THE



DESCRIPTION OF

OF

The Incredulity af Chamas,

BY THAT CELEBRATED ARTIST,

BENJAMIN WEST,

an american quaker,

The Property of William Peel Crag Cottage,
Windhill, near Bradford,

WITH A BRIEF

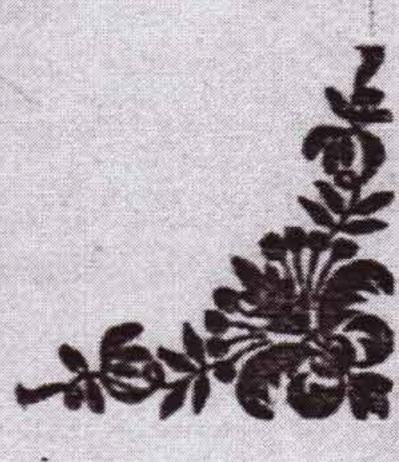
Sketch of the Life of Benjamin West.

SHIPLEY:

PRINTED FOR WILLIAM PEEL,
BY JOHN VINT.

1853.





TO THE PUBLIC.

To attempt a full description of the Picture would be out of my power, I must therefore confine myself to a few observations; for it must be seen to be appreciated. The treating of the subject in designing the Picture is wonderful: the condescending attitude of our Saviour, and the natural appearance of the wounds he is exhibiting, cannot fail to make a deep impression upon the mind of every beholder. The boldness of the Figure of St. Peter is characteristic, while that of St. John is truly sublime, and his devotedness of character shine forth in his face. Upon the whole, the correctness in giving the characters of Christ and his Apostles, as recorded in the Scriptures, is most amazing. The correctness of the Drawing, the fineness of the Colouring, and the softness of the Drapery, are beautiful. It is not too much to

say, that the Figures advance as near to perfection as can be conceived: the expression of the Eyes exceeds all imagination: and the animation of the Figures is all that can be given, except Life itself. For you might look at the picture while it would be no great stretch of imagination to fancy yourself in the presence of Christ and his Apostles. I will, therefore, now conclude with the following Lines spoken by the late John Nicholson, the Airedale Poet, on seeing the Picture.

GREAT WEST! like all with Death had to depart,
That mighty Master of the Painter's Art;
Such touches in his life his hand did give,
They want but breath—to make the canvass live.

By the same, on seeing it a second time:-

The Light, the Shade, touch'd by the Artist West, Of the Creator. Saviour of the blest, Exceeds in splendour and in Nature's fire All that the most fastidious can desire; 'Tis nearly life, as perfect art can give; But greatest Artists make not Paintings live; But He who died to raise us from the fall, And rose again, He can give life to all.

WILLIAM PEEL.

CRAG COTTAGE, July 4th, 1853.

THE SUBJECT OF

THE PAINCIM

IS TAKEN FROM

THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN,

Chapter XX. from 24 to 30 Verses.

But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.

The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.

And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you.

Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.

And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.

Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed.

And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.

A

Wescription & Guide for the Picture,

WITH A BRIEF SKETCH OF THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST AND HIS APOSTLES.

The Painting represents the interior of the Temple, with Christ and the Eleven. In the midst is our Saviour and St. Thomas. The Figure of Christ showeth that meek and lowly mind he always possessed while upon earth, and shewing the wounds in his Hands and Side; whilst Thomas is stooping down in the act of putting his finger into the wound, being ashamed of the manner of testing his faith.

On the left of our Saviour is St. Peter, with his hands clasped powerfully together, and looking down on Thomas with great consternation and that fiery zeal he so often shewed for his Lord.

To the left of Peter is that of St. John, Christ's beloved apostle, viewing the scene with strong emotion, and countenance so sublime no pen can describe; and when seen with the eye, no tongue can express the heavenly appearance of that favourite disciple who lay his head upon his Master's bosom at the administration of the Last Supper.

Between Peter and John is St. Andrew, Peter's brother, who looks upon the scene with strong feeling of mind.

On the left of John is St. Philip, who appears to be hiding himself from the scene.

To the right of Peter is St. Bartholomew, whose countenance bespeaks that of deep sorrow, and is turning away from the faithless act of Thomas, because he was "an Israelite indeed in whom there was no guile."

On the left of Thomas is St. Matthew, that venerable and aged apostle whose face expresses deep anguish while he sees the finger of Thomas in the Saviour's side.

