

formed. Under the false idea that generalization was preferable to detail—an idea encouraged by the practice of portrait and historical painters, as well as by the oracles of the lecture-room—they concentrated their labours on the faces of their figures, and dealt with the remaining portions and with the back-grounds as summarily as possible, often extemporizing the drapery and accessories either from imagination or from memory. This custom certainly had the merit of being in opposition to the Dutch and Flemish schools, which it was the fashion of the period to decry, as though the finest masterpieces of Teniers and Ostade were worthy only of reprehension and avoidance; but it had the effect at the same time of rendering the productions of the English school tame and unreal, and therefore comparatively worthless. The fine instincts of Wilkie revolted against this erroneous idea. He saw from the first that the grand element, the vital principle of all art, is truth—truth in everything, small things as well as great; and therefore, though he painted human character as few men have done before or since, he did not think it beneath him to give character also to inanimate things—to the asthmatic bellows, to the rickety table, the old cracked fiddle, the worn-out besom-stump, the bruised and bulging quart pot. Here it was that his modesty and diffidence brought him such a large return: he did not believe it possible that he, David Wilkie, was able to paint a mug, a spoon, an inkstand, a joint-stool, etc., from imagination merely, and therefore he never attempted it without having the objects before him. His practice was, whatever he painted, invariably to paint it from the model; and on this subject there is a curious anecdote told concerning him, which, as it is in all probability true, we shall set down.

One morning a nobleman, who had already paid him some large sums, called on him to commission a new picture. While both were seated, talking over the subject to be painted, his lordship, observing a biscuit lying on the table, broke it with his knuckles, and put a fragment in his mouth. Wilkie leaped from his seat with an exclamation intended to stay the blow, and when too late for that, turned away with an ejaculation of chagrin. "Why, what is the matter?" asked his patron. "O, my lord," said Wilkie, "you have destroyed my model biscuit: I have walked half London to get it, and now it is gone. You see, my lord, it was a crumpled biscuit, and they are extremely rare to meet with."

The effect of the fidelity in detail above mentioned is familiar to us all in the pictures of Wilkie. We feel that the result of every touch of truth in the picture tells not merely in its own place, but throughout the whole of the canvas; there is not a spot on the entire surface that shows either falsehood or failing, nor any the minutest portion that is wrapped in conventional because convenient obscurity. The consequence is, that we identify the scene with ourselves, and, so to speak, step on to the stage and play our part in the drama.

We are not claiming the merit of originating this pervading fidelity to fact in delineation for Wilkie—indeed it was old among the Dutch and

Flemings before it was practised in our island: there is this grand difference, however, namely, that, with the majority of the Dutch and Flemings, their scrupulous fidelity in detail was the sole merit in their pictures, while in the works of Wilkie, wonderful as is his dexterity in the same way, it is always subordinate to the living idea of his work, and is the last thing, and not the first, which claims the admiration of the spectator.

To form a just idea of Wilkie's versatile dexterity of hand, one should have the opportunity of comparing his pictures with one another. Such an opportunity was afforded soon after his death, by the exhibition of the major part of his greatest works in the gallery of the British Institution. It was then seen that the great Scotch painter had been as various in his manner and methods of work as he was in fancy and imagination. While some of the canvasses and panels were barely covered with thin films of colour, others were painted in thick impasts, the pigments standing out almost in relief. The pictures painted during the last few years of his life were nearly all on stout wooden panels, which his watchful experience had shown him were best adapted for works of elaborate execution.

We have said above, that Wilkie stands at the head of a school of followers. We may say more. Though he was the last man who would have presumed to take the lead, it is the fact that there is not a fine *piece de genre* in the Royal Academy this present year, nor has there been one for these twenty years past, the painter of which was not indebted to Wilkie's example, more or less remotely, for the elements of his success. All our good artists in this department have accepted and practised the lesson he so modestly taught; and English art at the present day, in this peculiar direction, owes to him what landscape art owes to Turner.

Wilkie travelled in search of improvement, both in France and Italy, and in search of *subjects* for his pencil, in Spain and the East. It was on his return from the East, in 1841, that he died, after a brief illness, on shipboard. Some of our readers may remember a mysterious picture by Turner, (now in the Turner Gallery at South Kensington), illustrative of the burial at sea of David Wilkie.

## TWO FISCAL EPOCHS.

THE following statement of the chief mercantile productions of every state in Europe (France excepted), in the fifteenth century, affords a singular and interesting exposition of *the resources of those countries* and our own, with the state of commerce and its chief channels at that period, compared with their aspect in the days we live in. It appears in an old pamphlet, entitled, "Processe of English Policie, advocating the necessitie of England keeping possession of the sea."

"At that period," says the writer, "France was in a deplorable condition from her continued warfare and English conquests; its land lying uncultivated and overgrown with briars and thorns, like

a wood infested with wild beasts, and the people reduced to poverty and desolation." He then proceeds to particularize the chief products of each country.

