

From the Monthly Chronicle.

SCULPTURE IN ENGLAND.*

The government have bought pictures for the public, and the public are grateful: we have never heard a complaint against the expense of the Museum, or the National Gallery, or any other means of improvement which the public are called on to pay for and enjoy. But the government raises no statue. A vast number of individuals, however, have united to raise, by subscription, statues to Nelson and Wellington. The history of these transactions has thrown some light on the state of sculpture in England, the power to appreciate it, and the will to encourage it. The city statue was subscribed for and entrusted to Sir Francis Chantrey—with great propriety, as it appears to us. Not that we so estimate Sir Francis as to conceive him capable of producing a truly great work; but because his position and his fame, native and European, demand of his countrymen a fair opportunity for the exercise of his talent in almost the highest line of his profession. The share taken by government in this work was the supplying of some old cannon for the bronze of which the statue will be cast. It is to be completed in four years, and the artist will not probably be restricted to a thousand pounds or so in the ultimate expense. The site of this intended statue is the corner of Cornhill, opposite Cheapside, and near the Mansion House: its character is equestrian, and the size heroic. Neither the style nor site entirely satisfies our views of the subject; but we will not digress into objections: we shall content ourselves with rejoicing that English valour and sagacity are to be commemorated by English talent, and the city to be adorned with a work of art at the expense of the citizens.

No sooner was the statue decidedly entrusted to Sir F. Chantrey than the friends of Mr. Wyatt got up another subscription for the erection of a Wellington testimonial at the west end of the town. That the real object of this undertaking was the employment of the sculptor has been made clear in the course of the proceedings; and, if such a purpose had been avowed instead of disclaimed, who could have blamed the patrons of art? But patriotism, and taste, and all the virtues were assumed as the motive, and a large sum of money was subscribed, a committee formed, who met, discussed, arranged, and at length settled that the statue should be mounted first on a horse, and then horse and all on the archway opposite to Apsley House, and leading into the Green Park, and that Mr. Wyatt should be employed to execute it. Now, as on all such occasions, a great number of noblemen and gentlemen who had consented to be of the committee had carefully abstained from taking any share in its labours, or encountering any part of its responsibilities; and these honourable men, who ought to have guarded the public against what looked not unlike a job, although we are far from accusing the committee of any such intention, and what would certainly have given us, as the Wellington at the west end, something not unlike the King of Cockspur Street, now came forward, and accused the committee of partiality, and a hurry, and holding meetings without notice, and of various high crimes and misdemeanors, which were all resolvable into their own neglect of a duty which they ought either to have declined or discharged. Whether we are to have a Wyatt Wellington, or whether the malcontents of the committee will have spirit enough to reverse its decrees, remains to be seen; but we believe, however painful, and perhaps unfair, to the selected artists, the monument will be transferred to other hands, but not, we hope, into those of Sir F. Chantrey. If one George III. is enough for Mr. Wyatt, let one Wellington satisfy Sir Francis: there are able men behind.

Warned, however, by this alleged intrigue, and shocked, at least, by the reproaches hurled at the Wellington committee, the gentlemen selected by the subscribers to the Nelson memorial resolved on a public competition, which took place last March. The gallery of Mr. Rainy, in Regent Street, was accepted by the committee for the exhibition of models and drawings, and many artists and amateurs competed for the prize. Architects and sculptors were alike encouraged to try their talent; and the exhibition was expected to afford a fair view of the amount of ability in these arts as they existed in this country. And it was fair to suppose so. Than Nelson never was a hero so heartily beloved, never was a country more proud of a son, never were actions more capable of artistic illustration, nor a character more inspiring of lofty sentiment and high feeling than his. He was himself a genius with whom genius was likely to sympathise, in the astonishing boldness of conception, and in the rapidity and dash of execution. He scorned all pettiness of detail, all trifling quibbles of the schools; he was content to trust to the dictates of his own original mind, and won his battles, not according to rule, but by the force of genius; and it might be expected that the artist who would commemorate his actions would catch a spark of his fire; and scorning the pedantry of precedent, unfettered by rule, and excited to greatness, by the contemplation of greatness, would have produced something at once surprising and appropriate, something new yet recognised, daring but allowed, grand yet intelligible, bold, significant, expressive, and commanding admiration rather than soliciting approval. Was any thing of this kind exhibited? Nothing approaching to it. But in its place every variety of eccentric device, every extravagance of bewildering

