

**NOTES AND MEMORANDA
RESPECTING THE
LIBER STUDIORUM
OF J. M. W. TURNER**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649658602

Notes and Memoranda Respecting the Liber Studiorum of J. M. W. Turner by John Pye & John Lewis Roget

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

JOHN PYE & JOHN LEWIS ROGET

**NOTES AND MEMORANDA
RESPECTING THE
LIBER STUDIORUM
OF J. M. W. TURNER**

NOTES AND MEMORANDA
RESPECTING THE
LIBER STUDIORUM

OF
J. M. W. TURNER, R.A.

WRITTEN AND COLLECTED BY THE LATE

JOHN PYE,

LANDSCAPE ENGRAVER.

EDITED, WITH ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS, AND AN
ILLUSTRATIVE ETCHING,

BY

JOHN LEWIS ROGET.

LONDON:
JOHN VAN VOORST, PATERNOSTER ROW.

1879.

60

NOTES AND MEMORANDA
RESPECTING THE
LIBER STUDIORUM
OF
J. M. W. TURNER, R.A.

CHAPTER I.

Introductory—John Pye's Memoranda of Turner—Pye not one of the Engravers, but an Admirer and Collector of the *Liber*—Public Appreciation of the *Liber*—National Collections—Pye and Ruskin on *Chiaroscuro*—"Tricks" of Light and Shade—Writers on the *Liber*—Ruskin—Burlington Club—Hamerton—Wedmore—Thornbury—Rawlinson—Papers at the British Museum—The *Liber* as a Source of Instruction in Landscape Composition.

THE recent appearance of a descriptive catalogue of the *Liber Studiorum* of Turner affords an occasion, which I have for some time desired, of putting together in a form adapted to publication, some memoranda written by the late Mr. John Pye, the engraver, which were entrusted to me several years ago for perusal, with that object in view.

I am desirous, at the same time, of correcting a

misapprehension which seems to exist with regard to the manuscripts in question.

Pye's long connection with Turner, as one of the most celebrated, and in some respects the most perfect, interpreter of the great painter's meaning, through the medium of line engraving; the mutual high appreciation which was known to have existed between these two artists, amounting in Pye's case to something little short of adoration of Turner's genius; and the fondness and gusto with which the old engraver, who was a capital story-teller, used to relate and dwell on various little traits of the painter's character; coupled with hints thrown out that he had committed to paper some unpublished facts about Turner; led to a prevalent belief that at Pye's death, if not before, much interesting matter would be revealed to the public respecting the great artist's career. This expectation having been referred to in an article by Mr. Wedmore in the *Academy* of Feb. 1, 1879, I on the 8th of the same month addressed a letter to the editor of that journal, which was published on the 15th, expressing my regret that, under the following circumstances, such expectation was not likely to be realized.

All the papers left by Mr. Pye which are supposed by his family to have any bearing on the subject of Turner's life or works, were, shortly after Pye's death, placed by his executor in my hands for the purpose above mentioned. I found them to be very fragmentary documents; and, after

examining and arranging them, came long ago to the conclusion, that beyond a few facts connected with the painter's works (more particularly the *Liber Studiorum*), they contained little or nothing of importance which was not already known to the public. That it was Pye's intention to give to the world a connected history of art, in which an account of the life and works of Turner should form a prominent feature, is, however, indicated by the following draft of a title-page, which is among the documents in question :

“Characteristics of British Art, and how in their midst J. M. W. Turner and Thomas Girtin arose. Chronologically arranged, together with a brief notice of Turner's *Liber Studiorum*, and of the latter part of his life. By John Pye, Corresponding Member of the Institute of France.”

With this object, Pye had evidently been engaged after Turner's death, in a diligent collection of material ; but he left the undertaking in a rudimentary state, and recorded next to nothing of his personal recollections of the great painter. Moreover, after the publication of Mr. Thornbury's “Life of Turner” (unsatisfactory as that compilation was), there seems to have been little remaining untold that the old engraver desired to impart to posterity.

It is, however, with the memoranda relating to the *Liber Studiorum*, which, as containing a few new facts of interest, form the above-mentioned exception, that I have here exclusively to deal.

With the production of that remarkable work, Pye himself is not known to have had any connection.* He was purely and exclusively a line engraver, and the *Liber* was engraved in an entirely different manner, chiefly mezzotint. Although, however, he held an exalted opinion of the superiority of the style which he himself practised, he had a profound admiration for these plates, and was never tired of descanting on their beauty. During Turner's life-time he had been at much pains to secure good impressions; and, shortly before his own death, he sold to the nation, at a moderate price, the fine collection which he had then acquired; in the belief that by so doing he was conferring an important boon to the public, in setting before students of art a high standard of excellence in landscape composition.

