

LANDSCAPE-SKETCHING.



OR the greater part of my life—a busy one—the chief enjoyment in my holiday time has been that of landscape sketching.

Of the many fellow amateurs I have come across spending their leisure in this way, ladies form the great majority, and after allowing for some very striking exceptions, I have noticed that many of these fair students are, every now and then, “in difficulties,” or, at any rate, are not satisfied with their work, and sometimes even are inclined to despair. As the sketching season has now come, it has occurred to me to send to the GIRL'S OWN PAPER a few hints which may possibly be of some little service to those readers who are as enthusiastic as myself, but are not near to friends who are able to help them.

I want to say, at the outset, that none of my remarks are intended to refer to the kind of drawings made at home, in quiet rooms, and with materials of all sorts at hand, nor to elaborate studies out of doors (involving, perhaps, several days of careful work), but strictly to *out-of-door sketches*; the subjects, as a rule, such as are unexpectedly met with in a walk or drive, and generally under circumstances which allow but very limited time.

It will, perhaps, be well first to mention one or two things which should *not* be done, especially in the case of excursions on foot. I would say, then, “Do not carry too much with you.” An excess of *impedimenta* is, I have noticed, rather the rule than the exception. A young lady must indeed be strong who can carry, for any considerable distance, an easel, a stool, a large block, a colour-block, and water-flask (worse still an oil-colour box), and not get heated and out of breath long before she sits

down to her subject. There is, then, not only the risk of chill, but that of unfitness for real work without some previous rest. To those who practice water-colours I would suggest the use of a very moderate-sized block (the blocks the severed leaves of which form a sketch-book will generally be found convenient) carried in a loose, home-made case of leather cloth by a strap, a *small* colour-box (eight colours are quite sufficient for sketching), three brushes of good size, a small sponge for damping, a piece of blotting-paper, and a camp-stool. Sketching in oils has some advantages in respect of the things to be carried. The small box, named after the painter Fortuny, is one of the handiest of all. The lid forms the palette (which of course should be “set” before starting); it has grooves for several small panels, or mill-boards, and rings underneath for the thumb. The box called “Pocharde” is larger, but is still very portable. A good many tubes of colour may be carried in it, but even some of these may be left out if the palette is set beforehand. Two hog-hair brushes and one of sable are quite enough; when shortened to eight or nine inches they can be carried in a tin case. I seldom encumber myself with a stool (most of my sketches being done standing), but where there is a chance of finding a beach, rocks, or grass-banks, I take one of the folding “fisherman’s seats” used by anglers.

Do not assume, when a subject strikes you, that the spot where you find yourself standing gives the best view of it. It is a thing of constant occurrence to discover that moving a few yards to the right or left, or some other slight shifting of position, so as to get, for instance, a rather broader foreground, or an alteration in the grouping of some objects in the middle distance, would greatly increase the attractiveness; and I, and no doubt scores of others, have many a time found, to my mortification, after I had been bestowing infinite pains on a subject, that a very slight change of standpoint would have given me something infinitely better.

Directly the subject is chosen do not lose a moment in setting to work. The importance of this cannot be too strongly enforced; for, even apart from the rapidity with which the light changes, there is always great risk (unless the sun is entirely hidden) of the “effect” which was the original attraction, hopelessly, and perhaps suddenly, vanishing.

Whether oils or water-colours are used, a piece of charcoal will be found very useful in

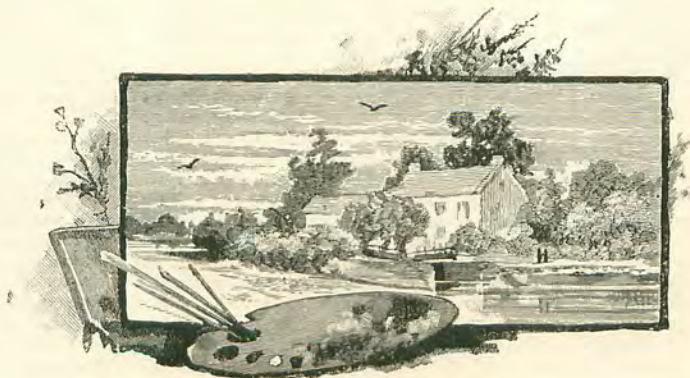
blocking-in the sketch. No other material works with anything like such rapidity. The charcoal lines can be gone over with pencil, and can then be blown off with a handkerchief. When time presses, and the subject contains but few details, both charcoal and pencil should be dispensed with, and the masses put in with the brush and a little transparent colour.

