Aims and Ideals in Art

G. Clausen

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AIMS AND IDEALS IN ART

Raphael *Louvre*

PORTRAIT OF BALTHAZAR CASTIGLIONE

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AIMS AND IDEALS IN ART

EIGHT LECTURES DELIVERED
TO THE STUDENTS OF
THE ROYAL ACADEMY

BY

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WITH THIRTY-TWO ILLUSTRATIONS

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G. C.

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ON TRUTH TO NATURE; AND STYLE

I

ON TRUTH TO NATURE; AND STYLE

SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS, in his notes on Du Fresnoy's *Art of Painting*, very truly says that "The study of nature is the beginning and the end of theory. It is in nature only we can find that beauty which is the great object of our search: it can be found nowhere else: we can no more form any idea of beauty superior to nature than we can form an idea of a sixth sense, or any other excellence out of the limits of the human mind. We are forced to confine our conception even of heaven itself and its inhabitants to what we see in this world. Nothing can be so unphilosophical as a supposition that we can form any idea of beauty or excellence out of or beyond nature, which is and must be the fountain-head from whence all our ideas must be derived.

"This being acknowledged, it must follow, of course, that all the rules which this theory, or any other, teaches, can be no more than teaching the art of *seeing* nature. The rules of art are formed on the various works of those who have studied nature the most successfully: by this advantage, of observing the various manners in which various minds have contemplated her works, the artist enlarges his own views, and is taught to look for and see what otherwise would have escaped his observation."

This really sums up the matter, and I can do no more than try, by touching on some points of detail, to help you to arrive at some sort of standard, some definite idea of what should be an artist's aim; what idea of truth or what aspect of nature are best worth our trying to express: for every picture, even the worst, has some measure of truth to nature, otherwise it would not be recognisable. We have to find for ourselves some meaning for "nature," some standard of truth.

The Greek artists, and in a lesser degree the great Italians, expressed more perfectly than

others a type of form which we recognise as approaching an ideal of perfection. These are true to the type rather than to the individual; while, on the other hand, an artist like Velasquez is truer than others in giving the natural appearance of the individual. The portraits of Raphael, of Velasquez, and of Rembrandt, are each true to nature; and it may help us, perhaps, to hold our way amidst contradictory or opposite tendencies in art, to remember that there is no one truth to nature, for nature contains all truths and includes all manifestations: and "truth to nature" is a loose and inexact phrase which we use to support our individual point of view. The finest works include more than one kind of truth, and so are nearer to nature.

A mean, poor view of nature may be chosen, and may be painted truly; that is to say, the picture may correspond to the idea of its painter: but however great the painter's accomplishment, it will be a poor picture. It is, though, true, in a way, to say that it does not matter what object is painted, if it is painted well: for good painting justifies itself. The question is, what do

we mean by good painting? It may be only smart execution, or it may be, like the noble realism of Watts, the expression of a fine understanding of his subject. We come back to the necessary thing: the "art of seeing nature."

Truth of resemblance does not cover the whole ground of art; much of the finest work appeals on other grounds; through subject, or sentiment, and demands that the spectator be in sympathy and prepared to receive its message. It is not the greatest works which have the largest number of admirers; these do not impress people at once, but are received with indifference, or even with a measure of hostility.

You will remember that Reynolds, in speaking of Raphael's frescoes in the Vatican, and his inability to understand them at first, says the custodian told him that many persons who came expressly to see these works had passed through the rooms without noticing them, and at the end asked where they were; and he confesses to his own disappointment on first seeing them. The impressions of nature in the minds of these people, and in his mind, had

practically no correspondence with the impressions of nature which were in the mind of Raphael. Yet, if Raphael had not been true to nature, if his works were not founded on a deep understanding and great knowledge of nature, it is inconceivable that they should have gained, and should still retain, the admiration and esteem of the artistic world.

It is easier for us, perhaps, to recognise the fine qualities of Raphael's art in his portraits than in his large compositions, which are in a sense too familiar to us, too much a part of our inheritance, for us to think of them critically; they have become commonplaces, and we cannot estimate the greatness of his achievement. But in his portraits we come nearer to him, and such works as the portrait of Castiglione in the Louvre, or the portraits in the Uffizi, or the Pope Julius in our National Gallery, are, I think, unsurpassable, in their truth to the essential things in nature, the structure and character; the modelling is firm and thorough, and close to the form. The Castiglione seems to me to rank even with Velasquez's portrait

of Philip in the National Gallery, in the sense of atmosphere which it has, in addition to its other fine qualities.

