Justices of the county of Chester, who possessed some taste in painting, requested Mr. West to allow Benjamin to spend a few weeks at his house. A short time before, this gentleman had met with a severe domestic misfortune in the loss of a wife, to whom he was much attached; and he resolved to shew his respect to her memory by devoting his attention exclusively to the improvement of his children: for this purpose he had sent to England for a governess qualified to undertake the education of his daughters, and he had the good fortune to obtain a lady eminently fitted for the trust. She arrived a few days only before the young Artist, and her natural discernment enabled her to appreciate that original bias of mind which she had heard ascribed to him, and of which she soon perceived the determination and the strength. Finding him unacquainted with any other books than the Bible, and the works of Richardson

and Fresnoy, she frequently invited him to sit with her pupils, and, during the intervals of their tasks, she read to him the most striking and picturesque passages from translations of the antient historians and poetry, of which Mr. Flower had a choice and extensive collection. It was from this intelligent woman that he heard, for the first time, of the Greeks and Romans; and the impression which the story of those illustrious nations made on his mind, was answerable to her expectations.

Among the acquaintance of Mr. Flower was a Mr. Ross, a lawyer in the town of Lancaster, a place at that time remarkable for its wealth, and which had the reputation of possessing the best and most intelligent society to be then found in America. It was chiefly inhabited by Germans, who of all people in the practice of emigrating, carry along with them the greatest stock of knowledge and accomplishments. The society of Lancaster, therefore, though it could not boast of any very distinguished character, yet comprehended many individuals who were capable of appreciating the merit of essays in art, and of discriminating the rude efforts of real genius from the more complete productions of mere mechanical skill. It was exactly in such a place that such a youth as Benjamin West was likely to meet with that flattering attention which is the best stimulus of juvenile talent. The wife of Mr. Ross was greatly admired for her beauty, and she had several children who were so remarkable in this respect as to be objects of general notice. One day when Mr. Flower was dining with them, he advised his friend to have

their portraits taken; and mentioned that they would be excellent subjects for young West. Application was in consequence made to old Mr. West, and permission obtained for the little Artist to go to Lancaster for the purpose of taking the likenesses of Mrs. Ross and her family. Such was the success with which he executed this task, that the sphere of his celebrity was greatly enlarged; and so numerous were the applications for portraits, that it was with difficulty he could find time to satisfy the demands of his admirers.

Among those who sent to him in this early stage of his career, was a person of the name of William Henry. He was an able mechanic, and had acquired a handsome fortune by his profession of a gunsmith. Henry was, indeed, in several respects, an extraordinary man, and possessed the power generally attendant upon genius under all circumstances, that of interesting the imagination of those with whom he conversed. On examining the young Artist's performance, he observed to him, that, if he could paint as well, he would not waste his time on portraits, but would devote himself to historical subjects; and he mentioned the Death of Socrates as affording one of the best topics for illustrating the moral effect of the art of painting. The Painter knew nothing of the history of the Philosopher; and, upon confessing his ignorance, Mr. Henry went to his library, and, taking down a volume of the English translation of Plutarch, read to him the account given by that writer of this affecting story.

The suggestion and description wrought upon the imagination

of West, and induced him to make a drawing, which he shewed to Mr. Henry, who commended it as a perspicuous delineation of the probable circumstances of the event, and requested him to paint it. West said that he would be happy to undertake the task, but, having hitherto painted only faces and men cloathed, he should be unable to do justice to the figure of the slave who presented the poison, and which he thought ought to be naked. Henry had among his workmen a very handsome young man, and, without waiting to answer the objection, he sent for him into the room. On his entrance he pointed him out to West, and said, "There is your model." The appearance of the young man, whose arms and breast were naked, instantaneously convinced the Artist that he had only to look into nature for the models which would impart grace and energy to his delineation of forms.

When the death of Socrates was finished, it attracted much attention, and led to one of those fortunate acquaintances by which the subsequent career of the Artist has been so happily facilitated. About this period the inhabitants of Lancaster had resolved to erect a public grammar-school; and Dr. Smith, the Provost of the College at Philadelphia, was invited by them to arrange the course of instruction, and to place the institution in the way best calculated to answer the intention of the founders. This gentleman was an excellent classical scholar, and combined with his knowledge and admiration of the merits of the antients that liberality of respect for the endeavours of modern talent, with which the same kind of feeling is but rarely

found connected. After seeing the picture and conversing with the Artist, he offered to undertake to make him to a certain degree acquainted with classical literature; while at the same time he would give him such a sketch of the taste and character of the spirit of antiquity, as would have all the effect of the regular education requisite to a painter. When this liberal proposal was communicated to old Mr. West, he readily agreed that Benjamin should go for some time to Philadelphia, in order to take advantage of the Provost's instructions; and accordingly, after returning home for a few days, Benjamin went to the capital, and resided at the house of Mr. Clarkson, his brother-in-law, a gentleman who had been educated at Leyden, and was much respected for the intelligence of his conversation, and the propriety of his manners.

Provost Smith introduced West, among other persons, to four young men, pupils of his own, whom he particularly recommended to his acquaintance, as possessing endowments of mind greatly superior to the common standard of mankind. One of these was Francis Hopkins, who afterwards highly distinguished himself in the early proceedings of the Congress of the United States. Thomas Godfrey, the second, died after having given the most promising indications of an elegant genius for pathetic and descriptive poetry. He was an apprentice to a watchmaker, and had secretly written a poem, which he published anonymously in the Philadelphia newspaper, under the title of "The Temple of Fame." The attention which it attracted,

and the encomiums which the Provost in particular bestowed on it, induced West, who was in the Poet's confidence, to mention to him who was the author. The information excited the alert benevolence of Smith's character, and he lost no time until he had procured the release of Godfrey from his indenture, and a respectable employment for him in the government of the state; but this he did not live long to enjoy: being sent on some public business to Carolina, he fell a victim to the climate.

It is pleasant to redeem from oblivion the memory of early talent thus prematurely withdrawn from the world. Many of Godfrey's verses were composed under a clump of pines which grew near the upper ferry of the river Schuylkill, to which spot he sometimes accompanied West and their mutual friends to angle. In the heat of the day he used to stretch himself beneath the shade of the trees, and repeat to them his verses as he composed them. Reid was the name of the other young man, and the same person who first opposed the British troops in their passing through Jersey, when the rebellion of the Provinces commenced. Previous to the revolution, he was bred to the bar, and practised with distinction in the courts of Philadelphia. He was afterwards elected a Member of Congress, and is the same person who was appointed to meet Lord Carlisle on his mission from the British Court.