One of the most general, and I fear most fatal, mistakes is that of attempting too much. It is natural to desire to represent *all* that is grand, or beautiful, or picturesque, as the case may be, in a scene which suddenly presents itself; but in innumerable instances disappointment, and even despair, of ever doing good work would be avoided by a few minutes’ thought and calculation as to how much of the subject it would be within the limits of possibility to do in a very limited time. The tone, say, of that lovely bit of sky and distance, can perhaps be indicated in a few minutes. The grouping of the trees and farmstead in the mid-distance can possibly be accomplished in half an hour, and the broken colour of the hedge and pool in the foreground may, perhaps, not take longer. But alas! in nine cases out of ten unreasonable, and most valuable, time is spent on the sky; sometimes, indeed, till it has lost its transparency. The stem or foliage of a particular tree or clump has been elaborated till it ceases to keep its due place in the composition; and some detail of the foreground so worked and retouched that the other parts of the subject are thrown out of perspective. Meantime the rising or sinking sun has greatly altered the distribution of light and shade.

In rapid sketches from nature the *masses* of the composition should first be put in, then the flow of the principal lines and curves; then the point of interest (for there must always be such a point) should be fixed upon. As much work should then be given—but equally throughout—as time and light will allow.

There are one or two points as to which water-colour amateurs commonly err. 1. The large majority cover the whole surface of the block, the result being that the superfluous water reaches the gummed edge and weakens the solidness of the block. It will be found a better plan to draw four pencil lines and leave a margin of an inch or so. 2. They omit to slightly damp the paper. 3. They do not attach nearly enough importance to a full brush.

(To be continued.)





A POPULAR PAINTER.

LANDSCAPE SKETCHING.

II.

FEW amateurs will mind confessing that the introduction of figures, etc., is one of the most trying of stumbling-blocks; nor is it a difficulty by any means confined to amateurs, as many an artist would admit.

There are, of course, some subjects where the effect is greatly heightened by the entire absence of figures; and, indeed, some where what the French call the *motif*, would be sacrificed by the addition of anything of the kind; but in the large majority of cases—certainly in most of those with which we are at present concerned—the introduction of an animate object, even if it be not actually essential to the interest, rarely fails to add greatly to the completeness. Were it not for the limit laid down at the commencement of these papers, there would here arise a strong temptation to indulge in a little digression, and to dwell for a moment on the lessons—differing much in character, but all of great helpfulness—taught us by some of those landscape-artists who in recent days have shone conspicuously in this part of their work; on, for instance, the ease and absence of all appearance of effort with which Prout places his square-drawn, but always most expressive, peasants or fisher-folk exactly in that part where their *dolce far niente* way of life is best indicated; or, if the subject require it, crowds them in a street or cathedral aisle; on the way in which Harding or David Cox contrive that their figures shall be actual part and parcel of, and quite inseparable from, the scene; and, to name but one more, the facile skill with which Mr. Birket Foster introduces his dainty maidens and gentle children. But we must abide by our undertaking, merely remarking that the books illustrated by these artists will well repay a careful study.

A subject must indeed be exceptional if, during the time required for an ordinary