imagination on the one side, and on the other every form of the cold and tame. Among the multitude of designs, few indeed were fitted to be the monument of any thing but the dulness of him who had conceived it. We will not waste words on the rocks from which flowed fountains, and on which sat tritons in the most amiable confusion, with the most inexplicable purpose; nor with the confectionary or pastry models of mock Egyptian and ungenial Greek temples; nor with the monstrous light-houses, nor the more absurd fountains, which decorated the rooms. The committee divided the designs into the column, the obelisk, and the pile, in which architecture and sculpture were combined, and selected from each class a specimen for the first, second, and third prize,—but not one for execution. The column was of the Corinthian order, surmounted by a statue: it was the design of Mr. Railton, and, although no way remarkable, was correct and pleasing as a column—a column *apropos* to what? certainly not to Nelson. The obelisk was the design of Mr. Bailey, and, had the competition proceeded, would have probably carried away the majority of suffrages. It was an Egyptian obelisk of granite, surrounded at the base with allegorical figures in bronze,—among them a lion, a Britannia, a Nelson, and a number of sea-gods and goddesses “swimming,” as somebody said, “round the world for sport,” but meant, according to the artist, to signify that Nelson’s victories were as extensive as the element on which they were gained, which, if they did express, their significance was as simply complex as Lord Burleigh’s nod. The architectural composition was the design of Messrs. Fowler, and Sevier, and was finished with remarkable beauty for a model, but was distinctly wanting in all the characteristic features of a monument to naval glory. Mr. Rennie, Mr. Coffee, Mr. Westmacott, and some others, appear to have approached more nearly the simple and severe standard which might be expected to guide this work: they all agree in a sculptured pedestal, columnar or pyramidal, surmounted by a statue. The pervading thought in these designs was certainly the true one; and he who succeeds best in embodying it will probably be the selected artist. But to accomplish this design great power and judgment are required; and perhaps the public would be unwilling to receive the grave and true for the frivolous and showy. But to return to the history. The committee had announced this selection, and the day was fixed for their final determination. In the meanwhile the press had spoken, the committee had consulted all who were likely to know any thing of the matter, and they resolved to re-open the competition, a resolution which does them the greatest credit, and which, we believe, the public owes to the Duke of Wellington and Sir Ridley (now Lord) Colborne. Sir Hussey Vivyan had taken under his patronage Lieut Siborn, and had resolved to move the committee to decide on a temple which should contain the model of Waterloo, now exhibiting at the Egyptian Hall, and a model of the battle of Trafalgar on a similar scale. From what we have seen and heard of the models in preparation, we have no doubt that the approaching competition will do more honour to English art; but we have no very high hopes of seeing such a tribute to Nelson as will at once satisfy the critic and the public—the true test of fitness in the design and of ability in the artist; but when we look abroad at the monuments of the Continent, ancient and modern, we do not see the design which we should desire to see naturalised for the Nelson monument. Here is a difficulty not carefully considered by the critics. The monument should be one to the glory of England’s navy; it should record by intelligible figures the localities of those victories, and the means by which they were gained, and the ideal of the men who won them; and Nelson should be the climax,—the point to which all should tend,—the grand feature, the aim, object, the soul of the composition.

We have endeavoured to show that at one period English sculpture had attained an eminence from which all but the summit of perfection was in sight. We have attempted to explain the causes that interrupted its progress. If we are right, the greatest evil of the interruption is over, and the stream of art again flows easily on. The advantages we possess in the splendid relics of ancient art, to direct its progress, cannot be calculated. As yet they have not produced their natural effect; but the advance of art is slow, and more especially is this true of sculpture. The country must acquire a taste for the beautiful, and a knowledge of its own treasures, before the artist can be stimulated to the necessary exertion. Money is no due reward, nor ordinary fame a sufficient stimulant to greatness. To be praised by those who know is the artist’s aim; and, until a whole people are educated to an understanding of art, the applause of that people will fail in its effect. We have all to do, but we have the means of accomplishing all; and we hope the Nelson monument will mark the commencement of a new era in English art—the era of the great and the original; and the final period of the tame, the feeble, and the imitative, which, from the time of William Austin to that of John Flaxman, have been the characteristics of sculpture in England.

