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978-1-108-07418-6 - Tour of a German Artist in England: With Notices of
Private Galleries, and Remarks on the State of Art: Volume 1

Johann David Passavant

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Tour of a German Artist in England

The German artist Johann David Passavant (1787–1861) visited Britain in 1831 in order to examine works by Raphael in private and public galleries for a book he was preparing. He had not been able to find any helpful German accounts of British collections, and so decided to publish a narrative of his own travels and observations. The British writer and art critic Elizabeth Rigby (later Lady Eastlake) produced a two-volume translation in 1836, believing that English readers would benefit from Passavant's descriptions of little-known collections in their own country, as well as from his practitioner's response to the works themselves. Volume 1 covers the National Gallery, the Royal Academy and the royal collections at Buckingham and Kensington Palaces, Windsor Castle and Hampton Court, as well as the private galleries of aristocrats and wealthy commoners in London and the home counties, ending with the colleges of Oxford.

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Tour of a German Artist in England

*With Notices of Private Galleries,
and Remarks on the State of Art*

VOLUME 1

JOHANN DAVID PASSAVANT
TRANSLATED BY ELIZABETH RIGBY



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BY M. PASSAVANT.
IN TWO VOLUMES, WITH PLATES.
VOL. I.
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P R E F A C E.

IN the spring of the year 1831, on first projecting a journey to England for the purpose of ascertaining the state of art in that country, I naturally looked around me for those works most calculated to give information on the subject, and found, to my astonishment, little of a satisfactory nature.

The works of the elder Richardson, published 1722,—of which a second edition, enriched with addenda by the younger Richardson, with the title, “The Works of Jonathan Richardson,” appeared in 1773,—although containing many notices of much interest, offer by no means a complete account of the collections of art in England.

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In the “English Connoisseur,” published in two volumes, a particular account of the paintings in England, with reports of the sales of different collections, names of purchasers, &c., up to the year 1766, will be found. By this means, a good idea of the rank and nature of the English galleries at that period may be obtained; although, at the same time, as far as regards the names of masters, this authority is frequently fallacious. At all events, since that period, so many pictures—and among the rest the splendid Houghton collection—have quitted the English shores, so many have exchanged masters at home, and, during the last forty years, such innumerable objects of art have been imported into the country, that the “Connoisseur” ceases to afford the information requisite at our present date.

The same may be said of Dr. Joh. Jac. Volkmann’s “*Neuste Reisen durch England*,” published at Leipsic, 1781, in four volumes, 8vo; a work, otherwise, of great merit, and of authentic reference at that time.

Dr. G. F. A. Wendeborn’s “*Zustand des*

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Staats, der Religion, der Gelehrsamkeit und der Kunst in England ; Berlin, 1785—1788,” 4 vols., 8vo, contains, in the last volume, a general critical examination of the state of art in England, with notices on some of the then living artists : these, however, being confined rather to opinions than facts, this portion of the work assumes but a secondary value.

In Ch. Aug. Gottl. Göde’s interesting work on “England, Wales, and Ireland,” 5 vols., 8vo, various notices of the English galleries occur ; but during my sojourn in England, I became aware of their insufficiency, both as respects completeness and connoisseurship.

A true French vivacity characterizes Louis Simond’s “*Voyage en Angleterre pendant les années 1810, 1811. Paris, 1817.*” 2 vols., 8vo. On all works of art, however, the author’s observations are very limited, and, in general, he only mentions those pictures to which his taste peculiarly directed him ; those, for instance, by Rembrandt. He, in short, professes to be no

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connoisseur. This work was translated by L. Schlosser, under the title, “*Reise eines Gallo-Amerikaners*, 1817.”

S. H. Spiker’s “*Reise durch England, Wales, und Schottland, im Jahre 1816; Leipzig, 1818*,” contains, like Göde’s work, many notices on the collections in the different country-seats; many are, however, omitted, and those in the capital are entirely passed over in silence, the author not professing to make any attempt at a work of a complete nature.

