The Works Of Horatio Walpole, Earl of Orford

In Five Volumes

Walpole, Horace

London, 1798

Advertisement to a Catalogue and Description of King Charles I.'s Collection

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ADVERTISEMENT

TO A

CATALOGUE and DESCRIPTION

Of KING CHARLES the FIRST's

CAPITAL COLLECTION OF

Pictures, Statues, Bronzes, Medals, &c.

THE catalogue, now offered to the public, of the collection of pictures belonging to king Charles the first, was transcribed by the late curious and industrious Mr. VERTUE, from a MS. in the Ashmolean musæum, and was by him prepared for the press, part of it being actually printed off before his death. The catalogue appears, from pages 57 and 63, to have been taken by one * Vanderdoort, keeper of the king's cabinet, pictures, jewels, &c. who had before served prince Henry in the same employment: and indeed, from every page, it appears not to have been compiled by an Englishman, the language in many places being barely intelligible; in none,

* In Saunderson's Graphice is this account of this Abraham Vanderdoort's death. The king had recommended to him to take particular care of an excellent miniature by Gibson, the parable of the lost sheep: he laid it up so carefully, that when the king asked for it, Vanderdoort could not find it: in despair he went and hanged himself. After his death, his executors found and restored it. As it is not mentioned in this catalogue, probably it was newly purchased.

Vide Saunderson, p. 14.

There is a fine head of Vanderdoort in lord Oxford's collection, by Dobson, whom king Charles called the English Tintoret, and yet there is not one picture by him in the following catalogue.

tolerably

tolerably pure *. Yet it was apprehended, that putting it into a new dreſs might have deſtroyed much of the fidelity of the deſcriptions, which ſeem very accurately taken; and as elegance of diction is by no means a neceſſary ingredient to a catalogue, it is hoped that the curious will prefer the rude original, in its native truth, to a more poliſhed, but perhaps leſs faithful narrative.

King Charles's collection was one of the moſt celebrated in Europe: he loved, he underſtood, he patronized the arts. Not having the fortune to find great geniuſes in painting among his own ſubjects, he † called over ſome of the ableſt maſters of other nations—a commendable partiality to foreigners, as it tended to enrich and inſtruct his own country. Nor did he confine his expence to artiſts: beſides ſeparate pieces, he purchaſed the celebrated collection of the duke of Mantua; having firſt laid a foundation of what he inherited from his brother the amiable prince Henry, who, as appears from this catalogue, had, amongſt his other qualifications, a taſte for pictures, and a noble zeal for encouraging the arts.

It is recorded of king Charles, that at one time he made a preſent of ultramarine to the value of five hundred pounds to Vandyke and Mrs. Carliſle, a celebrated paintreſs; and the immenſe price of eighty thouſand pounds, which his majeſty is ſaid to have agreed to pay to the ſame great maſter, for illuſtrating the banqueting-houſe with the ceremonies of the garter, is rather a comment on the magnificence of the prince, and the genius of the painter, than probably a matter of fact.—That noble chamber was ſoon deſtined to a more melancholy ſolemnity!

The ſtroke that laid royalty ſo low, diſmiſſed the painter, and diſperſed the royal virtuoſo's collection: the firſt cabinets in Europe ſhine with its ſpoils ‡. The few fine pieces thinly ſcattered through the royal palaces at

* Tom Hearne, who was going to print it, took it for German, and dropped the deſign.

† He invited Albano into England, by a letter written with his own hand. *Acad. Pict.* p. 282.

‡ After the reſtoration a commiſſion was iſſued out to examine Hugh Peters concerning the diſpoſal of the pictures, jewels, &c. belonging to the royal family, but ſoon came to nothing, by the obſtinacy or ignorance of Peters, who would not or could not give the deſired ſatisfaction. *Vide Gen. Dict.* vol. ii. p. 384.

home, are chiefly what were ſaved or re-aſſembled of king Charles's ſplendid gallery: the Dutch are reported to have purchaſed and reſtored ſome * to his ſon: the beſt part are buried in the gloom or periſhing in the vaults of the Eſcurial. The late prince of Wales, who had begun to aſſemble a fine collection, propoſed to acquire as many as poſſible of king Charles's pictures—but painting has ſtill been unfortunate in Britain!

The fire of Whitehall contributed to deſtroy what rebellion and rapine had ſpared. Many portraits of royal perſons, of whom no image is left, periſhed in thoſe flames. The faireſt works of the natural Holbein, and the exquiſite Iſaac Oliver, were probably loſt there: works ſo valuable, that the memory of them, preſerved in this rude tranſcript, muſt recommend it to the judicious and curious reader.

A ſtill farther view is aimed at. Catalogues of this ſort are deſervedly grown into eſteem: while a collection remains entire, the uſe of the catalogue is obvious; when diſperſed, it often ſerves to authenticate a picture, adds to its imaginary value, and beſtows a ſort of hiſtory on it. It is to be wiſhed, that the practice of compoſing catalogues of conſpicuous collections was univerſal: and perhaps this, ſo coarſely executed, may tend to incite more elegant imitations. Hitherto, this Vanderdoort, and one or two foreigners ſcarce better qualified, have been the chief illuſtrators of Britiſh muſæums †. One Gambarini began with lord Pembroke's collection, and made pompous promiſes of proceeding with what he was incapable of executing well. There is another account of the pictures and ſtatues at Wilton ‡: the coins and medals have been publiſhed in a fair edition. Many of the duke of Devonſhire's and doctor Mead's appear in Haym's *Teſoro Britannico*. Theſe, and the *Ædes Walpolianæ*, are, I think, the only deſcriptions of the riches of a country, which for ſome years has been aſſembling the arts and works of the politeſt nations and greateſt maſters.

* They are publiſhed in Gerard Reyntz's Gallery, of whoſe widow they were bought.

† It ſeems that king Charles's medals were ſaved, or that his ſon made a collection; for the latter ordered Aſhmole to make a deſcription of his medals, and aſſigned Henry the eighth's cloſet for that purpoſe. He made the catalogue accordingly; but I do not find that it was ever printed.

Vide Memoirs of El. Aſhmole, prefixed to his Berkſhire, p. 10, 24.

‡ By Cowdrey. Another ſince by Kennedy.

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The eſtabliſhment of the Britiſh muſæum ſeems a charter for incorporating the arts, a new æra of *virtù*. It is to be hoped that collections, wont to ſtraggle through auctions into obſcurity, will there find a centre! Who that ſhould deſtine his collection to the Britiſh muſæum, would not purchaſe curioſities with redoubled ſpirit and pleaſure, whenever he reflected, that he was collecting for his country, and would have his name recorded as a benefactor to its arts and improvements? And when ſo fair a foundation is laid, if pictures and ſtatues flow in to books and medals, and curioſities of every kind, may we not flatter ourſelves, that a Britiſh academy of arts will ariſe? at leaſt, that we ſhall not want great maſters of our own, when models are prepared, and our artiſts can ſtudy Greece and Rome, Praxiteles and Raphael, without ſtirring from their own metropolis?

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