FINE ARTS.

A DIALOGUE ON DRAWING.

"Any one who can write can draw," says Frank Howard, in his little book *The Science of Drawing* : this should be an axiom of education.

"Delightful it may be, but I have not found it easy"—poutingly interrupts a pretty listener, just returned from school with a portfolio of laboured copies of her drawingmaster's mannerisms, and who is vainly trying to sketch a tree from the window—"I have been learning these three or four years, and I can't sketch the commonest object from nature."

The fault is not yours, my dear young lady, but your drawing-master's—or rather, his wrong method of teaching.

"It's very provoking to find out that one has been wasting one's time and pains for nothing with a bad master—stupid man!"

Do not blame him, but the system.

"What, then, *everybody* has been wrong taught to draw? It is some consolation not to be the only one."

And it is more consolatory to know that you may turn your present knowledge to account, and soon get into the right way.

(*Young Lady clears her brow and brightens up.*) "I'm glad I've not been learning for nothing, after all. But how am I to get into the right way?—and who is this Mr. Howard, who is to set all the world right on this point?—How is one to know that *his* is the proper method?"

Mr. Frank Howard is the son of the Royal Academician, and has published a set of Designs from Shakspeare, in the manner of Retzsch Outlines; and all that knowledge and skill which outline requires he has acquired by the method of learning he inculcates.

"They are very clever, certainly; but there are a great many clever artists besides Mr. Howard, and they have not all learnt in that way, I suppose. But what is his plan?"

To draw from objects at first, instead of copying the pictures of others.

"Why that is just what I cannot do, though I have learnt——"

Because you have learnt---hear me out. "The power of drawing resides in the head---in the intellect---not in the hand," is the axiom on which Mr. Howard's method is based. The first process of drawing is the perception of form---in the thorough understanding of the proportions of the different parts of an object, and of its general characters as shown by them. To perceive these correctly is the chief difficulty; to indicate the leading characteristics, when they are perceived, is comparatively easy——

"I must interrupt you: but do you really mean to say that it is so difficult to see what is before one?"

Even so.

"And that it is easy to draw what one sees?"

Exactly.

"Then why cannot I draw that tree? I can see that is an oak, but I cannot imitate the foliage."

Do you know the character of the tufts of leaves----the masses of foliage---the ramifications of the branches?

"I confess I do not; but if I did, I could not define them on so small a scale: besides, I have only learnt to imitate a general idea of a tree, and that is all I wish to do now."

But your general idea is too vague; it is not formed from a knowledge of particular characteristics: you are trying to imitate more than you understand; and when you get beyond what you know, your skill fails you, and the more you do the farther you are from the reality. You can sketch the outline, and indicate the forms of the masses, but more than this you should not attempt: and that is enough for ordinary purposes.

"But it did not require three or four years' instruction to teach me that."

Assuredly not: yet you cannot do more.

"I can copy pencil-drawings of my master's, which are highly finished: why can I not finish a drawing from nature?"

Because you have only learned a few conventional phrases, not the whole language of the pencil: so that you cannot express your own ideas or perceptions. To copy drawings, where all that you want to know how to do is done for you, is not the way to learn.

"How then is drawing to be acquired?"

By studying first the objects themselves; and next the principles on which solid forms and space are imitated on a flat surface.

"And those principles are?"——

Perspective, or the laws that govern the proportions and distances of objects; light and shadow, by which their forms and surface are shown, and atmospheric effects are imitated; and colouring---whose uses I need not define.

"But perspective is so difficult---it is quite a science of itself."

Its leading rules are few and simple, however complicated their application. Few artists even possess more than a slight knowledge of it: and to amateurs that is quite sufficient. The same with light and shadow, and colour.

"But I cannot learn these without a master; and all masters, according to you---teach wrong."

They begin at the wrong end, and teach you to use a pencil and brush dextrously, instead of showing you how to define objects.

"How can one define objects properly, without using the pencil and brush properly?"

The practice of imitating objects will give the requisite facility, just as well as copying their pictures; and you will be learning the properties of light and shade and the rules of perspective gradually as you proceed from simple to more complex forms, and groups of objects.