Provost Smith was himself possessed of a fluent vein of powerful eloquence, and it happened that many of his pupils who distinguished themselves in the great struggle of their

country, appeared to have imbibed his talent; but none of them more than Jacob Duchey, another of the four youths whom he recommended to the Artist. He became a Clergyman, and was celebrated throughout the whole of the British Provinces in America as a most pathetic and persuasive preacher. The publicity of his character in the world was, however, chiefly owing to a letter which he addressed to General Washington, soon after the appointment of that chief to the command of the army. The purport of this letter was to persuade the General to go over to the British cause. It was carried to him by a Mrs. Ferguson, a daughter of Doctor Graham, a Scottish Physician in Philadelphia. Washington, with his army, at that time lay at Valley-forge, and this lady, on the pretext of paying him a visit, as they were previously acquainted, went to the camp. The General received her in his tent with much respect, for he greatly admired the masculine vigour of her mind. When she had delivered the letter he read it attentively, and, rising from his seat, walked backwards and forwards upwards of an hour, without speaking. He appeared to be much agitated during the greatest part of the time; but at length, having decided with himself, he stopped, and addressed her in nearly the following words: "Madam, I have always esteemed your character and endowments, and I am fully sensible of the noble principles by which you are actuated on this occasion; nor has any man in the whole continent more confidence in the integrity of his friend, than I have in the honour of Mr. Duchey. But I am here entrusted

by the people of America with sovereign authority. They have placed their lives and fortunes at my disposal, because they believe me to be an honest man. Were I, therefore, to desert their cause, and consign them again to the British, what would be the consequence? to myself perpetual infamy; and to them endless calamity. The seeds of everlasting division are sown between the two countries; and, were the British again to become our masters, they would have to maintain their dominion by force, and would, after all, retain us in subjection only so long as they could hold their bayonets to our breasts. No, Madam, the proposal of Mr. Duchey, though conceived with the best intention, is not framed in wisdom. America and England must be separate states; but they may have common interests, for they are but one people. It will, therefore, be the object of my life and ambition to establish the independence of America in the first place; and in the second, to arrange such a community of interests between the two nations as shall indemnify them for the calamities which they now suffer, and form a new æra in the history of nations. But, Madam, you are aware that I have many enemies; Congress may hear of your visit, and of this letter, and I should be suspected were I to conceal it from them. I respect you truly, as I have said; and I esteem the probity and motives of Mr. Duchey, and therefore you are free to depart from the camp, but the letter will be transmitted without delay to Congress."

Mrs. Ferguson herself communicated the circumstances of this interesting transaction to Mr. West, after she came to

England; for she, as well as Mr. Duchey, were obliged to quit the country. It is painful to add, that Duchey came to England, and was allowed to pine unnoticed by the Government, and was heard of no more.

Chap. III

The course of instruction adopted by Provost Smith. – The Artist led to the discovery of the Camera. – His Father becomes anxious to place him in business. – Extraordinary proceedings of the Quakers in consequence. – The Speech of Williamson the Preacher in defence of the Fine Arts. – Magnanimous Resolution of the Quakers, – Reflections on this singular transaction.

There was something so judicious in the plan of study which Provost Smith had formed for his pupil, that it deserves to be particularly considered. He regarded him as destined to be a Painter; and on this account did not impose upon him those grammatical exercises of language which are usually required from the young student of the classics, but directed his attention to those incidents which were likely to interest his fancy, and to furnish him at some future time with subjects for the easel. He carried him immediately to those passages of antient history which make the most lasting impression on the imagination of the regular-bred scholar, and described the picturesque circumstances of the transactions with a minuteness of detail that would have been superfluous to a general student.

In the midst of this course of education the Artist happened to be taken ill of a slight fever, and when it had subsided, he was in so weak a state as to be obliged to keep his bed, and to have the

room darkened. In this situation he remained several days, with no other light than what was admitted by the seams and fissures in the window-shutters, which had the usual effect of expanding the pupil of his eyes to such a degree that he could distinctly see every object in the room, which to others appeared in complete obscurity. While he was thus lying in bed, he observed the apparitional form of a white cow enter at the one side of the roof, and walking over the bed, gradually vanish at the other. The phenomenon surprised him exceedingly, and he feared that his mind was impaired by his disease, which his sister also suspected, when on entering to inquire how he felt himself, he related to her what he had seen. Without, however, saying any thing, she went immediately and informed her husband, who accompanied her back to the apartment; and as they were standing near the bed, West repeated the story, exclaiming in his discourse that he saw, at the very moment in which he was then speaking, several little pigs running along the roof. This confirmed them in the apprehension of his delirium, and they sent for a physician. But the doctor could discover no symptoms of fever; the pulse was regular, the skin moist and cool, the thirst was abated, and indeed every thing about the patient indicated convalescence. Still the Painter persisted in his story, and assured them that he then saw the figures of several of their mutual friends passing on the roof, over the bed; and that he even saw fowls pecking, and the very stones of the street. All this seemed to them very extraordinary, for their eyes, not accustomed to the gloom of the chamber, could

discern nothing; and the learned physician himself, in despite of the symptoms, began to suspect that the convalescent was really delirious. Prescribing, therefore, a composing mixture, which the Painter submitted to swallow, he took his fee and leave, requesting Mrs. Clarkson and her husband to come away and not disturb the patient. After they had retired, curiosity overcame the influence of the drug, and the Artist got up, determined to find out the cause of the strange apparitions which had so alarmed them all. In a short time he discovered a diagonal knot-hole in one of the window-shutters, and upon placing his hand over it, the visionary paintings on the roof disappeared. This confirmed him in an opinion that he began to form, that there must be some simple natural cause for what he had seen; and, having thus ascertained the way in which it acted, he called his sister and her husband into the room and explained it to them. When able to go down stairs, Mr. Clarkson gave him permission to perforate one of the parlour window-shutters horizontally, in order to obtain a representation on the wall of the buildings of the opposite side of the street. The effect was as he expected, but, to his astonishment, the objects appeared inverted. Without attempting to remedy this with the aid of glasses, as a mathematical genius would perhaps have done, he was delighted to see in it the means of studying the pictural appearance of Nature, and he hailed the discovery as a revelation to promote his improvement in the art of painting. On his return soon after to his father's, he had a box made with one of the sides perforated; and, adverting to the

reflective power of the mirror, he contrived, without ever having heard of the instrument, to invent the *Camera*. Thus furnishing another proof, that although the faculty which enables a man to excel in any particular art or science is a natural endowment, it is seldom unaccompanied with a general superiority of observation. It will, however, not be disputed, that a boy under sixteen, who had thus, by the guidance of his own unassisted judgment, found out a method of ascertaining the colour and outline of natural objects as they should appear in painting, possessed no ordinary mind. Observations of this nature mark the difference between innate talent and instructed habits; and, whether in painting, or in poetry, in art, or in science, constitute the source of that peculiarity of intellect which is discriminated from the effects of education by the name of original talent. The self-educated man of genius, when his mind is formed, differs but little in the method of expressing his notions, from the most mechanical disciple of the schools; but the process by which he attains that result, renders his history interesting by its incidents, and valuable by the hints which it furnishes for the study of human character. It is, perhaps, also, one great cause of his own distinguishing features of mind, as the very contrivances to which he has recourse have the effect of taking, as it were, something extraneous into the matter of his experiments which tinges the product with curious and singular effects. – West, on afterwards mentioning his discovery to Williams the painter, was surprised to find himself anticipated, that Artist having received

a complete Camera some time before from England.

