THE

PRIVATE GALLERY

OF

HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN,

AT

BUCKINGHAM PALACE.

☞ *Visitors are admitted only by an Order from the Lord Chamberlain, and during the absence of Her Majesty from the Palace.*

INTRODUCTION.

THE pictures which now constitute the private gallery of her Majesty at Buckingham Palace, were principally collected by George IV., whose exclusive predilection for pictures of the Dutch and Flemish schools is well known. To those which he brought together here, and which formerly hung in Carlton House, her present Majesty has made, since her accession, many valuable additions; some purchased, and others selected from the royal collections at Windsor and Hampton Court; others have been added by Prince Albert, from the collection of the late Professor D'Alton, of Bonn.

The pictures, excepting the royal portraits, are hung in a gallery constructed especially for their reception when Buckingham House was altered for the residence of George IV.; it runs from north to south through the body of the edifice, and forms a corridor opening into suites of apartments on either side. It appears to me too lofty, and the light not well contrived for such small and delicate pictures. Each picture has the name of the painter and the title by which it is known attached to it legibly, but as they are neither numbered nor classed, I have, for the sake of present and future reference, arranged the pictures in the gallery according to the classification adopted throughout this volume, and already explained; and added thereto a list of the Royal Portraits, which are now hung in the state rooms adjoining the gallery, and to which the visitors are usually admitted.

George IV. began to form his collection about the year 1802, and was chiefly guided by the advice and judgment of Sir Charles Long, afterwards Lord Farnborough, an accomplished man, whose taste for art, and intimacy with the King, then Prince of Wales, rendered him a very fit person to carry the royal wishes into execution. The importation of the Orleans gallery had diffused a feeling—or, it may be, a *fashion*—for the higher specimens of the Italian schools, but under the auspices of George IV. the tide set in an opposite direction.

In the year 1812, the very select gallery of Flemish and Dutch pictures collected by Sir Francis Baring, was transferred by purchase to the Prince Regent. Sir Francis Baring had purchased the best pictures from the collections of M. Geldermeester of Amsterdam (sold in 1800), and that of the Countess of Holderness* (sold in 1802), and, except the Hope gallery, there was nothing at that time to compare with it in England. I have heard that Mr. Seguier, valued this collection at eighty thousand pounds; but the exact sum paid for it I do not know—certainly much less.† Before and since that time, the known predilection of the monarch for works of the Dutch school, the high, and what Dr. Waagen terms (rather equivocally) the "*princely*" prices paid for this class of pictures, and which have since been kept up by fashion and the picture dealers, have almost emptied the celebrated cabinets of Holland. The most valuable masterpieces once in the collections of Braamcamp, van Slingelandt, Geldermeester, Smeth van Alpen, Greffier Fägel, the Duc de Choiseul, the Duc de Praslin, Pou-

* She was a Dutchwoman by birth, and it appears that several of her finest pictures had descended to her as heir-looms.

† 24,000*l.* is the sum which has been stated to me, on what I consider high authority.

lain, and latterly those of the Duc de Berri, Talleyrand, Calonne, have found their way to England, and the acquisitions made by collectors here now comprise some of the most exquisite and valuable productions of a school of art which, though more easily comprehended and relished than the ideal creations of the great poet-painters of Italy, is yet not always well understood or justly appreciated; not even by those who are astonished, delighted, or diverted by the power of imitation, the delicate and minute execution, and the grotesque humour displayed in some of these marvellous performances.

The Dutch painters, properly so called, are those who flourished in the Low Countries, particularly at the Hague, Leyden, Amsterdam, and Haarlem, towards the end of the sixteenth and throughout the seventeenth century, comprising a period of about 120 years: and here, as in the Italian schools, we find the earliest, the *best*, and the latest, the *worst* painters of their class. In the highest rank we place Jan Steen, Teniers, and Adrian van Ostade, as delineators of plebeian character and life; Terburg, Netscher, and Eglon Vander Neer, as painters of elegant social life; Gerard Douw, Gabriel Metzu, and Franz Mieris, as the most refined portrayers of common life and domestic incident; De Hooghe, and Vander Heyden, as imitators of purely natural effects of perspective and light. Hobbema, Ruysdael, Adrian Vander Velde, and Cuyp, stand perhaps at the head of a long list of landscape painters; Paul Potter was confessedly the greatest cattle painter, as Wouvermanns was the best painter of equestrian subjects, in the world; and, for sea pieces merely, Wilhelm Vander Velde and Ludolf Backhuysen are considered unrivalled. All these painters, however they might differ in the selection of their subjects, and in the individual manner of treatment (easily discriminated by a little practice and observation), had taken that direction which