The issue of the *Liber* plates began in 1807, and ended prematurely in 1819,† when 71‡ out of an

* It was erroneously stated, in a "Biographical Note" on John Pye, prefixed to the catalogue of an "Exhibition of Engravings by Birmingham Men," held at that town in the spring of 1877, that he "executed well-known plates for 'Turner's Liber Studiorum;'" but the error was, I believe, afterwards admitted by the compiler in a letter to a local journal.

† Mr. Hamerton, in his "Life of J. M. W. Turner, R.A.," (p. 109,) says "1816"; therein adopting one of the many mis-statements contained in the late Mr. Thornbury's book, bearing the same title. The error first occurs in the original edition of Thornbury's "Life," published in 1862, (vol. i. p. 272.) In the second edition, dated 1877, (p. 493,) the author remodeled the sentence, without correcting the date, although a full chronological list of the plates is given in an appendix.

‡ Mr. Thornbury, in a summary, appended to his "Life of

intended set of 100, had been completed; but until after Turner's death in 1851, little was known of the work, except by members of the author's profession and a small circle of connoisseurs. It is only since the dispersion by Messrs. Christie & Co. in 1873, within a year of Pye's death, of the large stock of copies, which had remained in the great painter's hands till he died, and had then been taken possession of by the Court of Chancery, that the work has been much known to the general public. Before that time, indeed, about fifty * of the brown

Turner," of Mr. Stokes's catalogue of Turner's engraved works, sets down the number of plates as twenty-one only. Mr. Griffith (Turner's agent and one of his executors), in commenting on the general inaccuracy of Thornbury's book, in a letter to Pye (dated Dec. 21, 1861) observes, however, "I think he is pretty close to the mark in putting the collective number of engravings after Turner at 800, because, although palpably wrong in setting down the *Liber* published plates at twenty-one instead of seventy-one, he has counterbalanced the error 'as far as figures go, by giving seventy-five to Rogers's 'Italy' instead of twenty-five." Both these errors are, with many others, repeated in the later edition. [See "The Life of J. M. W. Turner, R.A.," 1st edition, vol. ii. p. 352; 2nd edition, p. 551.]

* There were fifty-one so exhibited, but one was for a plate which has never been engraved. They were afterwards removed to Trafalgar Square. Mr. Rawlinson writes:—"Not only are they becoming utterly faded and in other ways deteriorated by continual exposure, but the position given them leads to their being constantly copied by students, who would surely learn more of Turner's intentions in *Liber Studiorum*, if they studied and copied a fine set of the Prints." ["Turner's *Liber Studiorum*;" by W. G. Rawlinson, 1878, p. vii. n.] Since these words were written, and possibly in deference to the opinion expressed by their writer and by others before him, the drawings in question have been removed from the general exhibition rooms, and

drawings, made by Turner for the engravers to work by, had been hung on the walls of a room in the South Kensington Museum; but the thousands of visitors to that institution were unaware how inferior many of those drawings are to the finished engravings.

placed where, it is to be hoped, they will no longer be exposed to the like injury, but where they are accessible to the public on a special application.

Mr. Ruskin declares that they "are not to be considered as Turner *drawings* at all. They are," he says, "merely hasty indications of his intention, given to the engraver to guide him in his first broad massing out of the shade on the plate. Turner took no care with them, but put his strength only into his own etching on the plate itself, which was repeated and elaborate on the engraver's work. The finer impressions of the plates are infinitely better than these so-called originals, in which there is hardly a trace of Turner's power, and none of his manner. The time bestowed in copying them by some of the students is wholly wasted; they should copy the engravings only, and chiefly those which were engraved as well as etched by Turner himself." ["Notes on the Turner Collection," 5th edition, 1857, p. 4.] This recommendation must, however, be valued in connection with the same teacher's advice to students as to their method of using the *Liber* plates, the object of which appears to be the training of hand and eye to produce exact fac-similes of lines and shadows. [See "The Elements of Drawing," pp. 132-138.]

Mr. Wedmore writes:—"In the *Mount St. Gothard* subject, in the *Dunstanborough*, and in the *Coast of Yorkshire*, the drawings are more impressive and powerful than the prints. The drawing of the *Falls of the Clyde* has the light *through* the trees, as well as *upon* the trees, as in one engraver's proof belonging to Mr. Stopford Brooke; and it gains thereby. In all the other drawings for this series in the National Gallery, the effect is inferior to that of the prints; generally very markedly so, and of all perhaps most markedly so in the exquisite and unsurpassed subject, *Severn and Wye*—a subject well nigh worthless in the 'original