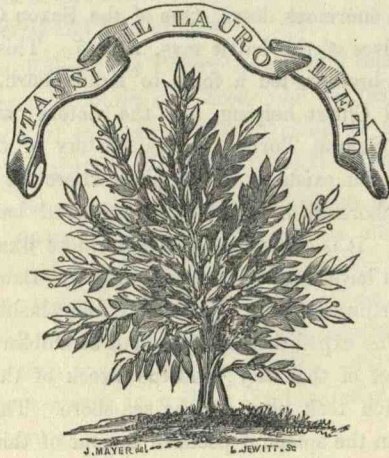


II.—ROSCOE, AND THE INFLUENCE OF HIS WRITINGS ON THE FINE ARTS.

By Joseph Mayer, Esq., F.S.A., Hon. Curator.



"*Stassi il lauro lieto*" was the motto adopted by Roscoe on his seal, with the emblem of the laurel; and in allusion to it, a sonnet * was addressed to him, by one of his sons, in the year 1816.

How little did he think at that time, that in after years, his fellow-

* "STASSI IL LAURO LIETO."

"Favour'd beyond each tree of field or grove,
Glad, and for ever green, the laurel stands;
Not to be pluck'd but by heroic hands,
And sacred to the majesty of Jove.

No lightning flash may smite it from above,
No whirlwinds rend it from its rooted bands;
Obedient to their master's high commands,
They spare the chosen plant he deigns to love.

So 'midst the tumults of this mortal state,
While thunders burst around, and storms assail,
The good man stands with mind and brow serene;
In cloud or sunshine still inviolate,
Confiding in a trust that cannot fail—
A sacred laurel, glad and ever green."

townsmen would assemble on the centenary† of his birthday, to do honour to his name, and again repeat

“Stassi il lauro lieto.”

The quotation could not be more appropriately applied to any one than to William Roscoe, whose writings will remain to be read, alike with pleasure and instruction, in after ages; and the glad and evergreen laurel will in immortality encircle the head of our great townsman. But it is not either with the poetical or the historical genius of Roscoe that we have now to do. I ask indulgence for a short time, whilst I place his honoured name in another light, which I think will add a further claim on your admiration of his versatile genius—the influence of his writings on the Fine Arts throughout Europe, but more especially in his native country.

† The centenary was celebrated at Liverpool on the 8th of March, 1853, under the auspices of a committee of delegates from the Architectural and Archaeological Society, the Chemists' Association, the Historic Society, the Literary and Philosophical Society, the Liverpool Academy, the Polytechnic Society, and the Royal Institution. The proceedings of the day commenced with a public breakfast in the Philharmonic Hall, the Earl of Sefton, lord lieutenant of the county, in the chair. The official address respecting the personal character of Roscoe, was delivered by W. Rathbone, Esq., and that on his literary character by the Rev. Dr. Hume. These were responded to by W. Caldwell Roscoe, Esq., grandson of the historian; and other interesting addresses were delivered by the Mayor of Liverpool, the Lord Bishop of Chester, the President of the Chetham society, the Stipendiary Magistrate of Liverpool, and the Rev. Dr. Raffles.—At two o'clock, the Derby Museum was formally opened to the public by the Mayor, accompanied by the Aldermen, Town Councillors, and other principal inhabitants. The inaugural address was delivered by the Mayor, and responded to by the Rev. Augustus Campbell, M.A., junior rector, on the part of the Trustees. Other interesting addresses were delivered by James A. Picton, Esq., F.S.A., chairman of the Library and Museum Committee of the Town Council, and by the Lord Bishop of Chester.—At three o'clock, the members of the local learned societies, the members of the Royal Institution, and other friends met in the theatre of the Royal Institution, where an interesting address was delivered by Joseph B. Yates, Esq., F.S.A., formerly President of the Institution and of the Literary and Philosophical Society. The Rev. Dr. Raffles, in moving a vote of thanks, stated some interesting reminiscences of Roscoe.—Mr. Mayer's Egyptian Museum having been generously thrown open to the company during the day, many paid a visit to it; others inspected the museum and gallery of the Royal Institution; and a few called at the Athenæum library to examine the Roscoe memorials deposited there.—In the evening, a brilliant *soiree* was given by the Mayor, at which upwards of a thousand ladies and gentlemen were present, in the magnificent suite of apartments in the Town-hall. The proceedings embraced a short vocal and instrumental concert, and were varied by the introduction of the following subjects of interest:—Illustrated Books, presided over by Mr. Picton and Mr. Fernihough; Miscellaneous Zoology and Botany, Dr. Dickinson and Mr. T. C. Archer; Local Antiquities, Dr. Hume and Mr. Mayer; Rare Manuscripts and Books of Art, Jos. B. Yates, Esq.; Original Letters of Roscoe, and Articles of Vertu, Mr. Jas. Boardman; Architectural Models and Stereoscopes, Mr. H. P. Horner and Mr. Newlands; Microscopes, Dr. Inman, Dr. J. B. Edwards, and Messrs. Byerley and Canty.—A medal was struck for the occasion, by Mr. Mayer, of Lord street; and a bronze bust was issued by Mr. Flower, of Bold street; the Poems of Roscoe were published by Mr. Young, of Castle street; and numerous other works were privately printed for presentation. An account of the whole was published under the title of “*The Liverpool Tribute to Roscoe*,” by Mr. Baines, of the Liverpool Times office, Castle street.—Ed.