In this favourable state of things he attained his sixteenth year, when his father became anxious to see him settled in some established business. For, though reluctant to thwart the bias of a genius at once so decided and original, and to which the injunction of Peckover had rendered him favourable and indulgent, the old gentleman was sensible that the profession of a painter was not only precarious, but regarded by the religious association to which he belonged, as adverse to their tenets, by being only ornamental; and he was anxious, on his son's account and on his own, to avoid those animadversions to which he was exposed by the freedom he had hitherto granted to the predilections of Benjamin. He, therefore, consulted several of his neighbours on the subject; and a meeting of the Society of Friends in the vicinity was called, to consider, publicly, what ought to be the destiny of his son.

The assembly met in the Meeting-house near Springfield, and after much debate, approaching to altercation, a man of the name of John Williamson rose, and delivered a very extraordinary speech upon the subject. He was much respected by all present, for the purity and integrity of his life, and enjoyed great influence in his sphere on account of the superiority of his natural wisdom, and, as a public preacher among the Friends, possessed an astonishing gift of convincing eloquence. He pointed to old Mr. West and his wife, and expatiated on the blameless reputation which they had so long maintained, and merited so well. "They

have had," said he, "ten children, whom they have carefully brought up in the fear of God, and in the Christian religion; and the youth, whose lot in life we are now convened to consider, is Benjamin, their youngest child. It is known to you all that God is pleased, from time to time, to bestow upon some men extraordinary gifts of mind, and you need not be told by how wonderful an inspiration their son has been led to cultivate the art of painting. It is true that our tenets deny the utility of that art to mankind. But God has bestowed on the youth a genius for the art, and can we believe that Omniscience bestows His gifts but for great purposes? What God has given, who shall dare to throw away? Let us not estimate Almighty wisdom by our notions; let us not presume to arraign His judgment by our ignorance, but in the evident propensity of the young man, be assured that we see an impulse of the Divine hand operating towards some high and beneficent end."

The effect of this argument, and the lofty commanding manner in which it was delivered, induced the assembly to agree that the Artist should be allowed to indulge the predilections of his genius; and a private meeting of the Friends was appointed to be holden at his father's house, at which the youth himself was requested to be present, in order to receive, in form, the assent and blessing of the Society. On the day of meeting, the great room was put in order, and a numerous company of both sexes assembled. Benjamin was placed by his father, and the men and women took their respective forms on each side. After sitting

some time in silence, one of the women rose and addressed the meeting on the wisdom of God, and the various occasions on which He selected from among His creatures the agents of His goodness. When she had concluded her exhortation, John Williamson also rose, and in a speech than which, perhaps, the porticos of Athens never resounded with a more impressive oratory, he resumed the topic which had been the subject of his former address. He began by observing that it was fixed as one of their indisputable maxims, that things merely ornamental were not necessary to the well-being of man, and that all superfluous things should be excluded from the usages and manners of their society. "In this proscription, we have included," said he, "the study of the fine arts, for we see them applied only to embellish pleasures, and to strengthen our inducements to gratify the senses at the expense of our immortal claims. But, because we have seen painting put to this derogatory use, and have, in consequence, prohibited the cultivation of it among us, are we sure that it is not one of those gracious gifts which God has bestowed on the world, not to add to the sensual pleasures of man, but to facilitate his improvement as a social and a moral being? The fine arts are called the offspring and the emblems of peace. The Christian religion itself is the doctrine of good will to man. Can those things which only prosper in peace be contrary to the Christian religion? But, it is said, that the fine arts soften and emasculate the mind. In what way? is it by withdrawing those who study them from the robust exercises which enable nations and people

to make war with success? Is it by lessening the disposition of mankind to destroy one another, and by taming the audacity of their animal fierceness? Is it for such a reason as this, that we who profess to live in unison and friendship, not only among ourselves, but with all the world that we should object to the cultivation of the fine arts, of those arts which disarm the natural ferocity of man? We may as well be told that the doctrine of peace and life ought to be proscribed in the world because it is pernicious to the practice of war and slaughter, as that the arts which call on man to exercise his intellectual powers more than his physical strength, can be contrary to Christianity, and adverse to the benevolence of the Deity. I speak not, however, of the fine arts as the means of amusement, nor the study of them as pastime to fill up the vacant hours of business, though even as such, the taste for them deserves to be regarded as a manifestation of Divine favour, in as much as they dispose the heart to kind and gentle inclinations. For, I think them ordained by God for some great and holy purpose. Do we not know that the professors of the fine arts are commonly men greatly distinguished by special gifts of a creative and discerning spirit? If there be any thing in the usual course of human affairs which exhibits the immediate interposition of the Deity, it is in the progress of the fine arts, in which it would appear he often raises up those great characters, the spirit of whose imaginations have an interminable influence on posterity, and who are themselves separated and elevated among the generality of mankind, by the name of men of genius.

Can we believe that all this is not for some useful purpose? What that purpose is, ought we to pretend to investigate? Let us rather reflect that the Almighty God has been pleased among us, and in this remote wilderness, to endow, with the rich gifts of a peculiar spirit, that youth who has now our common consent to cultivate his talents for an art, which, according to our humble and human judgment, was previously thought an unnecessary ministration to the sensual propensities of our nature. May it be demonstrated by the life and works of the Artist, that the gift of God has not been bestowed on him in vain, nor the motives of the beneficent inspiration which induces us to suspend our particular tenets, prove barren of religious or moral effect. On the contrary, let us confidently hope that this occurrence has been for good, and that the consequences which may arise in the society of this new world, from the example which Benjamin West will be enabled to give, will be such a love of the arts of peace as shall tend to draw the ties of affection closer, and diffuse over a wider extent of community the interests and blessing of fraternal love."

At the conclusion of this address, the women rose and kissed the young Artist, and the men, one by one, laid their hands on his head and prayed that the Lord might verify in his life the value of the gift which had induced them, in despite of their religious tenets, to allow him to cultivate the faculties of his genius.