These portraits of Raphael show what is called a sense of style. Now, what is style? The word is used in two senses; as when we speak of the style of Rubens, or of Rembrandt, we mean rather their manner: but when we speak of the style of the Parthenon Marbles, we mean something beyond mannerism, something that expresses as closely and completely as possible the beauty and subtlety of nature. The highest praise we can give to the finest work (such as, for instance, that splendid figure the "Ilyssus," which is perhaps the most beautiful of all the Parthenon Marbles), is only to say that it is true to nature; that it represents very truly a fine type of form. But then, it may be said that a photograph, or a cast from nature, are the finest things attainable; and if the aim of art were only to present a close copy of a stationary thing, I don't see how this can be gainsaid. However true these things may be, they seem to lack intention; and the fact of an artist

British Museum

COIN OF TERINA
(ENLARGED)

making anything, whatever his material, presupposes some intention on his part. There is something he wishes to say; some measure of action, some kind of expression; and it is in giving this, with the truest expression of form and colour, that the painter's work lies. And although faces and figures vary infinitely, they all refer in greater or less degree to the normal type; and though this is rather felt in the mind than seen by the eye (though, of course, the impression must come through the eye), it should be expressed and conveyed to the mind of those who see the artist's work.

All the complex tendencies of an artist's mind are seen in what he does, so that it is not possible to isolate, as it were, one quality from the others, and exactly define it; but one may make a rough attempt. And it seems to me that style does not depend on symmetry, nor on proportion; for we find in examining such works as the little Greek statuettes, the so-called Tanagra figures, that they are sometimes ill-proportioned, or even clumsy, yet that they have what is called the charm of style. I think that this quality

called style, rests, first, on expressive action, on structural rightness; and when we see it at its finest, on this truth of action, expressed with the closest approach to the finest type of form. And I think, too, that underlying this there must be a creative impulse of the artist; that his aim is to express something, not merely to copy.

As the quality of style depends rather on form than on colour, we may perhaps refer to ancient sculpture as showing this more clearly; and especially, I think, it may be seen in the small figures and in the coins. An illustration is given of a small coin of Terina in the British Museum, which is about half an inch in diameter; no doubt the die was cut to that size, and not reduced from a large model, as is the practice now. The enlarged illustration shows clearly the things which were thought necessary to express; that is, the main forms and their direction; everything else is ignored.

The so-called "Throne of Venus," a piece of Greek work, in the National Museum at Rome, may be instanced as a fine example of style.

It is a marble seat carved on the back and sides with figures in relief (those on the sides are given as illustrations) which are remarkable for the beautiful austerity of their drawing. Nothing is given that is not essential; the modelling is as close and true to natural form, and as subtle as possible, although it has the appearance of great simplicity. All the fine antique work should be studied; especially, I think, after some experience in the life class, when we can see the reason of the ancients' generalisations. As it is, we go through the antique room and forget it as soon as we can; but it is well worth while to return to the best antique figures, not to copy them, but to study them, as Michelangelo studied the "Belvidere" torso, from which, he said, an artist could learn everything.

It should be remembered that the Italian artists had the advantage of reference to the ancient works, and all the artists of the Renaissance should be studied; especially, I think, the early ones: Masaccio, Leonardo, Bellini, Pisanello, and Mantegna. Pisanello was one of the earliest and best; he is particularly fine in

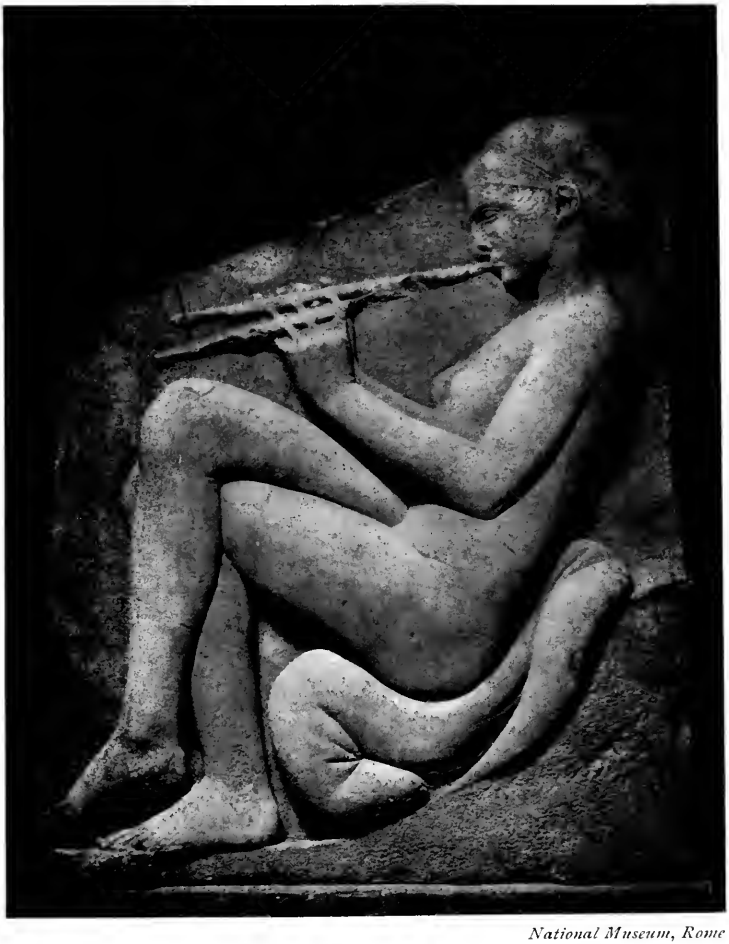
his medals, which have the same firm, true drawing, the same structural rightness and grasp of essentials, that we find in the best Greek work: and are perhaps the finest works in that kind that have been produced.