had been given to the national taste and genius by the influence and example of Rubens. They were distinguished generally by two characteristics—1st, the most lively and intense perception of natural forms and effects, and 2dly, the development of the faculty of colour. Some finished more, and some less, but all were exquisite imitators and colourists. The degree of intellectual power and moral sentiment which each brought to bear upon and direct this wonderful mechanical skill, varies considerably. In Gerard Douw and Franz Mieris we have mind as well as mechanism; and in Wilhelm Mieris and Slingelandt, we have the mechanism without the mind. The observer admitted into this beautiful gallery, will find here excellent opportunities for immediate comparison: he will *feel* these characteristic differences, and will do well to note the causes and results.

A descriptive catalogue of a gallery of Dutch pictures must needs be dry and full of repetitions, for the reasons given by Sir Joshua Reynolds, who has summed up their merits in his usual masterly style. "One would wish," he says, "to be able to convey to the reader some idea of that excellence, the sight of which has afforded so much pleasure; but as their merit often consists in the truth of representation alone, whatever praise they deserve, whatever pleasure they give when under the eye, they make but a poor figure in description. It is to the eye only that the works of this school are addressed; it is not, therefore, to be wondered at, that what was intended solely for the gratification of one sense, succeeds but ill when applied to another. A market woman with a hare in her hand, a man blowing a trumpet, or a boy blowing bubbles, a view of the inside or outside of a church, are the subjects of some of their most valuable pictures; but there is still entertainment, even in such pictures; however uninteresting their subjects, there is some plea-

sure in the contemplation of the truth of the imitation. But to a painter they afford likewise instruction in his profession; here he may learn the art of colouring and composition, a skilful management of light and shade, and, indeed, all the mechanical parts of the art, as well as in any other school whatever. The same skill which is practised by Rubens and Titian in their large works, is here exhibited, though on a smaller scale. Painters should go to the Dutch school to learn the *art of painting*, as they would go to a grammar school to learn languages: they must go to Italy to learn the higher branches of knowledge. We must be contented to make up our idea of perfection from the excellences which are dispersed over the world. A poetical imagination, expression, character, or even correctness of drawing, are seldom united with that power of colouring which would set off those excellences to the best advantage; and in this, perhaps, no school ever excelled the Dutch. An artist, by a close examination of their works, may in a few hours make himself master of the principles on which they wrought, which cost them whole ages, and perhaps the experience of a succession of ages, to ascertain."

Here Sir Joshua Reynolds speaks chiefly of the value of such works in the eye of a *painter*, as studies in the practical part of his profession; but the best among them can also impart exceeding delight to the cultivated taste of an amateur. The beautiful conversation pieces of Netscher and Terburg, are like scenes of elegant comedy or domestic fiction. I could no more endure to see Teniers, or Jan Steen, or even the coarse Brouwer, sacrificed to Titian and Guido, than I would wish to have Hudibras, the Rape of the Lock, or Congreve's comedies expunged from our literature, because we possess a Shakspeare, a Milton, a Spenser. Though we love Claude, and revel in his Arcadian fictions, "beautiful as a wreck of Paradise," should

we therefore be insensible to the delicious rural feeling of Hobbema, or the breezy freshness of Vander Velde? This were pitiable. It is good, as I have said before, to cultivate as far as possible a catholic taste in the fine arts; though the individual temperament must necessarily determine our preferences, and the amount of pleasure enjoyed through our sympathies.