To the left of Matthew is St. Jude, brother of James, whose features, like his preceding brethren, express the greatest excitement, and whose eyes are turned upward to avoid seeing the wound in the side of his Saviour.

On the right of Matthew is St. James the great, brother of John, with his hand resting on the back of Thomas, and is pointing with his finger to the faithless disciple with his face towards Simon, whose care-worn features shew that great warmth of disposition, and the unfeigned zeal he often shewed for the cause of his Saviour.

To the right of Simon, and looking over his shoulder, is St. James the Less, whose faith in the resurrection of his Saviour was the greatest of any of the apostles; he having solemnly sworn that, from the time he had drank of the Cup at the institution of the Sacrament, he would eat bread no more till he saw the Lord risen from the dead. Our blessed Lord appeared to him, in particular, after his resurrection, and said to him, "Bring hither bread; and he took the bread and blessed and brake it, and gave it to our Apostle, saying, Eat thy bread, my brother, for the Son of man is risen from among them that sleep."

But Thomas required both ocular and manual demonstration; declaring that unless he should see in His hands the print of the nails, and thrust his hand into His side, he would not believe. Then he appeared to His disciples again, and gave to Thomas the demonstration he required.

A SKETCH

OF THE

LIFE OF BENJAMIN WEST.

"Benjamin West, President of the Royal Academy of Painting, was born on the 10th October, 1738, and was the son of John West, a Quaker, residing at Springfield, a village in the interior of Pennsylvania.

It was scarcely possible that any human being could be less favourably situated for the culture of any of the arts which embellish human life, than young Benjamin. The sect to which he belonged, noted for so many estimable and moral qualities, had adopted in excess the austere creed, which condemns, as ungodly and perilous, every art which aims only at amusement and ornament. He was therefore bred up under the impossibility of seeing a single specimen of the imitative arts. Only the most irresistible strength of natural genius could have enabled him to break through such a host of discouraging circumstances.

It was at the age of six that the disposition of the young painter first displayed itself. Being left to rock the cradle of an infant sister, he saw her smile in her sleep, and was so struck with the beauty of her countenance at that moment, that he snatched up a pen, and attempted to delineate it. His mother entering, shame led him to conceal what he had been doing; but she, perceiving his confusion insisted to see it, and, viewing the drawing with evident pleasure, exclaimed, "I declare he has made a likeness of little Sally." Maternal sanction being thus given to the art, the boy was allowed full liberty to pursue it in the intervals of his school, and to delineate with the pen every object which struck his eye. A party of Indians who happened to visit Springfield, taught him to prepare the red and yellow with which they painted their ornaments; and his mother having presented him with a piece of indigo, he was thus in possession of the three primary colours. About this time he heard the description of camel's hair pencils, and instantly saw how superior these must be to the rude machinery of a pen. The world, however, with which he was acquainted, presented no such object. The only substitute he could contrive, was obtained by the following expedient. He cast his eye on a favourite black cat of his father's, and having privily obtained the use of his mother's scissors, employed them in cutting off the

bushy extremity of the tail. As this lasted only for a short time, he was reduced to the necessity of making large inroads on the back of grimalkin. The worthy man inwardly mourned this naked and altered appearance of his favourite, and could only ascribe it to some serious malady; till the youth, on hearing these lamentations repeated, blushingly confessed the wrong he had done. He obtained an easy forgiveness from the surprised and gratified parent. At eight years of age the young painter spent the whole of several days in the garret with his paint and canvass: the schoolmaster lodged a complaint of his non-attendance, his mother hastened up and surprised her son, but was soon appeased by the view of his work which was so well executed that he afterwards declared there were some touches in it that he had never been able to surpass in the whole of his practice, which was upwards of seventy years.

A short time after, the young painter visited Philadelphia. Here, in passing along the street, saw one Williams a painter, carrying an object which he had never before seen—a picture. The emotions which he betrayed at this moment were so extraordinary, that Williams was delighted, took him home, showed him his pictures and drawings; there was no longer any doubt as to his destiny. On returning home he announced himself as a future

painter, and seems to have formed the loftiest ideas of his profession. He now began to obtain employment in portraits. Being advised by a friend to try historical painting, he produced the "Death of Socrates," which drew so much admiration, that Dr. Smith, Provost of the College at Philadelphia, undertook his tuition. This judicious scholar directed his attention particularly to those objects and incidents which tended to fire his imagination, and furnish future subjects for his pencil.