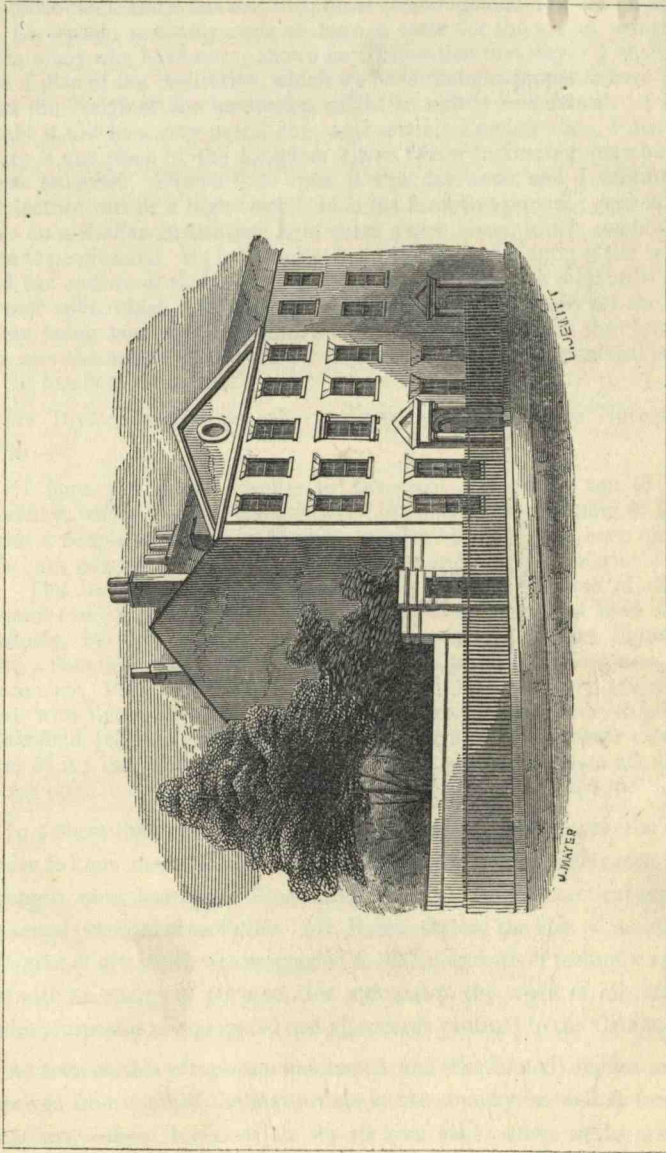
It is well known in how poor and feeble a state the arts of painting and sculpture were at the latter end of the eighteenth century, when conventionalism of style prevailed in all the schools of art in Europe: the only encouragement being at that period confined to the patronage of the church; with very few exceptions, in the orders given by crowned heads, and the high nobility of caste. We owe much to the fascinating writings of Roscoe, to whom it was reserved, in his lives of Lorenzo de Medicis and Leo X., to revive the love of those ennobling arts—painting and sculpture, which have grown in our time to a healthy strength, more especially in the schools of our own country. They have also for ever set at rest the pedantic assertion, that our climate was inimical to the growth of true genius.