Johanna Schopenhauer’s “*Reise durch England und Schottland, im Jahre 1816; Leipzig, 1818*,” contains too superficial an account of the collections in those countries to convey any adequate or satisfactory idea of their wealth and value.

Dr. A. H. Niemeyer’s “*Beobachtungen auf einer Reise nach England; Halle, 1822*,” 2 vols., 8vo, gives a true picture of what he saw, with notices of the most interesting nature upon the two Universities. Works of art were, however,

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by no means his object, and paintings are scarcely alluded to.

The work entitled, “*Bilder aus England, von Adrian ; Frankfurt A.M., 1827,*” 2 vols., 8vo, only offer, towards the latter part, a short description of the works of a few distinguished artists, such as Lawrence, West, Martin, &c.

H. Meidinger’s “*Reise durch Grossbritannien und Irland, vorzüglich in topographischer, kommerzieller und statistischer Hinsicht ; Frankfurt A.M., 1828,*” 2 vols., 8vo, is an excellent companion in travelling through England. Not only has he followed the example of Dr. Volkmann, in borrowing from authentic sources of information, but, through personal observation, his work bears that stamp of correctness which, if I may be allowed so to say, does not always appear in that by Volkmann.

A work of the most recent date is, “*Breife eines Verstorbenen,*”* who sometimes enters upon

* “Tour of a German Prince,” translated by Mrs. Austin.
—*Transl.*

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the subject of art, although usually only superficially, and with more display of general talent than of connoisseur knowledge.

Details of a more copious nature will be found in the descriptions of individual collections, which are generally very splendidly got up beneath the patronage, or even at the sole expense, of the proprietor himself. Hence it is, that strict impartiality of judgment, even where these works have been assisted by competent knowledge of the subject, (a circumstance which sometimes appears questionable,) cannot, in these instances, be expected. Besides these objections, works of this nature are seldom to be met with out of England, and I frequently only obtained the sight of them after having previously examined the objects they described. In the course of the following remarks, it will be found that I have notified such works in the different collections where they occur.

Although my journey to England referred principally to an examination of the works of

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Raphael, as a preliminary step to a projected work on the life and productions of that master, yet this very object naturally opened to my acquaintance most of the first collections in that country. The observations thus obtained I here submit to the judgment of the connoisseur and of the amateur public in general.

In this work I flatter myself in being able to offer to the public many discoveries of novelty, and remarks of a more particular and emendatory nature than have yet appeared. Where it has laid in my power to give historical references, I have not failed so to do. In answer to any remark upon the conspicuous place which the picture galleries hold in this work, I beg to remind the reader that this subject is least generally known, while, on the other hand, many English works on architecture and sculpture, and some of the most excellent kind, are extant, which frequently find their way over to the continent.

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Of the collections of drawings by old masters in England, I have described four of the most valuable, which will probably be thought sufficient.

Should it be remarked that many hitherto quoted works by the first masters are missing in the following observations, it may be safely concluded, that my object in preserving silence has been to avoid giving that offence which I should otherwise infallibly have done by the exposure of the truth.

The want of completeness in my descriptions of country seats, and their various treasures of art, I have endeavoured to supply by a supplementary list, borrowed either from different authentic works, or imparted by friendly communications.

To the amateur and man of research, the catalogues of King Charles I.'s collection, and that of the Orleans Gallery, will not be unacceptable additions,—the former being of rare

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occurrence out of England, and the latter having been supplied me, in the most complete form, with the names of purchasers and prices affixed.

To those who have not leisure to examine the more copious works upon the history of art in England, the “Survey of Art in England,” at the end of this work, slight and sketchy as it is, will not be devoid of interest.

In conclusion, I cannot refrain from mentioning the kind reception and friendly assistance in my researches, which I almost invariably met with in the course of my journey. If I have in any instance failed to acknowledge this, I can only beg those individuals to whom I am thus indebted, should these lines ever reach them, to be assured, that the most grateful remembrance of their goodness will ever accompany me, and that my heart often wanders back in thought to their blooming island in the ocean, and to the kind friends it contains.

