Celebrating 175: Peale, Rembrandt, Notebook Fragments, circa 1830s

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man, or leading captive the imaginations of thousands: it is to this sensation in the mind that we are indebted for many of the greatest works of art. "We are obliged" he adds "to devotion for the noblest buildings that have adorned the several countries of the world: it is this which has set man to work in temples and public places of worship, not only that they might by the magnificence of the building invite the deity to reside within it, but that such stupendous works might at the same time open the mind to vast conceptions and fit it to converse with the Divinity of the place. For every thing that is majestic, imprints an awfulness & reverence on the mind of the beholder, & strikes it with the natural greatness of, the soul." It therefore followed that if statues & pictures were to be introduced for the purpose of increasing such emotions, that they shd be of a grandeur to correspond with the magnitude of the building, both in dimensions & style. This has given rise to boldness in the design, simplicity in the attitudes, a continuity of the outline, & a spreading out of the masses of colour.

What in another place appears gigantic, there appears natural; what might be that formal, there appears dignified; & what might appear too harsh or dazzling in the colouring, is there subdued into a grand & harmonious union. By these component parts of one magnificent structure the imagination is enlarged & extended. Colouring must either add or diminish the effect of any work upon the imagination; it must add to it by increasing, or diminish it by destroying the deception. The language in which the poet clothes imagery is not more necessary to its identity, than the colr in the hands of the painter to the identity of the subject treated by him.

Addison, speakg. of Shakespeare's language, says "There is something so wild, & yet, so solemn, in the speeches of ghosts, fairies, witches, & the like imaginary persons, that we cannot forbear thinking them natural, tho we have no rule by which to judge of them, and must confess, if there are such beings in the world, it looks highly probable that they should talk and act as he has represented them."

This train of reasoning is applicable to painting in a high degree; and by it we may investigate the superior beings of MAngelo, or his followers in the field of poetical imagery. Addison justly observes, "We cannot indeed have a single image in the fancy that did not make its first entrance thro' the sight; but we have the power of retaining, altering, & compounding those images wh we have once received, into all the varieties of picture & vision that are most agreeable to the imagination." We can form no idea of colouring beyond what has an existence in nature. From this source all our materials must be drawn; both sacred & profane writers have employed the same means.

Reynolds says, "Raphael & Titian seemed to have looked at nature for different purposes; they both had the power of extending their view to the whole; but one looked only for the general effect as produced by form, the other as produced by colour." - This naturalness in the colours seems therefore equally applicable to the higher departments as the outline or the light & shade. There seems a certain identity necessary in representation, to give an appearance of reality of existence, & awaken those ideas in the mind, consequent upon such appearances.
The representation of beings like ourselves in the "Last Judgement" of M. Angelo, or the "Fall of the Damned" by Rubens, strikes us with more horror than if those beings were coloured with the ethereal essence which Milton describes spirits to inherit.

If we descend lower into the regions of fiction and allegory, this truth of representation is still more essential, as in many respects it conveys the images more strongly to the mind; for example the Satyrs, Silenus, & Fawns of Rubens, seem as if they had actually existed, so
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