In the foregoing remarks on the Dutch painters, I have said nothing of Rembrandt, because he stands alone as the creator of a style apart. Some of his finest works adorn the Queen's Gallery, and give us an excellent opportunity of studying "this mysterious and extraordinary being," for such he truly was, and undoubtedly a genius of the first class, in whatever is not immediately related to form or taste; "for, in spite of the most portentous deformity and vulgarity, and without considering the spell of his chiaroscuro, such were his powers of nature, such the grandeur, pathos, and simplicity of his composition, from the most elevated and extensive arrangement to the meanest and homeliest, that the most untutored and most cultivated eye, plain common sense and the most refined sensibility, dwell on them equally enthralled."*

"Rembrandt's enormous faculty of imagination is not more remarkable than the singular and original direction of his extraordinary powers. He is the very king of shadows,

——————— Earth-born,
And sky-engendered—son of mysteries!

a poet-painter, if ever there was one! He reminds me of the prince-sorcerer, nurtured 'in the cave of Domdaniel, under the roots of the sea.' Such an enchanted 'den of darkness' was his mill and its skylight to him; and there, magician-like, he brooded over half-seen forms, and his

* See Fuseli's notes to Pilkington's Lives of the Painters.

imagination framed strange spells out of elemental light and shade. Thence he brought his unearthly shadows; his dreamy splendours; his supernatural gleams; his gems, flashing and sparkling with internal light; his lustrous glooms; his wreaths of flaming and embossed gold; his wicked, wizard-like heads — turbaned, wrinkled, seared, dusky; pale with forbidden studies, solemn with thoughtful pain, keen with the hunger of avarice, and furrowed with an eternity of years! I have seen pictures of his, (such is the Wise-Men's Offering, in this gallery,) in which the shadowy back-ground is absolutely peopled with life. At first, all seems palpable darkness—apparent vacancy; but figure after figure emerges—another, and another; they glide into view, they take shape and colour, as if they grew out of the canvas; even while we gaze, we rub our eyes, and wonder whether it be the painter's work or our own fancy.

"Of all the great painters, Rembrandt is perhaps least understood; the admiration bestowed on him, the immense prices given for his pictures, is, in general, a fashion—a mere matter of convention, like the price of a diamond. To feel Rembrandt truly, it is not enough to be an artist or an amateur picture-fancier; one should be something of a poet too."* What is most extraordinary about him is, the intense impression of nature, of a presence—a reality which comes upon us from amidst this world of light and shadow:—

> I see a mighty darkness
> Filling the seat of power, and rays of gloom
> Dart round, as light from the meridian sun,
> Ungazed upon and shapeless—neither limb,
> Nor form, nor outline; yet we feel it is
> A living spirit.

Those who would understand and feel the poetry of

* Visits and Sketches. A. J.

Rembrandt, should look at the "Christ in the Garden" and the "Wise Men's Offering" here; the "Visitation" of the Grosvenor Gallery, and the "Woman taken in Adultery" of the National Gallery.

The specimens of Rubens and Van Dyck are excellent, but do not present sufficient variety to afford an adequate idea of the wide range of power of the first of these great painters, nor of the particular talent of the last. On the other hand, the works and style of Gerard Douw, Teniers, Jan Steen, Adrian and Wilhelm Vandervelde, Wouvermanns, and Berghem, may be more advantageously studied in this gallery than in any other I have visited, for the specimens of each of these masters are many in number, various in subject, and good in their kind. Of Mieris and Metzu, there are finer specimens at Mr. Hope's and Sir Robert Peel's; and the Hobbemas and Cuyps must yield to those of Lord Ashburton and Lord Francis Egerton. But, on the whole, it is certainly the finest gallery of this class of works in England. The collection derives additional interest from the presence of some pictures of the modern British artists—Reynolds, Wilkie, Allan, Newton, Gainsborough. It is, however, only just to these painters to add that not one of their pictures here ought to be considered as a first-rate example of their power. I wish I could add the name of Edwin Landseer, one of the few modern painters whose pictures would not suffer by juxtaposition with this particular school of art; but though he has painted many pictures for the Queen, none of them are as yet placed in the gallery.

I reserve some further observations on the Dutch and Flemish schools, and particularly the characteristics of the Dutch landscape painters, till we review the collections of Mr. Hope and Sir Robert Peel.