The destinies of a nation depend less on the greatness of the few, than the virtues or vices of the many. Eminent individuals cast further the features of her glory or shame; but the realities of her weal or woe lie deep in the great mass.

MY MOTHER.

BY D. ROSS LIETCH, M.D.

Dark is the night and wild the sea,
The tempest round me gathers,
And I must wander far from thee,
Sweet island of my fathers!
But soft dreams in my soul arise,
Nor storm nor fear can smother:
And clothed in love, before mine eyes,
Thy image glides, my Mother!

The sable garb—the widow’s cap
Thy sweet cheek simply shading;
And, oh! that pensive look of love,
Unspeakable—unfading!
Bright thoughts lie brooding on that brow,
Where Grief hath left his furrow;
For Faith and Love have brightened now,
The lines engraved by Sorrow.

Oh, Mother! thou art blent with all
That to my heart is nearest;
Even Heaven to me is doubly dear,
Because to thee ’tis dearest.
If virtue burns within my breast,
To thee that bliss is owing!
’Twas thou that lit the sacred flame,
’Tis thou that keep’st it glowing.

When the wild waves of passion roll,
Like starbeams o’er the ocean;
Thine image glides athwart my soul,
And calms each fierce emotion.
An angel atmosphere of peace,
Breathes from thy spirit o’er me:
The gloom retires,—the tempests cease,
And all is bright before me.

The bounding heart of youth is gone,
The flowers have left the wildwood;
And dim, dim now the dreams have grown
I cherish’d in my childhood.
But mother, oh! whilst thou art left,
The true, the angel-hearted,
Not all of boyhood bliss is left,
Not all of youth departed!

ASCENT OF MONT BLANC.

Saunders, the celebrated French philosopher, reached the top of this mountain; and others went up soon afterwards. They tied themselves together with ropes; so that if any happened to fall into a chasm, they might be saved. Some of these chasms were so deep, that when ice was thrown into them, the sound produced by its reaching the bottom was not heard. One chasm was found so wide, that the ladder which they laid across it, reached only one inch over each side; and that only in one place. They learned that this chasm had opened only a few days; so that if they passed over, there was a danger of their not being able to get back, from its opening wider before their return. They ventured over, however, and got safely back. Their thirst was very great. When near the top, they became very weak, felt dispirited, and were troubled with vomiting, &c.; owing to the air being very thin (the rarity of the atmosphere, as it is called). At last they reached the summit. In 1827, Mr. Ferrars, an English gentleman, ascended to the top. He also experienced great effects from the rarity of the air. His guides had bleeding from the nose, great difficulty of breathing, and intense thirst. Their eyes were bloodshot, and their faces blistered. Some had vomiting of blood. Mr. Auldjo likewise reached the top; and gives an interesting account of his journey. One of his guides sunk up to his arm-pits in a chasm; but saved himself by stretching out his arms, and by his pole falling across the chasm like a bridge. As they got towards the highest point, they were obliged to rest every three or four steps, and to turn their faces towards the north wind; which assisted respiration. Mr. Auldjo was partly dragged, and partly carried to the summit. The sun was shining brightly on the snow-topped peaks around; but it was very cold; and he soon fell asleep. He had with him a bottle of champagne; of which the cork flew out to a great distance, but with little noise. Owing to the rarity of the atmosphere, a pistol fired there makes no more noise than a cracker in a room;—noise being occasioned by percussions of the air. The champagne frothed to the last drop; and our traveller partook of it; but the fixed air (carbonic acid) being given out very abundantly after being drunk, gave him much uneasiness. There have been about fifteen successful ascents of this mountain; and about twenty persons (of whom about twelve were English), besides guides, have reached the top. Among the successful travellers was a female. One of the latest to ascend, was Dr. Martin Barry, a highly intelligent and accomplished member of the Society of Friends. He gave a very interesting account of his journey, in two

*Concluded from page 266.