The history of no other individual affords an incident so extraordinary. This could not be called a presentiment, but the result of a clear expectation, that some important consequence

would ensue. It may be added that a more beautiful instance of liberality is not to be found in the records of any religious society. Hitherto, all sects, even of Christians, were disposed to regard, with jealousy and hatred, all those members who embraced any pursuit that might tend to alienate them from their particular modes of discipline. The Quakers have, therefore, the honour of having been the first to allow, by a public act, that their conception of the religious duties of man was liable to the errors of the human judgment, and was not to be maintained on the presumption of being actually according to the will of God. There is something at once simple and venerable in the humility with which they regarded their own peculiar principles, especially contrasted with the sublime view they appeared to take of the wisdom and providence of the Deity. But, with whatever delightful feelings strangers and posterity may contemplate this beautiful example of Christian magnanimity, it would be impossible to convey any idea of the sentiments with which it affected the youth who was the object of its exercise. He must have been less than man had he not endeavoured, without ceasing, to attain an honourable eminence in his profession; or, had he forgotten, in the honours which he has since received from all polished nations, that he was authorized by his friends and his religion, to cultivate the art by which he obtained such distinctions, not for his own sake, but as an instrument chosen by Providence to disseminate the arts of peace in the world.

Chap. IV

Reflections on the Eccentricities of Young Men of Genius with respect to pecuniary matters. – The Death of the Artist's Mother. – The Embodying of the Pennsylvanian Militia; an Anecdote of General Wayne. – The Artist elected Commandant of a corps of Volunteer boys. – The circumstances which occasioned the Search for the Bones of Bradock's army. – The Search. – The Discovery of the Bones of the Father and Brother of Sir Peter Halket. – The Artist proposed afterwards to paint a Picture of the Discovery of the Bones of the Halkets. – He commences regularly as a Painter. – He copies a St. Ignatius. – He is induced to attempt Historical Portraiture. – His Picture of the Trial of Susannah. – Of the merits of that Picture.

There is a regardless independence about minds of superior endowment, which, in similar characters, manifests itself differently according to the circumstances in which they happen to be placed. Devoted to the contemplation of the means of future celebrity, the man of genius frequently finds himself little disposed to set a proper value on the common interests of of life. When bred in affluence, and exempted from the necessity of considering the importance of money to the attainment of his object, he is often found, to a blameful degree, negligent of pecuniary concerns; and, on the contrary, when his situation is such that he may only hope for distinction by the practice of the

most parsimonious frugality, he will as often appear in the social and propelling season of youth enduring voluntary privations with an equanimity which the ostentatious fanatic or contrite penitent would in vain attempt to surpass. This peculiar feature of the self-sustained mind of genius has often been misunderstood, and seldom valued as it ought to be. The presumptuous weak who mistake the wish of distinction for the workings of talent, admire the eccentricities of the gifted youth who is reared in opulence, and, mistaking the prodigality which is only the effect of his fortune, for the attributes of his talents, imitate his errors, and imagine that, by copying the blemishes of his conduct, they possess what is illustrious in his mind. Such men are incapable of appreciating the self-denial which Benjamin West made it a duty to impose upon himself on entering the world; but to those who are truly conscious of possessing the means of attracting the admiration of their contemporaries and posterity, the voluntary abstinence of a youth of genius will afford them delight in the contemplation, even though they may be happily free from the obligation of practising it themselves.

When it was determined among the Friends that Benjamin West should be allowed to cultivate the art of Painting, he went to Lancaster, but he was hastily recalled by a severe domestic misfortune. His mother was seized by a dangerous illness, and being conscious that she could not live long, she requested that he might be sent for home. Benjamin hastily obeyed the summons, but, before he reached the house, her strength was exhausted,

and she was only able to express by her look the satisfaction with which she saw him approach the bed, before she expired. Her funeral, and the distress which the event naturally occasioned to her family, by all of whom she was very tenderly beloved, detained the young Artist some time at his father's. About the end of August, in 1756, however, he took his final departure, and went to Philadelphia. But, before proceeding with the narrative of his professional career, it is necessary to advert to some of the public transactions of that period, by which his sensibility was powerfully excited. Indeed it will appear throughout the whole of these singular memoirs, that the subject of them was, perhaps, more immediately affected by the developement of national events, than usually falls to the lot of any individual so little connected with public men, and so far remote from the great thoroughfare of political occurrences.

After the destruction of General Bradock's army, the Pennsylvanians being alarmed at the defenceless state in which they were placed by that calamity, the Assembly of the Province resolved to embody a militia force; and Mr. Wayne, who has been already mentioned, was appointed Colonel of the Regiment raised in Chester County. This defensive measure announced that the golden age of the country was past, and the change felt by the peaceful Quakers indicated an alteration in their harmless manners. West, among others, went to view the first muster of the troops under the command of Colonel Wayne, and the sight of men in arms, their purpose and array, warmed his lively

imagination with military enthusiasm. In conjunction with a son of the Colonel, a boy of his own age, with whom he had become acquainted, he procured a gun, and determined also to be a soldier. Young Wayne was drilled by the diciplinarians of his father's corps, and he, in turn, exercised West, who, being more alert and active, soon obtained a decided superiority; but what different destinies were attached to them! West has attained, in the intellectual discipline of the arts of peace, an enviable reputation; and Wayne, who was inferior to him in the manual of the soldier, became an illustrious commander, and partook, as the companion in arms of Washington, of the glory of having established the independence of America.

The martial preparations inspired all the youths of Pennsylvania with the love of arms, and diffused the principles of that military spirit which was afterwards exerted with so much effect against the erroneous policy of the mother country. West, soon after his drilling under young Wayne, visited Lancaster; and the boys of that town having formed themselves into a little corps, made choice of him for their commandant. Among others who caught the spirit of the time, was his brother Samuel, who possessed a bold character and an enterprising disposition. He was about six years older than the Artist, and, being appointed a Captain in Colonel Wayne's regiment, joined the troops under the command of General Forbes, who was sent to repair the disasters which had happened to the unfortunate Bradock.

After the taking of Fort Duane, to which the new name of

Pittsburgh was given, in compliment to the minister of the day, General Forbes resolved to search for the relics of Bradock's army. As the European soldiers were not so well qualified to explore the forests, Captain West was appointed, with his company of American sharpshooters, to assist in the execution of this duty; and a party of Indian warriors, who had returned to the British interests, were requested to conduct him to the places where the bones of the slain were likely to be found. In this solemn and affecting duty several officers belonging to the 42d regiment accompanied the detachment, and with them Major Sir Peter Halket, who had lost his father and a brother in the fatal destruction of the army. It might have been thought a hopeless task that he should be able to discriminate their remains from the common relics of the other soldiers; but he was induced to think otherwise, as one of the Indian warriors assured him that he had seen an officer fall near a remarkable tree, which he thought he could still discover; informing him at the same time, that the incident was impressed on his memory by observing a young subaltern, who, in running to the officer's assistance, was also shot dead on his reaching the spot, and fell across the other's body. The Major had a mournful conviction in his own mind that the two officers were his father and brother, and, indeed, it was chiefly owing to his anxiety on the subject, that this pious expedition, the second of the kind that History records, was undertaken.