"This appears plain enough: but if it is so difficult for a beginner to copy a few touches in a drawing-book, how much more must it be to draw a real object, however simple?"

It is not so much so; for the lines of the object have meaning when the form is understood; but the touches of the master's hand have none to the pupil. The first step to imitation is to understand the thing to be represented. A clever draughtsman will not satisfy the architect in drawing a building, unless he understands the character of the "order" and of its ornaments; nor will a painter satisfy the surgeon in depicting the human form, or the naturalist or sportsman in delineating animals, who does not know their anatomy.

"Yet you said, that to see aright was the grand difficulty; and draughtsmen must be practised in that part of their art?"

But in order to see rightly, understanding of what is before you is necessary.

"Then the surgeon, the naturalist, and the architect should be able to draw men animals, and buildings, better than the draughtsman?"

Not so: they know the forms, but they have not been used to regard them with a view to their pictorial characteristics. The art of making pictures is distinct from the power of delineating objects: the two combined make the complete artist. All the world need not be artists; but everybody ought to be able to draw so as to express those ideas that cannot be conveyed in words—and there are many such. For instance, how can you describe the shape of a mountain, the character of a face, the style of a building, the fashion of an implement or piece of furniture, the form of a vase, and so on, without drawing? Nay more, it sharpens the perception itself, and enables you to detect nice differences and recondite beauties unseen by others. How many picturesque combinations of form and colour are perceived by the artist that escape the uncultivated perception! Even the study of pictures quickens the eye to the observance of the charms of nature. Thousands go through life in a state of half-sightedness: "seeing they see and do not perceive."

"You really consider then the faculty of perceiving form all that is requisite to be able to draw?"

Undoubtedly. It is in the eye that the power resides, as Mr. Howard says: the band obeys the eye insinctively, as you may see by the juggler balancing the sword and catching the balls that he throws up---his hand mechanically adapts its position to the direction of his eye.

"That, then, accounts for the wonderful talent that a young lady of my acquaintance possesses of cutting out paper profiles of persons with her hands under the table, and her eyes fixed on the individual all the while."

A happy instance: it completely proves the assertion.

"Yet this same young lady cannot match the colour of a silk accurately."

This shows the distinctness of the two faculties whose combination is necessary to make a painter.

The object of Mr. Howard is "to afford those who desire the power of delineating objects, without attempting to convert the representation into a picture, a sound and simple method of instruction in the art of drawing, upon the only solid basis of science."

"*The science of drawing*," he goes on to say, "*consists in the knowledge of the forms, in representing which consists the art*. Hitherto, in the education of the draughtsman, whether as an amateur or as a professional man, it has been the custom to devote attention solely to the *art*, and to leave the *science* to intuition or to chance."

After observing that this mode of teaching has caused drawing to be regarded as an art attainable only by a few gifted geniuses, he remarks on the absurdity of the course of study adopted for learners: "they are required to begin with details—with heads, hands, and feet, which are considered the test of the skill of the master."

Mr. Howard lays great stress on the character of objects. "It is the first indispensable qualification of drawing as a means of communicating ideas, that it should convey a distinct and intelligible impression: for this purpose, it must possess *character*"—not the character of the artist's manner, or style, observe, but of the object itself. He defines character to be "that quality by which one object differs permanently from another, whether the distinction be in size, form, colour, or any other property;" and thus illustrates its importance—"A pupil shall make a drawing almost a hair's-breadth of perfect accuracy; the lines shall be firm, and the form most carefully defined; nevertheless, it shall be pronounced ill drawn; while the master shall make the rudest sketch, without one single line correct, and yet it shall appear and be approved well drawn. * * In caricature, the skilful are able to take the greatest liberties with the human form, and yet the drawing is good; whilst the bungler shall avoid all defect and yet be pronounced deficient. The cause of this will be, that the student's work shows *a want of intention, and a want of knowledge*, in what parts defects are admissible and in what parts correctness is indispensable; in other words, what is absolutely requisite to preserve character. Correctness consists in conveying the impression intended; bad drawing is the deficiency of the characteristic."