"From SPAIN," says he, "come wines, figs, raisins, dates, liquorice, oil, grain, soap, wax, iron, wool, wadmoe, red skins, saffron, and quicksilver; all of which are transported to Bruges, the emporium of Flanders, by her haven of Sluys. From FLANDERS the Spanish ships lade homeward, fine cloth of Ypres and of Courtzay, of all colours, much fustian, and also linen cloth. PORTUGAL sends much merchandize into England: wines, osey, wax, grain, raisins, dates, honey, cordavant leather, hides, etc., all of which are also carried in great quantities to Flanders. BRETAGNE sends to Flanders, salt, wines, linen, and canvas. The EASTERLINGS, PRUSSIA, and GERMANY, send beer and bacon into Flanders; ormond copper, bow-staves, steel, wax, peltry, pitch, tar, oak boards, Cologne thread, wool, cards, fustian, canvas and buckram. And they take back from Flanders, silver plate, and wedges of silver, which come in great quantities from Bohemia and Hungary; also woollen cloth of all colours. GENOA resorts to England in her huge ships named Carricks, with cloth of gold, silk, paper, much wood, wool, oil, cotton, rack, allum, and gold coin; carrying back from us, wool and woollens, cloth made with our own wool, and tin. The VENETIANS and FLORENTINES bring all sorts of spiceries and grocery wares, sweet wines, and a great variety of small wares, trifles, drugs, sugar, etc.; and from us they carry home wool, cloth, tin, and our gold coin. They also deal much in usury both in England and Flanders.\* BRABANT, HOLLAND, and ZEALAND afford little merchandize properly of their own, but madder and woad for dyers, garlic, onions, and salt-fish. To the Brabant marts (which we call Fairs) we send English cloth, and bring back mercery,† haberdashery, and grocery. SCOTLAND'S commodities are wool, woollens, and hides. Their wool is sent to Flanders to be draped, though not so good as the English wool, with which it is there worked up. Scotland brings from Flanders small mercery and haberdashery wares in great quantities, and *one half of the Scotch vessels are generally laden home from Flanders with cart wheels and wheelbarrows.* IRELAND'S commodities are hides and fish; as salmon, herrings, and hake; wool, linen cloth, and skins of wild beasts."

But we have in another record referring to the sixteenth century, a contrast scarcely less striking in the fact that during the reign of Queen Elizabeth the whole customs revenue of the country was "farmed" at three different periods for the several sums of £14,000, £42,000, and £50,000; and that the whole revenue of the crown, derived from the queen's manors, lands, customs and escheats, (there being then no taxes in time of peace,) amounted to only £188,197 4s. 0d., and the expenditure to £110,612 13s. 0d.

How forcibly are we here reminded of the introduction into England, during this reign, of that

"weed" which had no better claim to notice than pertained to a vicious habit among "savages," but which is now yielding a yearly revenue to the crown of upwards of *four millions sterling!* But how marvellous, how eloquent the contrast in our Budget of 1860, representing one year's revenue of £71,089,669! "What a figure! what a revenue!" an ejaculation worthy of the "Times." "It is no mere matter of account; no shadowy estimate; no antiquarian computation of drachms; no swollen sum in reals; but seventy-one millions of golden sovereigns actually collected and paid into the British treasury. How solemnly Pericles would have stated these figures! with what pomp Demosthenes would have drawn them out! they are too suggestive of what England can do if it wishes."

## CORNISH MINERS.

### "GETTING A START."

A MINE agent at St. Ives sends the following communication after reading our article in No. 424, to the general correctness of which he bears testimony.

For the information of those readers of "The Leisure Hour" whose knowledge of mining in Cornwall may be limited, it may be well to state that, on an average, miners work for a lower rate of wages per week or per month than most labourers; but they do not work so many hours. With miners there is comparatively little day-work. "Tutwork" and "tribute" are the prevailing modes of working. The former means excavating the rock at a certain price per fathom, the latter raising the mineral at a certain rate in the pound.

The "setting day" is usually once a month, when the places to be worked (the several prices being fixed previously by the agents) are called up, and the men are at liberty to take or refuse, as they think fit.

The term of the taking is one or two months, as the case may be. Owing to the very changeable character of the ground to be worked (the rock for excavating is always called "ground"), and the veins of ore that ramify through it in every possible direction, there is often much uncertainty as to what the month will turn out. The ground may take a turn in the miner's favour or otherwise. The vein of ore may improve in size and value, or the opposite.

We will take a case. John White and his boy Tom had been working on "tribute" for a considerable time, and, in their own phraseology, had been "doing very slight." They had been working on "subsist" for four or five months, and were in debt. Their "pitch" had been slight; and though their "tribute" was raised to 13s. 4d. in the pound, they could not make a living out of it. They were almost ready to give up the pitch and "see" for another; but "no, we won't give up for one bad bargain," said John White; "we'll try um again, boy." John's money was done, and he had his goods on credit; their living was hard, but John said to his wife and his boy, "We'll try um again." John

\* Genoa and Venice were then in the hey-day of their commerce.

† Mercery in those days meant many kinds of small wares.