Young West had now reached the age of sixteen, and the time was come when he must make choice of a profession. His father, however gratified by his son's display of genius, felt still some scruple at making him a painter, the utility of which profession is not recognised by the Quakers. Many of his most respected neighbours pressed upon him the duty of giving the youth a sober and godly trade, and not allowing him to exercise an occupation which ministered only to the concerns of sin and vanity. The worthy man troubled by these meditations and discourses, determined to call a general meeting of the Friends of Springfield, and to submit to them the future destination of Benjamin. A considerable difference of opinion prevailed; but at last a venerable friend rose and argued, that the talent of the young man was a manifest gift of God, which must have been bestowed for

wise ends; and that painting, though liable to abuse, might be employed for the noblest purposes. These reasons were pronounced satisfactory by the meeting; an inspired sister pronounced a blessing upon him; the men laid their hands upon his head, and the women kissed him; and the young artist was sent forth into the world to exercise his vocation.

At Philadelphia and New York, West found considerable practice as a portrait painter. He produced, moreover, an original work on the subject of the "Trial of Susannah."

Having raised by his labours, and the kind assistance of his friends and patrons, a small sum of money, West determined to embrace an opportunity which offered of visiting Italy. At Rome, the arrival of an American Quaker to study the fine arts, caused an astonishing sensation. He was introduced to Cardinal Albani, and through him to the most distinguished persons then in Rome. Having painted the portrait of Mr. Robinson, afterwards Lord Grantham, it was shown to a large circle as the production of Mengs, the most eminent painter then in Rome, and was pronounced superior to the usual productions of that artist. Mengs was so generous as not to be mortified, but contracted a friendship for West, and gave him his best advice. Accustomed to the quietude of a

Pegnsylvanian life, the agitations of Rome threw him into a fever, from which the physicians declared that he could only recover by being removed to a more tranquil scene. After his recovery, he visited all the great schools of Italy.

West repaired, in 1763, to England, where he soon became acquainted with Sir Joshua Reynolds and Richard Wilson, and was introduced to other eminent men. But his chief obligations were to Dr. Drummond, Archbishop of York, who engaged him to paint for him the story of "Agrippina landing with the ashes of Germanicus." The Archbishop was so gratified by the production, that he immediately introduced both the picture and the artist to the notice of George the Third. That monarch, endued both with taste and discernment in the fine arts, was so delighted with it, that he thenceforth made West the object of his especial favour and patronage. He suggested to him the subject of "the Final Departure of Regulus from Rome;" and the applause which the picture received at the first exhibition, was equally gratifying to the artist and to the royal patron.

West was now frequently invited to spend the evening at Buckingham-House, and his Majesty held long conversations with him on the best means of promoting the arts. It was owing to these that

the plan of the "Royal Academy" owed its origin; an institution calculated, under proper management, to be beneficial to art. In 1792, West, with universal approbation, was appointed to the office of president. He painted for the king the "Oath of Hannibal," and several other subjects.

His Majesty, continuing to bestow his patronage on West, employed him in a truly magnificent work. It was to adorn a private chapel or oratory at Windsor, with a series of paintings, illustrative of the history of revealed religion.

His celebrated picture of "Christ healing the Sick" was purchased by the British Institution for three thousand guineas; while his subsequent works of "Christ Rejected" and "Death on the Pale Horse," have produced large sums by their mere exhibition. West had received from the king thirty-four thousand, one hundred and eighty-seven pounds for various pictures,—a bounty surpassing even the boasted generosity of Leo the Tenth.

Our artist was now far advanced into the vale of years. His wife, an American lady, and the object of an early attachment, died on the 16th of December, 1817, and thus closed a union of fifty years. This loss was deeply felt, and accelerated the decline of his health, which went on increasing

without a struggle, in his eighty-second year. His remains were interred in St. Paul's Cathedral, and were honoured with a public funeral, which was attended not only by all his brethren of the art, but by many of the most distinguished personages of the kingdom.

As an artist, West will ever stand in the first rank: he designed, and painted, pictures which will stand as monuments of his abilities for ages yet to come. After his death, the before-mentioned picture of "Christ Rejected" sold for twenty thousand guineas. We may conclude this notice by saying, that in disposition Benjamin West was mild, liberal and generous. While filling the president's chair, he was to the elder artists a kind brother, and to the young a beneficent father."

J. VINT, PRINTER, SHIPLEY.