The roughest, rudest general characteristics, should at first be attempted, drawn with decision and *without correction*. The details should be added as the hand acquires facility, and the head knowledge to direct it.

To exemplify his meaning, Mr. Howard gives a number of plates with little outlines and shaded figures of trees, each showing directly the characteristic form of the tree; and he has added some little sketches of the details of each—as the trunks, forms of branches, and leaves.—*Spectator.*

From the Mother's Magazine.

THE ONLY SON.

Frank Wilson was an only son, and his parents were among the most respectable inhabitants of the town where they resided. They were very indulgent to him, but as he was an affectionate, well-disposed boy, he did not abuse their kindness. He had an unmarried uncle, who was very fond of him. He was quite rich, and had said something about making Frank his heir. So, the parents frequently consulted him about their son, and he was pleased to give advice respecting his education. Once the uncle said, "I think you had better send Frank from home." The father replied, "I do not see the necessity of it. Our schools here, are considered among the best of the country; and boys are sent to them from other States." "That may be," the uncle answered, "and yet he ought to go from home. He is not as manly as other boys; I see him sometimes putting his arm around his mother's neck, or sitting with her hand in his, which is very childish, you know." So Frank felt constrained when his uncle visited them. He was afraid to show fondness for his parents or to express his affectionate feelings on other occasions, lest it should not be manly. At length, the uncle prevailed on the parents of Frank to have him sent from home, for two years before he entered college, engaging to pay the expenses of his board and tuition, at a celebrated academy, in a distant State. But the mother had many misgivings. She said, "I now know, at least, that my boy is not in bad company. This I cannot know, when he is away from me. While he studies his lessons by our fireside in the evening, I feel that he is not exposed to evil example; and he is always contented with me." "That is the misfortune sister. He is altogether too contented with you. Your husband is a good deal occupied with his business, and boys brought up by women, are good for nothing. He must be sent from home, or he never will be a man." It was in vain the mother argued that when the home was a good one, ann the school a good one, and the boy making good progress, and in good habits, that a change might be for the worse. Her objections were supposed by the uncle to spring from unwillingness to part with her son; and as the father had consented, she at length consented also. Frank was pleased at the thought of seeing new places, and making new acquaintances. The preparations for his wardrobe, and supply of books, being on a more liberal scale than he had been accustomed to, flattered his vanity and kept him in good spirits. But when the last trunk was locked, and he sat between his father and mother, expecting every moment the arrival of the stage-coach, tears came so fast to his eyes, and he felt such a pain at his heart, that he could scarcely heed their parting counsel. The sound of the wheels was heard at the door, and he wished to throw himself on his mother's neck and weep. But his uncle, who was to accompany him, jumped out of the coach, and came in. So, he said in a hurried voice, "Good-by, dear father, dear mother. You shall hear from me as soon as I get there." He dared not look back, until the roof of his home, and the elm-trees that over-shadowed it, were entirely out of sight. For he felt such a choking sensation, that he feared he should burst into tears, and he dreaded above all things, lest his uncle should call him "*Miss Frances*," in the presence of strangers. In a large school, he found more to try his temper than he had expected. He wished to be distinguished for scholarship, but there were many older and more advanced than himself, and when he had been once or twice disappointed, he did not put forth that energy and perseverance, which are necessary to secure success. He suffered from that loneliness of heart, which a stranger at school, and especially an only child, feels, when first exiled from the sympathies of home. In the turns of headache to which he had been subject from childhood, he painfully missed maternal nursing and tenderness. But to these trials he gradually became accustomed, and having a good temper, was rather a favorite among his associates. At length, his room-mate was changed, and a bad scholar and bad boy was placed in this intimate connexion with him. It was found that he had not moral courage enough to say, *No*, when he was tempted to do wrong, and a sad change in his behaviour soon became evident. Frank had not firmness enough to reprove his companion, for what he knew was improper or wicked; and he who is constantly expos