But it was long before the life of Lorenzo issued from the almost obscure local press of Mr. M'Creery, at Liverpool, that we find a little band of lovers of art, who had caught the inspiration of the gifted Roscoe, forming themselves into a society for "the promotion and encouragement of art." It was in 1783, by this young society, that Liverpool was first taught that possession of mere wealth is not the only means of happiness; but that there is something beyond it, which must be attained before we arrive at either greatness or true enjoyment of life—the cultivation of the intellect and taste. We accordingly find here the honoured names of Roscoe, Taylor, Daulby, M'Morland, Green, Gregson, and others, associated with the delivery of well-written, earnest essays on the arts of design, painting, sculpture, and engraving, in a small room in John Street, to an attentive audience, who listened to the first teachings on the beauties of art.

There was an academy for drawing established prior to 1783, as will be seen from the following extract of a letter from Mr. Thomas Taylor, the Secretary, dated 28th Oct., 1783, and addressed to Mr. John Leigh Phillips, of Manchester.*

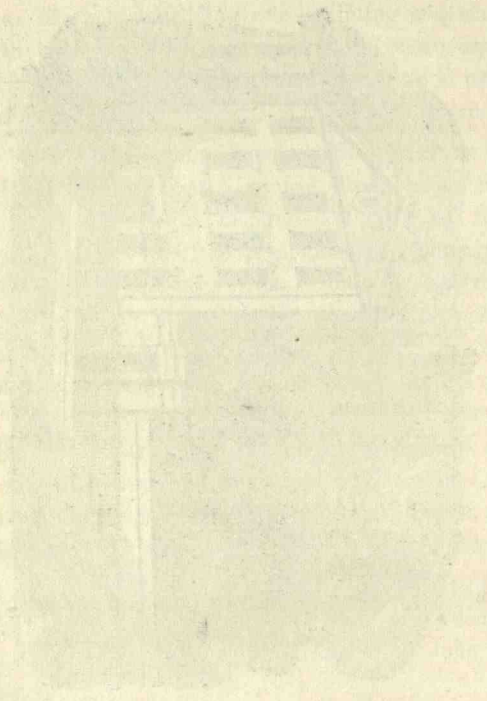
"I am glad you approve of our intended academy. We have not launched forth in a pompous manner, yet the promoters of it show much zeal for its

* John Leigh Phillips, Esq., a gentleman of well known taste, was one of the intimate friends of Roscoe, and collector of the works of Rembrandt, in amicable rivalry with Daniel Daulby, Esq., and whose name will be ever dear to the lovers of art, for the liberal patronage which he so kindly bestowed upon Wright, of Derby, who painted for him the "Dead Soldier" (and whose memoirs he wrote); as well as Westall, and many other artists, who always found in him a kind friend in the hour of need. It is through the kindness of Mrs. Phillips, of Belle Vue, who presented me with a series of letters addressed to her father-in-law, Mr. John Leigh Phillips, of Manchester, that I am enabled to fix the site of the house in which the first Exhibition was held. The accompanying wood-cut is a correct view of it.



HOUSE IN WHICH THE FIRST EXHIBITION WAS HELD.

