James Woodhouse, â??Benevolence, An Odeâ?•

Description

JAMES WOODHOUSE

â??BENEVOLENCE, An ODEâ?•

Inscribed to my Friends

Let others boast Palladian skill
The sculpturâ??d dome to raise;
To scoop the vale, to swell the hill,
Or lead the smooth, meandâ??ring rill
In ever-varying maze;
To strike the lyre
With Homerâ??s fire,
Or Sapphoâ??s tender art;
Or Handelâ??s notes with sweeter strains inspire,
Oâ??er Phidiaâ??s chissel to preside,
Or Titianâ??s glowing pencil guide
Through evâ??ry living part.

Ah! what avails it thus to shine,
By evâ??ry art refinâ??d;
Except BENEVOLENCE combine
To humanize the mind!
The Parian floor,
Or vivid cieling, frescoâ??d oâ??er,
With glaring charms the gazing eye may fire;
Yet may their lords, like statues cold,
Devoid of sympathy, behold
Fair worth with want repine,
Or indigence, expire;
Nor ever know the noblest use of gold.

â??Tis yours, with sympathetic breast,
To stop the rising sigh,
And wipe the tearful eye,
Nor let repining merit sue unblest;
This is a more applausive taste
Than spending wealth
In gorgeous waste,
Or with dire luxury destroying health;

It sweetens life with evâ??ry virtuous joy,
And wings the conscious hours with gladness as they fly.

NOTES:

Subtitle â??His first two elegies being seen by some gentlemen and ladies in London in manuscript, they made a small subscription for him; and these were the friends he speaks ofâ?• [Authorâ??s Note].

1 *Palladian* A reference to the neoclassical architectural movement inspired by the Italian Renaissance architect, Andrea Palladio (1508-1580). Palladian style was strongly based on symmetry and clarity and remained popular through the mid eighteenth century *(Britannica).*

7 *Homer* Greek poet, famously known for his epics *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey.*

8 *Sappho* â??Greek lyric poet (c. 610-570 BCE) greatly admired in all ages for the beauty of her writing styleâ?• (*Britannica).*

9 *Handel* George Frideric Handel (1685-1759), â??German-born English composer of the late Baroque era. He wrote the most famous of all oratorios, *Messiah* (1741)â?• (*Britannica*).

10 *Phidia* Greek sculptor (fl. c. 490-430 BCE), â??artistic director of the Parthenonâ?• and renowned for his colossal statues of Athena and Zeus (*Britannica).*

11 *Titian* Tiziano Vecellio (or Vecelli) (1488/90-1576) â??The greatest Italian Renaissance painter of the Venetian schoolâ?• (*Britannica).*

17 *Parian floor* The Greek island of Paros was known for its â??fine white marble, prized in antiquity by sculptorsâ?• (*OED*).

18 *cieling* Alternate spelling of â??ceiling,â?• noted in Johnsonâ??s *Dictionary*; *frescoâ??d* â??A kind of painting executed in water-colour on a wall, ceiling, etc. of which the mortar or plaster is not quite dry, so that the colours sink in and become more durableâ?• (*OED*).

28 *sue* â??To make oneâ??s petition or appealâ?• *(OED).*

Source: *Poems on Several Occasions*, second edition (London, 1766), pp. 24-26. [Google Books]

Edited by Natalie Nunez