

**THE HAND-BOOK OF TASTE: OR,  
HOW TO OBSERVE WORKS OF  
ART, ESPECIALLY CARTOONS,  
PICTURES, AND STATUES**

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The Hand-Book of Taste: Or, How to Observe Works of Art, Especially Cartoons, Pictures, and Statues by Fabius Pictor

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**FABIUS PICTOR**

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## PREFACE.

A PROPOSITION has been made to decorate the New Houses of Parliament with productions of British Art. The Parliament has assented, and has appointed a committee for the purpose of furthering the object proposed. Nothing can be fairer or better adapted for that purpose than the instructions issued by that committee. No test can exhibit the capacities of an artist so fairly and truly as the production of a cartoon.\* But those cartoons are, as is right, to be submitted to public inspection in Westminster Hall; and if the Public be intelligent and capable of judging,

\* A cartoon means a chalk drawing upon paper. The word is adopted from the Italian *cartone*, a large piece of paper.

they will exercise a most useful influence upon the decisions of that committee; for in the multitude of counsellors there is wisdom. High lineage and noble birth give wealth, but not intellectual richness. The poet's chaplet and the peer's coronet are not of necessity identical; nor is good taste always prominent in those to whom the world's worldly favours are most freely accorded. The minority, who do understand, may want the assistance of public opinion to make them a majority. Even foreign taste, in all probability better than our own upon such matters, may not regret that it is backed by an enlightened public opinion, if it should have to encounter ignorant prejudice.

It is, then, for the instruction of the Public that this little work has been compiled. It does not contain the opinions of one individual, but those of the best artists and best critics of all ages — such as Da Vinci, Winkelmann, Mengs, Milizia,



Lessing, and Sir Joshua Reynolds. Much is translated from Milizia; and it is believed that there is no one maxim in the book for which authority may not be found in the writings of Sir Joshua — only his object was to teach the young student how to become a good artist, mine to instruct the observer how to distinguish one.

Experience has shown that he did not succeed. Why not? Because the public taste was unable to appreciate works in the grand style, which he therefore himself deserted. It has not advanced much from his time to our own. Partially perhaps it has receded, while that of other countries has advanced with giant steps. England, in her arts of design, is immeasurably behind what Italy has been, and, notwithstanding our unwillingness to confess it, what France aspires to, and Germany has accomplished. But is she incapable of progress? We shall see.

THE  
HAND-BOOK OF TASTE.

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INTRODUCTION.

1. THE earliest productions of imitative art pretended to nothing but a certain degree of manual dexterity ; and even this was at first so rude and imperfect, that the artist felt himself obliged to inscribe upon his work the name of the object intended to be represented, in order to make it recognisable. But, as he was his own commentator, no exertion was required of the observer, beyond the making use of his eyes, to enable him to judge of the resemblance, which was all that was aimed at.

2. When these imitations were sufficiently true and correct to speak for themselves without comment or inscription, a great step was gained; yet, as the objects represented were single figures and simple subjects, the whole aim of the artist being still confined to the mere attempt of producing an exact copy of the original he imitated, every person was equally capable of appreciating their merits or defects, without any other assistance than that which a correct eye naturally afforded.

3. In process of time men were no longer content with the mere representation of what was constantly before their eyes; and the artist then took higher ground. He began to embellish and improve upon the model which nature afforded him, by selecting only such subjects as were more perfect than the rest, correcting the faulty parts of his original, or substituting others from more chosen specimens. Still his appeal