WATER BY ARCHER THE LINDS, EXETER, 1850



establishment, and it has met with great encouragement from the inhabitants of Liverpool; not only such as have a taste for the art of painting, but from many who have never shewn any disposition that way. I shall enclose you a plan of the institution, which we have thought proper to have printed, that the design of the institution might be rightly understood. I have no doubt it will be a very useful one, and setting London aside, I don't think there is any place in the kingdom where better instruction may be had on these subjects. Roscoe is to open it this day week, and I venture to say his lecture will be a high treat. It is his favourite pursuit; and it was his Ode on a similar institution here some years since, which established his title to poetic fame. He has much at heart the re-establishing of the academy; and has endeavoured, in forming the plan, to avoid the rock on which the former split, which was, that it was made to rest entirely on the artists. They being transient inhabitants, the matter dropt when they left town; but now the artists are secondary instruments only, the principal parts are in the hands of residents."

Mr. Taylor again names the academy in a letter dated November 25, 1783:—

"I hope you intend coming to Liverpool. We wish you to see our academy, which goes on charmingly. We meet every evening to draw for about a couple of hours, and some excellent things have been produced. We have now completely fitted up the room, and a very comfortable place it is. The lectures have been very clever; Roscoe's was one of the most elegant compositions I ever heard. The succeeding ones have been on anatomy, by [Dr.] Turner, and very clever indeed. Next Thursday we have a chemical one, and, on Thursday following, Morland mounts. [11th December, 1783, on "The Theory of Painting."] I have attempted to draw with them, but find it very difficult at first; but I mean to persevere. Wakefield [Gilbert] will draw in a masterly manner, I never saw one so fond of it; but Morland will carry the palm away from them all, and does in my opinion now, though it is a kind of work he is not used to."

In a short time afterwards, when, by means of the lectures, the seeds of desire to know more had been sown; the society, feeling their own growing strength, were desirous of illustrating their hitherto theoretical arguments by actual practical observation. Mr. Roscoe started the idea of an exhibition of works of art, which was responded to with a warmth of feeling, and carried out with an energy of purpose, that redound to the credit of all concerned; and a prospectus was prepared and afterwards prefixed to the Catalogue.

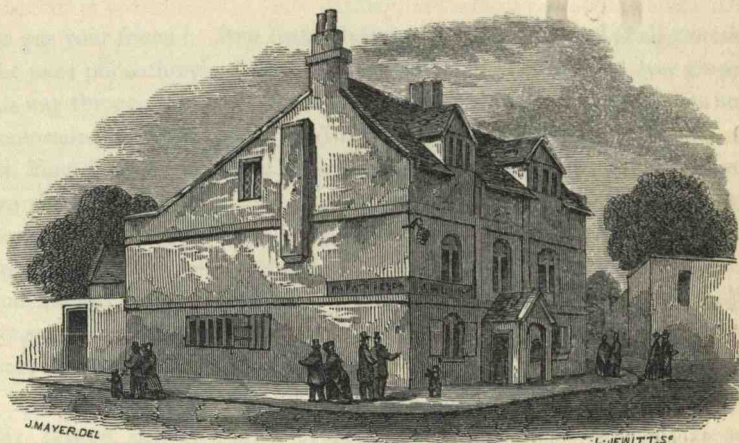
As soon as this prospectus was issued and distributed, replies to it were received from some of the first artists in the country, as well as from many amateurs,—those lovers of art for its own sake, whose works are always to be viewed with a lenient eye, and for whom the pen of criticism should ever be prepared with forbearance. In a letter from the secretary,

Mr. Taylor, addressed to Mr. Phillips, 4th May, 1784, alluding to the exhibition, he says, "We have got an excellent place for the exhibition, a large new house of Roscoe's, in the middle of his new street." This was the house in Rodney Street afterwards the residence of Pudsey Dawson, Esq., whose son the present Pudsey Dawson, Esq., of Hornby Castle, was born there, and more recently occupied by the late Mr. Egerton Smith. Now came the anxious moment; we read of the receipt of "large cases of pictures from various quarters," and in September, 1784, the first exhibition was opened in Liverpool.

On looking over the names of contributors, it will be seen that Mr. Roscoe himself contributed two pieces, Nos. 142 and 143; and that he had some knowledge of drawing may be seen by the etching which he made, as the admission ticket for the following exhibition, which took place in 1787. He made a great many others, amongst which are several book-plates which he executed *con amore* for his friends, some of them displaying great originality as regards the design and a free style of handling the dry point. It is not generally known that he executed several of the etchings in his great work on Monandrian plants, from drawings made by himself.