sketch, no living creature of any kind makes its appearance. Something, and often the very thing wanted, is tolerably sure to come. I had been working hard for two hours on a sketch of that loveliest of cities, Florence, as seen from San Miniato, and in that time no figure of any sort had come in sight. The day was intensely hot, my time was nearly up, and I was beginning to despair, when to my no small relief a lumbering cart, carrying a huge wine-cask and drawn by a pair of mouse-coloured oxen, crossed the road exactly where I wanted it. I promptly noted it, and I never look at my work without feeling a little pride in a successful sketch. The approach to the village where I live is under some huge trees arching over the road, which make a frame for the cottages and little shops in the middle distance. I had succeeded in getting the composition fairly well in, but the subject was one of those which distinctly required the interest of moving figures. Many of these passed—unyoked farm-horses, damsels with baskets, sheep from market, straggling cows, etc.—all these had movement, but none seemed to give the real pulse of rural life. At last came a tumbrel in which were two girls, one trying to hold a net over a calf, while the other kept off the bellowing mother. I waited till it had half turned into a farm-yard, and my subject was complete. Often have I waited on the bank of a stream till some of the cattle in the meadows chose to wade in knee-deep; and many a time have contrived, as if by accident, that a flock should quietly stray to the part of the common best suited to my purpose. However much time may press, or this or that detail may engross the attention, the appearance on the scene, and the movements of *all* figures, must be keenly watched; and the moment a suitable object reaches the spot where it fits into the composition, the place, and—which is of equal importance—the

scale, should be instantly indicated, *if it be only by means of two dots*, with any colour the brush may happen to have in it. Even this, I admit, is not always easy; a couple of teams are, say, ploughing in front of you, or the foreground is a meadow with nibbling sheep; for either of these a few minutes' patience will suffice for indicating the place and the comparative size. Not so when a number of fishing-boats are unloading their catches, or the figures in a market-place are in incessant motion.

Seldom has my patience been so sorely tried in such matters as last year in the Mercato Vecchio at Florence. The background and the stalls were themselves not very easy to manage in a short hour, but the constant shifting of the figures, and the tantalising variety of dresses and colours of the moving objects, would have tried the skill of Harding or Stansfield.

What has been said refers, it will be observed, to the hurried *indication* of figures; but sometimes of course it is quite practicable to actually insert them, either at the time or afterwards. In such cases there is, I have noticed, a singular proneness on the part of some amateurs to over-elaboration and finish, more especially with respect to human figures; and I have seen many a successful sketch completely spoiled through the figures having been retouched and worked upon till they had not only lost all spirit in themselves, but were, from the different execution, entirely out of harmony, even to the most unpractised eye, with the rest of the subject. This is a great, I might say a fatal, mistake. It is quite right to think well over the position, the character, and the colour of such accessories; but the amount of finish bestowed on them should invariably depend on, and never in any case go beyond, that given to the landscape itself.

(To be concluded.)



LANDSCAPE SKETCHING.

III.

IN the hints offered in the previous papers, I have taken for granted, on the part of my fellow-amateurs, not simply an enjoyment in out-of-door drawing, but a genuine ambition to acquire a solid additional accomplishment. I imagine it would not be easy to name another open-air pursuit which, while it can by no possibility cause "pain to the meanest thing that feels," gives more simple, quiet pleasure,—a pleasure, moreover, of a kind which goes on increasing as you see the work grow under your hand—more honest pride when success has been achieved; and (surely no small happiness), enables us to keep a more delightful souvenir of very many places, some associated, perhaps, with extremely pleasant recollections.

There will not, therefore, it is hoped, be a charge of exaggerated language if, in this concluding paper, it is asserted that, when thoroughly and earnestly taken up, even this limited kind of art—as some may call it—exercises faculties and calls out qualities which, it might be thought, applied only to scientific pursuits or highly technical work.

The sketcher-enthusiast, then, even when not actually in pursuit of subjects, should be ever and incessantly on the alert, eyes open and note-book in hand. As far indeed as sight is concerned, observation must be almost as keen as that of an Indian on the trail. No winding of the road should be unmarked, for who can say what a few yards may be the means of disclosing. A rise or fall in the ground may reveal, or, better still, partly reveal, a bit of a village, a farmstead, a cluster of cottages, or a church tower. I had drawn an ancient windmill many times from divers points of view before I accidentally discovered, on mounting half-way up the hill, that from a certain vantage-ground the prettiest part of the village was nestled under one of the sails. No sudden change in the clouds or sunlight should be unnoticed, as it may not be impossible to convert an uninteresting stretch of flat middle-distance into a useful bit of breadth.