Frankfurt A.M., March, 1833.

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IN presenting this work under the present form to an English public, the translator feels aware that it carries in the title-page a recommendation to notice of no little importance; and that, to the general reader, as well as professed amateur, who may wish to see the face of English art reflected, as it were, in a glass, the remarks of an enlightened foreign artist cannot be devoid of interest. As far as regards the novelty and variety of facts concerning the picture world, which M. Passavant has here brought forward, and which evince equal patience of research and liberality of investigation, he has established an important claim to our attention and respect : his

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own opinions, however, form so conspicuous a feature in the work, that, to all those who, either as proprietors of collections, or professors of the art themselves, are more intimately connected with the subject, some explanation, to justify his qualifications for the task, is here due. Of M. Passavant's early education the translator knows but little, except that he spent several years at Paris at that period when the finest specimens of every department of art were, through the means of commissaires, daily pouring into that capital, and when, for a short but brilliant epoch, Paris offered a school of art where the surest foundation of practical and theoretical knowledge might be laid. M. Passavant profited by the opportunities of investigation to the fullest extent, especially in the instances of paintings and drawings by the old masters; and this, added to subsequent and constant practice as an artist, and great natural talents for research, has raised him to the rank of one of the first connoisseurs of the day.

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The Author's object in visiting this country was professedly for the examination of the works by Raphael; by which means he obtained access to collections, some of which are unknown even by name to the English reader, and acquired a mass of correlative information, which he was induced to lay before the German public, whose veneration for English art has been further proved by the favourable reception which this work has found. This will account for the preponderance here given to the productions of the great master, and as M. Passavant's aim was not so much to go over old ground as to explore new, it will be found that various well-known collections are passed over in silence, while ample reparation is made by the light thrown on many a treasure, whose existence had scarcely been suspected.

It is perhaps a singular fact, that, in this writing age, no English work has yet been attempted which at all embraces the general view of art in England, or the number and

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variety of collections scattered through her counties, which a foreigner is here the first to offer. Several works of high interest and merit, it is true, exist; but these are confined to the public galleries alone, or at most include a few, and very few, of the largest and best known private collections. Another circumstance also in favour of this work is, that, as a foreigner, and unfettered by any ties, either of connexion, friendship, or patronage, M. Passavant has been able to express himself with the most perfect freedom and independence; — two qualities which various circumstances combine to render almost impracticable, in the true sense of the word, to the English critic. To those, therefore, who may feel mortification in finding a favourite work pulled down from its height, it can only be urged that his praise is as honest as his blame.

It is possible that the circumstance of this book having been already two years before the German public, may be an objection in the

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opinion of some ;—many alterations as to position of pictures having necessarily occurred ; but if the reader will reflect on the endless shiftings which are going forward on the theatre of art, it will be found impossible, even for two months in succession, to present a correct statement of these particulars. Interesting, also, as it may be to trace the wanderings of a picture from one country to another,—to see it now banished by civil factions, or snatched by foreign invasion,—now a sacrifice to royal bigotry, or the sport of private extravagance,—yet these are facts which the historian, equally as the connoisseur, could furnish, and are of separate, and perhaps secondary interest to those scientific criticisms and opinions which would teach us to view such chef-d'œuvres with eyes and judgments more capable of appreciating and enjoying their excellences.

For all faults and imperfections of style, the translator can only solicit indulgence. From the many technical and idiomatic terms, the

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work of translation has been rendered one of unusual difficulty; and fidelity to the original is the only merit it can with any justice assume. In all important changes the necessary notes have been added. By means of correspondence, also, the translator has obtained the advantage of the author's own corrections and emendations, which will account for some seeming discrepancies between this and the original version.

M. Passavant is now in Italy, pursuing his labours of research in collecting materials, drawings, &c., for a life of Raphael, which is intended for publication during the course of the ensuing summer.

March, 1836.