Henry Blundell, Esq., of Ince Blundell, the collector of the celebrated gallery of antique marbles, was also a great encourager of art, and the president of the first Liverpool Exhibition. Through the representations of Roscoe, soon after the founding of the Royal Institution, Mr. Blundell bequeathed the munificent sum of £1600 towards founding a gallery of art in Liverpool. One statue in the collection at Ince, the "Theseus," was considered by Flaxman to be one of the finest statues in the world.

Of the early Art education of Mr. Roscoe, we have an account in a short memoir of his early life, written by himself, in which he says that he used to assist the painters employed at a china manufactory, then absorbing the attention of the potters in Liverpool, who, at this early stage of the ceramic art had arrived at great perfection. Indeed, Liverpool claims the honour of being the nursing mother of most of those best artists, afterwards employed with so much success by Josiah Wedgwood, who for many years was even wont to send his ware to Liverpool to be ornamented. It was at this early period that Mr. Roscoe received instruction from Mr. Hugh Mulligan, an engraver for the potters, as well as a painter of porcelain, and whom, in after life, Mr. Roscoe never forgot; as I find recorded by a mutual friend, in an account prefixed to a portrait of Mulligan. He says of him, "Poor Hugh! tread lightly on his ashes ye men of goodness, for



THE HOUSE IN WHICH MR. ROSCOE WAS BORN.



USED BY MR. ROSCOE AS A CREST.



A CHAIR CONSTRUCTED FROM A BEAM
OF THE HOUSE IN WHICH
THE POET WAS BORN,
AND OCCUPIED
BY THE
EARL OF SEFTON,
PRESIDENT
AT THE
ROSCOE CENTENARY.

The first of these is the fact that the
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he was your friend ! Poor little Mully ! the kindest hearted of all mortals, the most philanthropic, benevolent, and sensible creature that ever groped his way through the world in chill penury, blind alleys, or the garrets and souterrains of gaunt poverty. Like a sensitive plant among thistles, or St. Fond beset by bagpipes, didst thou pass through this purgatory without any real solace but an excellent heart, thy Sarah possessing every imaginary perfection of the dulcinea adored by the inimitable Knight of La Mancha, and thy beloved pipe of tobacco. These were thy domestic enjoyments ; and abroad, the kind notice of William Roscoe, and his amiable family, consoled thy gentle soul for every hardship, for every insult, to which thou wast for ever liable."

Amongst the many artists who at this time enjoyed the friendship of Mr. Roscoe, may be named George Stubbs, the animal painter ; Henry Hole, the wood engraver, a pupil of Bewick ; William Hughes, wood engraver, afterwards appointed engraver to the Prince-Regent ; Mather Brown, the painter of the picture of the parting of Louis XVI. and his family ; John Williamson, who painted the first portrait of Mr. Roscoe, (now exhibited.) And at a later period, Samuel Williamson, the landscape painter ; Mr. Crouchley, the sculptor, whose sketch of the transfiguration received the commendation of Mr. Roscoe as a more consistent work than that of Raffaele, inasmuch as the group was more in unity of design than that of the great Florentine painter ; Mr. Austin, the well-known water-colour draughtsman, whose original sketch of the house in which Mr. Roscoe was born is now before you, together with a letter of Mr. Roscoe's, confirming it as the place of his birth. We may also include the name of Mr. Thomas Dodd, of whose extensive knowledge of prints Mr. Roscoe availed himself, when illustrating Lanzi's history of Italian art. Mr. Dodd was an extraordinary instance of the results of perseverance. Being self-instructed, he became so thoroughly acquainted with the old masters, that if any doubt arose as to the authority of a print, Mr. Dodd's opinion was considered conclusive. During a long life he collected materials for a Biographical Dictionary of Engravers in England, commencing at the earliest period at which the art was practised, 1550 to 1800 ; the series of manuscripts forming nearly forty volumes, which he finished only a few days before his death.*

The great success of the exhibition stimulated the committee to con-

* This took place in Liverpool, August, 1850. See *Memoirs, Gentlemen's Mag.*

tinued exertions ; and we find the number of students increasing, and the academy growing more and more useful every day. In course of time, genius shewed itself so rife, that a second exhibition was determined on, in which will be seen the name of our townsman, Deare, who, under the guidance of Mr. Roscoe, soon made himself an honourable name. He was sent out by the Royal Academy to study in Rome, where, shortly afterwards, being attacked by malaria, he took fever and died. He was followed to his last resting place by nearly all the artists in Rome, who threw laurels on his grave, in token of their admiration of his talents.