Nearly all farm-buildings (unless of the most recent construction) are worth looking at, for, from one point or other, they will generally yield a picturesque bit. All farming operations are valuable for our purpose. There is seldom any difficulty, by shifting the position, in choosing a more suitable view when the first presented does not fit in with our subject. Ploughing, for instance—an operation always of interest to even the most prosaic mind—furnishes a great variety of figures to the sketcher who can practise a little patience, and wait for the

precise moment for his purpose. I remember seeing a very successful sketch of this kind, in which, by a little dexterous watching and waiting, the same team (of four) had been made to do duty for all the figures, viz., the plough (half hid) on the crest of the hill, the plough half-way down the field, and the group of horses and men in the foreground resting at the end of the furrow.

Whenever several figures come within view at the same time—in a hayfield, for instance, or when fishermen are hauling in their boats—everything else should at once be set aside, and any material which happens to be in the hand at the moment (pencil, chalk, brush, etc.), should be made use of for a record. The way in which figures group themselves (sometimes with the variety of the kaleidoscope), should be watched with a lynx-eye, and carefully jotted down; an accidental and momentary combination of two or three may be so happy and exceptional a one as to give interest, nay, perhaps poetic feeling, to an otherwise commonplace subject. I need hardly point out that children are often of great use in these matters. They are always only too pleased to help, and will generally sit like statues wherever they are stationed.

It would be easy to expand to almost any extent interesting subjects of this kind, among them very many connected with the sea coast and the banks of our lovely rivers. But what I have already written may perhaps be of some little service in showing that even the pursuit which has been described, when followed with real ardour and zest, demands no small amount of keenness of observation (which most certainly increases by habit), fertility of resource, readiness in adopting expedients, and a reasonable stock of patience.

I must not omit one important bit of advice, viz., that at all times and in all places a small sketch-book (be it ever so tiny) should invariably be carried. It is equally useful for hasty scraps or for notes as to colour, position of the sun, figures, etc., and no amateur should ever be without one.

Lastly, I would say a word on the advantages of *utilising the memory*. Beyond doubt the faculty of retaining in the mind's eye, for some length of time, the details of a landscape subject is innate (in the case of Turner it can be called nothing less than "tremendous"); but I think it is equally beyond doubt that it is a faculty which admits of cultivation, and to a considerable degree of perfection. In fact, the case is no exception to the comprehensive dictum of Reynolds—"Nothing is denied to well-directed labour." I have not met with much on this subject in English writers, but

in more than one foreign school of art it is considered as of no slight importance. Englishmen differ, and will always differ, in their opinions of French art generally; but there is a general impression that, in what relates to the *teaching* of drawing, the French excel us. A practical writer on art urges with much force and ability the importance of *l'éducation de la mémoire pittoresque*; and I venture to quote the following paragraphs:—

"The aim in all work of such kinds, then, is to present an absent object. Among the more direct means for attaining this end I will mention the one which has generally been found the most successful. After selecting the point from which the subject can best be viewed, dwell with the mind's eye on the principal parts; and with a view to greater concentration of the attention, trace these masses with the fingers' ends or some pointed instrument; then, shutting the eyes, or turning away, repeat these tracings in the air. Imaginary drawings of this kind, which, from their nature, present no difficulties of execution, should be done as rapidly and be repeated as frequently as may seem requisite for such an impression as will admit of an actual drawing being afterwards made from recollection. . . . A practice of this sort may possibly seem strange, if not fantastical; but the experiment is a simple one, and its advantages can be easily gauged."

Whether or not such a plan as this be tried, memory is assuredly a very important ally, and its training is well worth considerable trouble. The occasions must be very frequent in which there are no available means at hand of making even the roughest scratch or memorandum, even of outline or composition, much less notes of colour or of the distribution of light and shade, but in which a few minutes' fixed, concentrated study can be given. I venture to think that resolute and *daily* practice of this kind will, unless the instance be a very exceptional one indeed, not long be without ample reward.

It is hardly necessary to point out, that an expedient of this sort is especially valuable in regard to clouds of unusual form or colour, or other sky effects, either of remarkable beauty or such as are strikingly appropriate to the subject; and these are constantly (and generally unexpectedly) met with on journeys. The form or the hue may be so peculiar, and, moreover, so transient, that it is impossible for the most rapid and dexterous hand to record it with any approach to truth, while a few minutes' fixed attention may impress it faithfully and firmly on the memory.

H. R. P.