Captain West and his companions proceeded through the

woods and along the banks of the river towards the scene of the battle. The Indians regarded the expedition as a religious service, and guided the troops with awe, and in profound silence. The soldiers were affected with sentiments not less serious; and as they explored the bewildering labyrinths of those vast forests, their hearts were often melted with inexpressible sorrow; for they frequently found skeletons lying across the trunks of fallen trees, a mournful proof to their imaginations that the men who sat there, had perished of hunger, in vainly attempting to find their way to the plantations. Sometimes their feelings were raised to the utmost pitch of horror by the sight of sculls and bones scattered on the ground-a certain indication that the bodies had been devoured by wild beasts; and in other places they saw the blackness of ashes amidst the relics, – the tremendous evidence of atrocious rites.

At length they reached a turn of the river not far from the principal scene of destruction, and the Indian who remembered the death of the two officers, stopped; the detachment also halted. He then looked around in quest of some object which might recall, distinctly, his recollection of the ground, and suddenly darted into the wood. The soldiers rested their arms without speaking. A shrill cry was soon after heard; and the other guides made signs for the troops to follow them towards the spot from which it came. In the course of a short time they reached the Indian warrior, who, by his cry, had announced to his companions that he had found the place where he was posted

on the day of battle. As the troops approached, he pointed to the tree under which the officers had fallen. Captain West halted his men round the spot, and with Sir Peter Halket and the other officers, formed a circle, while the Indians removed the leaves which thickly covered the ground. The skeletons were found, as the Indian expected, lying across each other. The officers having looked at them some time, the Major said, that as his father had an artificial tooth, he thought he might be able to ascertain if they were indeed his bones and those of his brother. The Indians were, therefore, ordered to remove the skeleton of the youth, and to bring to view that of the old officer. This was immediately done, and after a short examination, Major Halket exclaimed, "It is my father!" and fell back into the arms of his companions. The pioneers then dug a grave, and the bones being laid in it together, a highland plaid was spread over them, and they were interred with the customary honours.

When Lord Grosvenor bought the picture of the death of Wolfe, Mr. West mentioned to him the finding of the bones of Bradock's army as a pictorial subject capable of being managed with great effect. The gloom of the vast forest, the naked and simple Indians supporting the skeletons, the grief of the son on recognizing the relics of his father, the subdued melancholy of the spectators, and the picturesque garb of the Pennsylvanian sharpshooters, undoubtedly furnished topics capable of every effect which the pencil could bestow, or the imagination require in the treatment of so sublime a scene. His Lordship admitted,

that in possessing so affecting an incident as the discovery of the bones of the Halkets, it was superior even to that of the search for the remains of the army of Varus; the transaction, however, being little known, and not recorded by any historian, he thought it would not be interesting to the public. Other engagements have since prevented Mr. West from attempting it on his own account. But it is necessary that the regular narrative should be resumed; for the military history of the Artist terminated when he was recalled home by the last illness of his mother, although the excitement which the events that led to it occasioned never lost its influence on his mind, especially that of the incident which has been described, and which has ever been present to his imagination as one of the most affecting occurrences, whether considered with respect to the feelings of the gentlemen most immediately interested in it, or with respect to the wild and solemn circumstances under which the service was performed.

On his return to Philadelphia, he again resided with Mr. Clarkson, his brother-in-law; and Provost Smith, in the evenings, continued to direct his attention to those topics of literature which were most suitable to cherish the expansion of his mind, and to enrich his imagination with ideas useful to his profession. While his leisure hours were thus profitably employed, his reputation as a portrait painter was rapidly extended. His youth, and the peculiar incidents of his history, attracted many sitters, and his merits verified the recommendations of his friends. This constancy of employment, no doubt materially tended to

his improvement in the manipulation of his art; for whatever may be the native force of talent, it is impossible that the possessor can attain excellence by any other means than practice. Facility to express the conceptions of the mind must be acquired before the pen or the pencil can embody them appropriately, and the author who does not execute much, however little he may exhibit, can never expect to do justice to the truth and beauty of his own ideas. West was very soon duly impressed with the justness of this observation; and, while in the execution of his portraits, he was assiduous to acquire a ready knowledge of those characteristic traits which have since enabled him to throw so much variety into his compositions; he felt conscious that, without seeing better pictures than his own, he could neither hope to attain distinction, nor to appreciate his own peculiar powers. It was this consideration that induced him to adopt a most rigid system of frugality. He looked forward to a period when he might be enabled, by the fruits of his own industry, to visit the great scenes of the fine arts in Europe; and the care with which he treasured the money that he received for his portraits was rewarded even at the time with the assurance of realizing his expectations. The prices which he first fixed for his portraits, were two guineas and a half for a head, and five guineas for a half length.

After what has already been mentioned of the state of Society in Pennsylvania, it is needless to say that at the period to which these memoirs refer, there were but few pictures in the

British Plantations; indeed, without any other explanation, all that should be contended for by any person who might imagine it necessary to advocate the pretensions of Benjamin West to be placed in the list of original and self-instructed artists, would be readily granted, upon stating the single fact, that he was born in Pennsylvania, and did not leave America till the year 1760. At the same time, it might be construed into an injudicious concealment, if it were not mentioned that Governor Hamilton, who at that period presided with so much popularity over the affairs of the province, possessed a few pictures, consisting, however, chiefly of family portraits. Among them was a St. Ignatius, which was found in the course of the preceding war on board a Spanish prize, and which Mr. Pennington obtained leave for West to copy. The Artist had made choice of it himself, without being aware of its merits as a work of art, for it was not until several years after that he discovered it to be a fine piece of the Morillo school, and in the best style of the master.

This copy was greatly admired by all who saw it, and by none more than his valuable friend Provost Smith, to whom it suggested the notion that portrait-painting might be raised to something greatly above the exhibition of a mere physical likeness; and he in consequence endeavoured to impress upon the mind of his pupil, that characteristic painting opened a new line in the art, only inferior in dignity to that of history, but requiring, perhaps, a nicer discriminative tact of mind. This judicious reflection of Dr. Smith was however anticipated by

Sir Joshua Reynolds, who had already made the discovery, and was carrying it into effect with admirable success. The Provost, however, was unacquainted with that circumstance, and induced West to make an experiment by drawing his portrait in the style and attitude of the St. Ignatius.

