

WILSON (RICHARD)

English

1714—1783

Richard Wilson was born in Montgomeryshire in 1714, and died in 1783. In 1739 he became a pupil, and remained six years, with Thomas Wright in London, a portrait painter of little ability. He then painted portraits on his own account, having among his sitters the Prince of Wales and the Duke of York. In 1749 he visited Italy, where he remained for six years. He had already done some work in landscapes, and now the advice of Zuccarelli and Joseph Vernet decided him in adopting landscape painting, to the exclusion of any other department of art. He painted considerably in Rome and its neighbourhood, studying Claude and Poussin, yet endeavouring while acquiring the classical style to preserve his own individuality. He thus becomes a connecting link between the English and the Latin painters of the time.

Although one of the greatest English masters of landscape, he has suffered a partial eclipse through the greater brilliancy of Turner and Constable. But undoubtedly each of the latter owes much to his leadership; and Constable, gifted as he was in portraying wide panoramas of pastoral England—with all the incident of field, hedge-row, stately elm, and purple distance—was not the first to see their beauty, for it was with just such themes that Richard Wilson was eloquent. The formal classicism of Poussin had had its day, and the Englishman was one of the first to throw off those conventionalities which made it imperative to introduce into all landscapes the heroes of Greek mythology, shepherds, or nondescript personages in the garments of the ancients. Probably he was one of the earliest revolutionaries who ventured to produce a scene in the immediate foreground of which the fragments of a classic ruin were omitted. Some of the old formalism remained with him, but his work leads by a natural gradation to the freer and more experimental efforts of his successors in the art of landscape painting.

41. *Landscape* Owner, Wm. Armstrong