Thus, we find the reputation of the taste of Liverpool increasing, by the number of pictures sent to it ; and amongst the contributors, we notice several names, which in after years, ranked high in art. But soon all the fond hopes of its founders were blasted by the breaking out of the French war, which shook the foundations of all society. In the midst of the general panic, the society for the encouragement of art became paralysed, and then died away ; but in the meantime, Mr. Roscoe was silently and steadily collecting, with good judgment, a series of etchings of the old masters, a knowledge of whose works from actual observation, enabled him to write the preface to *Strut's Dictionary of Engravers*. This has been considered the best introduction to the subject treated of that has yet appeared, and has been translated into most of the modern languages.

During a long series of years devoted to a cultivation of art, Mr. Roscoe was in the habit of recording his observations on it by writing treatises on the various subjects which it embraces, and we find amongst his manuscripts several works which were probably intended for future publication. Amongst these may be named "A historical sketch of the state of the fine arts during the middle ages;" "On the origin of engraving on wood and copper;" "On the use of prints;" "On the practical part of painting;" "On the origin and progress of taste;" with many others, some of which were delivered as lectures at the meeting of the Society of Arts, and it is much to be regretted he did not live to see them through the press. Coming from the pen of one so singularly gifted with the power of discrimination, they would have been a delight to the educated, as well as an invaluable boon to the student in art. The preface to Mr. Daniel Daulby's catalogue of the Etchings of Rembrandt, we also owe to the pen of Mr. Roscoe. Mr. Daulby was brother-in-law to Mr. Roscoe, who often gave him the benefit of his advice in his purchases ; and it was to the zeal of Mr. Daulby

as a collector of the etchings of the old masters, that Liverpool owed the distinguished honour of possessing the most complete collection at that time known. Unfortunately at the death of Mr. Daulby, they were dispersed, and many of them now grace the national collections of Europe, where, in speaking of them, they are always alluded to as having formed part of "the celebrated Daulby collection."

Mr. Roscoe had many offers of great pecuniary advantage to induce him to write a history of the rise and decline of art in Italy, but his declining health forbade him accepting such engagements. He says in one of his letters, that art history is the subject he should like to write upon, it being his favourite study, but his age and delicate health are the great causes for his declining such engagements, which would involve him in more labour than he felt capable of undertaking.

Of the numerous artists who reaped advantages from the elegant conversation of Mr. Roscoe, and were admitted to share in his friendships and patronage, we must not omit the name of the great sculptor Gibson, our townsman, for whom Mr. Roscoe ever showed a kind of paternal solicitude. He was a principal means of Gibson's going to study in Rome, whence he often wrote to his early patron, and ever with that feeling of gratitude experienced by enlightened minds. We find him acknowledging the benefits he received from the permission which Mr. Roscoe gave him to copy some of his rare prints, at that time unattainable in Liverpool. They were from the old masters, and probably were a great means of fostering that love of purity of design so manifest in the early works of Gibson, and visible in the sketches now lying on the table before you. Such was the enthusiasm of Gibson throughout life, that in a letter in my possession, dated May 8, 1835, he says, "The beautiful medal of Mr. Roscoe, which you have so generously sent me, has given me more than one pleasure; the pleasure of seeing the old philosopher executed in this form, of seeing the beauty of the workmanship, and the pleasure of possessing this token of your kind remembrance. * * Time and hard-working have made me known, brought me encouragement and some credit. If I live some years longer, I hope to turn out something better than what I have hitherto done. I find myself improving, for I always endeavour to make the last work my best; the only ambition which rouses me in this world is that my name shall not die with my body. Whilst I am working on a marble statue, I spare no pains, forget profit, and say to myself—When this figure is hereafter found broken to pieces in the earth, every fragment of it shall rivet attention."