While he was thus employed on portraits, a gentleman of the name of Cox called on him to agree for a likeness of his daughter; and the picture of Dr. Smith attracted his attention. It indeed appeared to him to evince such a capacity for historical composition, that, instead of then determining any thing respecting his daughter's portrait, he gave an order for an historical picture, allowing the Artist himself to choose the subject. This task had peculiar charms; for the Painter in the course of reading the Bible to his mother some time before, had been led to think that the Trial of Susannah was a fine subject, and he was thus enabled, by the liberality of Mr. Cox, to embody the conceptions of his imagination while they were yet in all the freshness and vigour of original formation. He made his canvas about the size of a half length portrait, on which he introduced not fewer than forty figures. In the execution he followed the rule which he had adopted in painting the Death of Socrates, and drew the principal figures from living models. – It is not known what has become of the Trial of Susannah. In the rebellion of the Colonies, Mr. Cox adhered to the British interest; and his daughter, the last person into whose possession the picture has been traced, having married a British officer, came to England

during the war, and the Artist has not heard where she has since resided.

In point of composition, Mr. West is of opinion that the Trial of Susannah was superior to the Death of Socrates. In this he is probably correct; for during the interval between the execution of the one and the other, his mind had been enlarged in knowledge by reading, his eye improved by the study of pictorial outline and perspective in the *Camera*, and his touch softened by the portraits which he painted, and particularly by his careful copy of the St. Ignatius. In point of drawing, both pictures were no doubt greatly inferior to many of his subsequent works; but his son, long after he had acquired much celebrity, saw the picture of the Death of Socrates; and was of opinion that it was not surpassed by any of them in variety of composition, and in that perspicuity of narrative which is the grand characteristic of the Artist's genius.

Chap. V

Motives which induced him to visit New York. – State of Society in New York. – Reflections on the sterility of American talent. – Considerations on the circumstances which tend to produce Poetical feelings. – The causes which produced the peculiarities in the state of Society in New York. – The Accident which led the Artist to discover the method of colouring Candle-light and Fire effects after Nature. – He copies Strange's engraving of Belisarius, by Salvador Rosa. – The occurrence which hastened his Voyage to Italy, with the Anecdote of his obligations to Mr. Kelly. – Reflections on Plutarch, occasioned by reference to the effect which his works had on the mind of West. – The Artist embarks; occurrence at Gibraltar. – He arrives at Leghorn. – Journey to Rome.

But although West found himself in possession of abundant employment in Philadelphia, he was sensible that he could not expect to increase his prices with effect, if he continued constantly in the same place. He also became sensible that to view life in various lights was as necessary to his improvement as to exercise his pencil on different subjects. And, beyond all, he was profoundly sensible, by this time, that he could not hope to attain eminence in his profession, without inspecting the great master-pieces of art in Europe, and comparing them with his own works in order to ascertain the extent of his powers. This

philosophical view of his situation was doubtless partly owing to the excellent precepts of Provost Smith, but mainly to his own just perception of what was necessary to the successful career of an Artist: indeed the principle upon which the notion was formed is universal, and applies to all intellectual pursuits. Accordingly, impressed with these considerations, he frugally treasured the earnings of his pencil, that he might undertake, in the first place, a professional journey from Philadelphia, as preparatory to acquiring the means of afterwards visiting Europe, and particularly Rome. When he found that the state of his funds enabled him to undertake the journey, he went to New York.

The Society of New York was much less intelligent in matters of taste and knowledge than that of Philadelphia. In the latter city the institutions of the college and library, and the strict moral and political respectability of the first settlers, had contributed to form a community, which, though inferior in the elegancies of living, and the etiquettes of intercourse, to what is commonly found in the European capitals, was little behind them in point of practical and historical information. Dr. Smith, the Provost of the college, had largely contributed to elevate the taste, the sentiment and the topics of conversation in Philadelphia. He was full of the best spirit of antiquity, and there was a classical purity of mind and splendour of imagination sometimes met with in the families which he frequented, that would have done honour to the best periods of polished society.

It would be difficult to assign any reason why it has so happened that no literary author of any general celebrity, with the exception of Franklin, has yet arisen in America. That men of learning and extensive reading, capable of vying with the same description of persons in Europe, are to be found in the United States, particularly in Philadelphia, is not to be denied; but of that class, whose talents tend to augment the stock of intellectual enjoyment in the world, no one, with the single exception already alluded to, has yet appeared.

Poetry is the art of connecting ideas of sensible objects with moral sentiments; and without the previous existence of local feelings, there can be no poetry. America to the first European settlers had no objects interesting to the imagination, at least of the description thus strictly considered as poetical; for although the vigour and stupendous appearances of Nature were calculated to fill the mind with awe, and to exalt the contemplations of enthusiasm, there was nothing connected with the circumstances of the scene susceptible of that colouring from the memory, which gives to the ideas of local resemblance the peculiar qualities of poetry. The forests, though interminable, were but composed of trees; the mountains and rivers, though on a larger scale, were not associated in the mind with the exertions of patriotic valour, and the achievements of individual enterprize, like the Alps or the Danube, the Grampians or the Tweed. It is impossible to tread the depopulated and exhausted soil of Greece without meeting with innumerable

relics and objects, which, like magical talismans, call up the genius of departed ages with the long-enriched roll of those great transactions, that, in their moral effect, have raised the nature of man, occasioning trains of reflection which want only the rythm of language to be poetry. But in the unstoried solitudes of America, the traveller meets with nothing to awaken the sympathy of his recollective feelings. Even the very character of the trees, though interesting to scientific research, chills, beneath the spaciousness of their shade, every poetical disposition. They bear little resemblance to those which the stranger has left behind in his native country. To the descendants of the first settlers, they wanted even the charm of those accidental associations which their appearance might have recalled to the minds of their fathers. Poetry is, doubtless, the first of the intellectual arts which mankind cultivate. In its earliest form it is the mode of expressing affection and admiration; but, before it can be invented, there must be objects beloved and admired, associated with things in nature endowed with a local habitation and a name. In America, therefore, although there has been no lack of clever versifiers, nor of men who have respectably echoed the ideas current in the old world, the country has produced nothing of any value descriptive of the peculiar associations connected with its scenery. Among some of the Indian tribes a vein of original poetry has, indeed, been discovered; but the riches of the mine are unexplored, and the charge of sterility of fancy, which is made by the Europeans against the citizens of the United States, still remains unrefuted.

Since the period, however, to which these memoirs chiefly refer, events of great importance have occurred, and the recollections connected with them, no doubt, tend to imbue the American climate with the elements of poetical thought; but they are of too recent occurrence for the purposes either of the epic or the tragic muse. The facts of history in America are still seen too much in detail for the imagination to combine them with her own creation. The fields of battle are almost too fresh for the farmer to break the surface; and years must elapse before the ploughshare shall turn up those eroded arms of which the sight will call into poetical existence the sad and dreadful incidents of the civil war.

In New York Mr. West found the society wholly devoted to mercantile pursuits. A disposition to estimate the value of things, not by their utility, or by their beauty, but by the price which they would bring in the market, almost universally prevailed. Mercantile men are habituated by the nature of their transactions to overlook the intrinsic qualities of the very commodities in which they deal; and though of all the community they are the most liberal and the most munificent, they set the least value on intellectual productions. The population of New York was formed of adventurers from all parts of Europe, who had come thither for the express purpose of making money, in order, afterwards, to appear with distinction at home. Although West, therefore, found in that city much employment in taking likenesses destined to be transmitted to relations and friends, he met with but few in whom he found any disposition congenial

to his own; and the eleven months which he passed there, in consequence, contributed less to the improvement of his mind than might have been expected from a city so flourishing. Still, the time was not altogether barren of occurrences which tended to advance his progress in his art, independent of the advantage arising from constant practice.

He happened, during his residence there, to see a beautiful Flemish picture of a hermit praying before a lamp, and he was resolved to paint a companion to it, of a man reading by candle-light. But before he discovered a method of producing, in day-light, an effect on his model similar to what he wished to imitate, he was frequently baffled in his attempts. At length, he hit on the expedient of persuading his landlord to sit with an open book before a candle in a dark closet; and he found that, by looking in upon him from his study, the appearance was exactly what he wished for. In the schools and academies of Europe, tradition has preserved the methods by which all the magical effects of light and shadow have been produced, with the exception, however, of Rembrandt's method, and which the author of these sketches ventures to suggest was attained, in general, by observing the effect of sunshine passing through chinks into a dark room. But the American Artist was as yet unacquainted with any of them, and had no other guides to the essential principles of his art but the delicacy of his sight, and that ingenious observation of Nature to which allusion has been already so often made.

The picture of the Student, or man reading by candle-light,

was bought by a Mr. Myers, who, in the revolution, continued to adhere to the English cause. The same gentleman also bought a copy which West made about the same time of Belisarius, from the engraving by Strange, of Salvator Rosa's painting. It is not known what has now become of these pictures; but when the Artist long afterwards saw the original of Salvator Rosa, he was gratified to observe that he had instinctively coloured his copy almost as faithfully as if it had been painted from the picture instead of the engraving.

In the year 1759 the harvest in Italy fell far short of what was requisite for the ordinary consumption of the population, and a great dearth being foreseen, Messrs. Rutherford and Jackson, of Leghorn, a house of the first consequence then in the Mediterranean trade, and well known to all travellers for the hospitality of the partners, wrote to their correspondent Mr. Allen, at Philadelphia, to send them a cargo of wheat and flour. Mr. Allen was anxious that his son, before finally embarking in business, should see something of the world; and Provost Smith, hearing his intention of sending him to Leghorn with the vessel, immediately waited on the old gentleman, and begged him to allow West to accompany him, which was cheerfully acceded to, and the Provost immediately wrote to his pupil at New York on the subject. In the mean time, West had heard that there was a vessel at Philadelphia loading for Italy, and had expressed to Mr. William Kelly, a merchant, who was then sitting to him for his portrait, a strong desire to avail himself of this opportunity

to visit the fountain-head of the arts. Before this period, he had raised his terms for a half-length to ten guineas, by which he acquired a sum of money adequate to the expenses of a short excursion to Italy. When he had finished Mr. Kelly's portrait, that gentleman, in paying him, requested that he would take charge of a letter to his agents in Philadelphia, and deliver it to them himself on his return to that city, which he was induced to do immediately, on receiving Dr. Smith's letter, informing him of the arrangement made with Mr. Allen. When this letter was opened, an instance of delicate munificence appeared on the part of Mr. Kelly, which cannot be too highly applauded. It stated to the concern to which it was addressed, that it would be delivered by an ingenious young gentleman, who, he understood, intended to visit Rome for the purpose of studying the fine arts, and ordered them to pay him fifty guineas as a present from him towards furnishing his stores for the voyage.

While waiting till the vessel was clear to sail, West had the gratification to see, in Philadelphia, his old friend Mr. Henry, for whom he had painted the Death of Socrates. Towards him he always cherished the most grateful affection. He was the first who urged him to attempt historical composition; and, above all, he was the first who had made him acquainted with the magnanimous tales of Plutarch; perhaps, the greatest favour which could be conferred on a youthful mind, susceptible of impressions from the sublime and beautiful of human actions, which no author has better illustrated than that celebrated

Biographer, who may indeed be regarded, almost without hyperbole, as the recorder of antient worth, and the tutor of modern genius. In his peculiar class, Plutarch still stands alone, at least no author in any of the living languages appears to be yet truly sensible of the secret cause by which his sketches give that direct impulse to the elements of genius, by which the vague and wandering feelings of unappropriated strength are converted into an uniform energy, endowed with productive action. Plutarch, like the sculptors of antiquity, has selected only the great and elegant traits of character; and hence his lives, like those statues which are the models of art, possess, with all that is graceful and noble in human nature, the particular features of individuals. He had no taste for the blemishes of mankind. His mind delighted in the contemplation of moral vigour; and he seems justly to have thought that it was nearly allied to virtue: hence many of those characters whose portraitures in his works furnish the youthful mind with inspiring examples of true greatness, more authentic historians represent in a light far different. It is the aim of all dignified art to exalt the mind by exciting the feelings as well as the judgment; and the immortal lessons of Plutarch would never have awakened the first stirrings of ambition in the innumerable great men who date their career from reading his pages, had he been actuated by the minute and invidious spirit of modern biography. These reflections have occurred the more forcibly at this juncture, as the subject of this narrative was on the point of leaving a country in which were men destined to acquire glory in

such achievements as Plutarch would have delighted to record; and of parting from early associates who afterwards attained a degree of eminence in the public service that places them high in the roll of those who have emulated the exploits and virtues of the Heroes of that great Biographer.

The Artist having embarked with young Allen had a speedy and pleasant passage to Gibraltar; where, in consequence of the war then raging, the ship stopped for convoy. As soon as they came to anchor, Commodore Carney and another officer came on board to examine the vessel's papers. It happened that some time before, the British Government had, on account of political circumstances, prohibited the carrying of provisions into Italy, by which prohibition the ship and cargo would have been forfeited had she been arrested in attempting to enter an Italian port, or, indeed, in proceeding with such an intention. But Captain Carney had scarcely taken his pen to write the replies to the questions which he put to the Master, as to the owners of the vessel and her destination, when he again threw it down, and, looking the other officer full in the face, said, "I am much affected by the situation in which I am now placed. This valuable ship is the property of some of my nearest relations, and the best friends that I have ever had in the world!" and he refrained from asking any more questions. There was, undoubtedly, much generosity in this conduct, for by the indulgence of the crown, all prizes taken in war become the property of the captors; and Captain Carney, rather than enrich himself at the expence of his friends,

chose to run the hazard of having his own conduct called in question for the non-performance of his official duty. It perhaps deserves also to be considered as affording a favourable example of that manly confidence in the gentlemanly honour of each other which has so long distinguished the British officers. On the mind of West it tended to confirm that agreeable impression by which so many previous incidents had made him cherish a liberal opinion of mankind. In other respects, Captain Carney happening to be the officer who came on board, was a fortunate circumstance; for on learning that young Allen was in the ship, he invited the passengers to dine on board his frigate; and the company, consisting of the Governor, his staff, and principal officers in the garrison, tended to raise the consideration of the Artist, and his companion in the estimation of the fleet with which their vessel was to proceed to Leghorn. Indeed, throughout his whole life, Mr. West was, in this respect, singularly fortunate; for although the condescensions of rank do not in themselves confer any power on talent, they have the effect of producing that complacency of mind in those who are the objects of them, which is at once the reward and the solace of intellectual exertion, at the same time that they tend to mollify the spirit of contemporary invidiousness. The day after, the fleet sailed; and when they had passed the rock, the captains of the two men of war[2] who had