To show how nearly allied are the feelings of all great men, it may not be out of place to quote a passage from one of the letters of Mr. Roscoe, addressed to the Earl of Buchan, November 1, 1819. "I rejoice to find that you still continue to employ yourself in munificent plans for preserving the remains of antiquity, and the promotion of works of art. Philosophers may say what they please of posthumous fame, but I believe there never was an elevated mind that did not feel an invincible desire to leave a memorial of its existence on the records of the age, for the observation of future times."

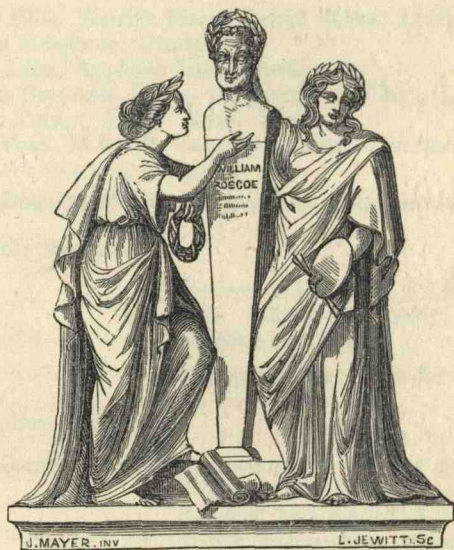
Many were the works executed by Gibson, at the suggestion of Mr. Roscoe; but one we cannot omit to mention from the vigour and originality of the design—Alexander depositing the works of Homer, which was long placed on the mantle-piece of his patron, and is now in the library of the Royal Institution. Among the numerous life-sizes, miniatures, busts, and bas-relief portraits of Mr. Roscoe, there has been none equal to or conveying so just a likeness as the one by Gibson. That by Sir F. Chantry, at the gallery of arts, is one of those mistaken idealisations which are too often indulged in by the most eminent of artists; as we see in it very few of the lineaments of that high-souled, benevolent man, which we used to observe when looking at the original. Besides these, there were likenesses by Mr. Alexander Mosses, portrait painter; Mr. Thomas Hargreaves, to whom we owe the best miniature of Mr. Roscoe; Mr. Griffiths, also a miniature painter, whose portrait of Gibson, the sculptor, taken a few days before his leaving England, is a good example of his talents. Henry Fuseli, R. A., painted several subjects from the works of Mr. Roscoe, and to him Mr. Roscoe addressed an Ode of very great poetical and artistic feeling.

The interesting memoir written some years ago by his son Henry has given us, with the full feeling of a dutiful child's affection, the most important features in the life of Mr. Roscoe; and I feel that the attempt which I have made to add anything to them in which to interest you, may have been unsatisfactory. I hope for your indulgence, as there has not been any want of desire to add my humble contribution to the honors of the man. Perhaps I have failed in expressing those feelings of veneration for the poet and philosopher, which ever inspired me from the early day when I first saw him; and conscious as I am that I cannot add a leaf to the laurels that surround his brow, still, with an humble voice, united with that of thousands of his admirers, I can repeat—

"Stassi il lauro lieto."



ALEXANDER DEPOSITING THE WORKS OF HOMER.



HISTORY AND PAINTING CROWNING THE BUST OF ROSCOE.

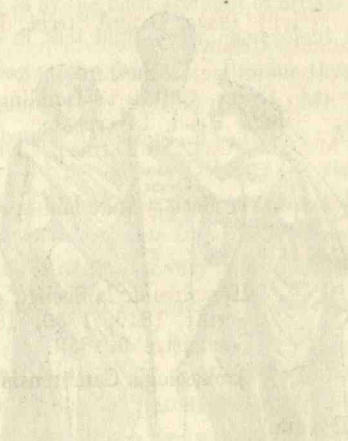


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