[2] The two frigates, the Shannon, Captain Meadow, since Lord Manvers, whose intimacy still continues with Mr. West, and the Favourite sloop of war, Captain Pownell.

charge of the convoy, came on board the American, and invited Mr. Allen and Mr. West to take their passage in one of the frigates; this, however, they declined, but every day, when the weather was favourable, they were taken on board the one ship or the other, to dine; and when the weather did not permit this to be done with pleasure to the strangers, the officers sent them presents from their stock.

After touching at several parts of the coast of Spain, the ship arrived safely at Leghorn, where mercantile enquiries detained Mr. Allen some time, and West being impatient to proceed to Rome, bade him adieu. Prior to his departure from Philadelphia, he had paid into the hands of old Mr. Allen the money which he thought would be requisite for his expenses in Italy, and had received from him a letter of credit on Messrs. Jackson and Rutherford. When they were made acquainted with the object of his voyage, and heard his history, they showed him a degree of attention beyond even their general great hospitality, and presented him with letters to Cardinal Albani, and several of the most distinguished characters for erudition and taste in Rome; and as he was unacquainted with French or Italian, they recommended him to the care of a French Courier, who had occasion to pass that way.

When the travellers had reached the last stage of their journey, while their horses were baiting, West walked on alone. It was a beautiful morning; the air was perfectly placid, not a speck of vapour in the sky, and a profound tranquillity seemed almost

sensibly diffused over the landscape. The appearance of Nature was calculated to lighten and elevate the spirits; but the general silence and nakedness of the scene touched the feelings with solemnity approaching to awe. Filled with the idea of the metropolitan city, the Artist hastened forward till he reached an elevated part of the high road, which afforded him a view of a spacious champaign country, bounded by hills, and in the midst of it the sublime dome of St. Peter's. The magnificence of this view of the Campagna excited, in his imagination, an agitated train of reflections that partook more of the nature of feeling than of thought. He looked for a spot to rest on, that he might contemplate at leisure a scene at once so noble and so interesting; and, near a pile of ruins fringed and trellissed with ivy, he saw a stone that appeared to be part of a column. On going towards it, he perceived that it was a mile-stone, and that he was then only eight miles from the Capitol. In looking before him, where every object seemed by the transparency of the Italian atmosphere to be brought nearer than it was in reality, he could not but reflect on the contrast between the circumstances of that view and the scenery of America; and his thoughts naturally adverted to the progress of civilization. The sun seemed, to his fancy, the image of truth and knowledge, arising in the East, continuing to illuminate and adorn the whole earth, and withdrawing from the eyes of the old world to enlighten the uncultivated regions of the new. He thought of that remote antiquity when the site of Rome itself was covered with unexplored forests; and passing

with a rapid reminiscence over her eventful story, he was touched with sorrow at the solitude of decay with which she appeared to be environed, till he adverted to the condition of his native country, and was cheered by the thought of the greatness which even the fate of Rome seemed to assure to America. For he reflected that, although the progress of knowledge appeared to intimate that there was some great cycle in human affairs, and that the procession of the arts and sciences from the East to the West demonstrated their course to be neither stationary nor retrograde; he could not but rejoice, in contemplating the skeleton of the mighty capital before him, that they had improved as they advanced, and that the splendour which would precede their setting on the shores of Europe, would be the gorgeous omen of the glory which they would attain in their passage over America.

While he was rapt in these reflections, he heard the drowsy tinkle of a pastoral bell behind him, and on turning round, he saw a peasant dressed in shaggy skins, driving a few goats from the ruins. The appearance and physiognomy of this peasant struck him as something more wild and ferocious than any thing about the Indians; and, perhaps, the observation was correctly philosophical. In the Indian, Nature is seen in that primitive vigour and simplicity, in which the actions are regulated by those feelings that are the elements of the virtues; but in the Italian bandit, for such he had reason afterwards to think was the real character of the goat-herd, he saw man in that second state of

barbarity, in which his actions are instigated by wants that have often a vicious origin.

Chap. VI

State of the stationary Society of Rome. – Causes which rendered the City a delightful temporary residence. – Defects of the Academical methods of study. – His introduction to Mr. Robinson. – Anecdote of Cardinal Albani. – The Cardinal's method of finding Resemblances, and curious mistake of the Italians. – The Artist's first visit to the Works of Art.

During the pontificate of Pope Rezzonico, the society of Rome had attained a pitch of elegance and a liberality of sentiment superior to that of any other city of Christendom. The theocratic nature of the government induced an exterior decorum in the public form of politeness, which, to strangers who took no interest in the abuses of the state, was so highly agreeable, that it tended even to appease their indignation against the laxity of private morals. If the traveller would forget that the name of Christianity was employed in supporting a baneful administration to the vices, or could withdraw his thoughts from the penury and suffering which such an administration necessarily entailed on the people, he had opportunities of access at Rome to the most various and delightful exercises of the faculties of memory, taste, and judgment, in the company of persons distinguished for their knowledge and genius. For, with all the social intercourse for which Paris was celebrated in the

reign of Louis XV. the local objects at Rome gave a higher and richer tone to conversation there; even the living vices were there less offensive than at Paris, the rumours of them being almost lost in the remembrance of departed virtue, constantly kept awake by the sight of its monuments and vouchers. Tyranny in Rome was exercised more intellectually than in the French Capital. Injustice and oppression were used more in the form of persuasion; and though the crosier was not less pernicious than the bayonet, it inflicted a less irritating injury. The virtuous endured with patience the wrongs that their misguided judgment led them to believe were salutary to their eternal welfare. But it ought to be observed, that the immorality of the Romans was greatly exaggerated. Individuals redeemed by their merits the reproach of universal profligacy; and strangers, by being on their guard against the moral contagion, suffered a less dangerous taint than in the Atheistical coteries of Paris. Many, in consequence, who came prepared to be disgusted with the degenerated Romans, often bade them adieu with sentiments of respect, and remembered their urbanity and accomplishments with delightful satisfaction.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.