The greatest artists of the Renaissance, Michelangelo and Raphael, should of course be studied. If, for instance, it is possible to examine one of Michelangelo's figures, as it were, from the outside only, for what it shows us of his method, apart from the interest of its intention; it would seem that his aim is to give movement, to express sentiment by movement. And though it may be said that he exaggerates the action and development of his figures, I think it would be truer to say that he does not go beyond the point of necessary expression.

His work is conceived from within. The intention is that a figure shall express an emotion by its action. The action is imagined and designed, and then comes the close study of how this would be shown, which we can follow to some extent from his existing studies; and a good example is that of the Bather, a drawing

National Museum, Rome

THRONE OF VENUS (RIGHT SIDE)



National Museum, Rome

THRONE OF VENUS (LEFT SIDE)

in the British Museum, given as an illustration. It is one of the studies for the celebrated cartoon of the soldiers bathing—the so-called "Cartoon of Pisa," which was destroyed—and it shows well his close and accurate drawing, and search for appropriate muscular action; a thing which it is impossible to study in a life class, where a stationary pose must be given: for movement must be studied from movement. In his paintings in the Sistine we see the summing up of this mode of study, in figures which are not carried beyond the point of emphasis which he felt to be needful for expression. In the drawings and studies of Raphael, too, we may see the same search for movement, and the attitude that will best express it. The great masters all aimed at truth to nature; and style, the completest, the most accomplished expression of their knowledge, was the result. The aim, it would seem, must be for truth, and not consciously for style; for this seems to deaden the artist at once.

We cannot approach anything in a spirit of absolute detachment; our likings, our training,

and the taste of the time, influence us in what we admire in art, and see or seek in nature: and we naturally base ourselves on the reigning influence of the moment, without assuring ourselves, by comparison with acknowledged standards, whether we are on firm ground. It is right, of course, that an artist should be impressionable, that he should be fully appreciative of the good work of his fellows, that he should be grateful to those of them who can help him; but why stop there? He should remember that the older artists who have attained mastery can help. One should not say, "Oh, Titian is all very well," or "Raphael is very great, of course, but I'm not going in for that sort of thing!" but rather one should say, "What can these men, too, teach me?" Even if a painter is, as we mostly are, concerned with the things of the day, he should remember that the old men had to use that which was before their eyes; that the sun shone and made things beautiful, and that life went on then much as it does now: and whatever may be the direction of his talent, some one of the great artists is ready,

as it were, to take him by the hand. But it would, for instance, be a mistake for a man with a taste for genre, or still life, to embark on an imaginative subject, simply because he rightly believed it to be the highest form of art; many a capable painter has been lost that way. And one should remember that great art can be shown in the commonest and simplest things; as we may see in the work of Rembrandt, De Hooghe, Vermeer of Delft, and Jan Steen; or of Chardin, who in that splendid still-life picture in the National Gallery gives us a loaf of bread, a bottle, glass and knife, so finely seen, or rather the beauty of their appearance as expressed by light, is so finely shown, that the little picture outweighs many of far greater pretension.

Our tendency, in the search for literal, or imitative truth, is to concentrate attention on the rendering of the surfaces, textures, and accidental appearances; ignoring or neglecting the deeper truths, the underlying qualities of structure and movement: from which, in a figure, we infer the intention, or in a tree, the nature of its growth, and the influence it is

under, and so on. These qualities I think govern the other ones (or should). Of course we must begin by literal imitation; we must be as exact in our studies as we can; it is the only way to learn. But it is not possible to paint a live man if we only paint his skin. In everything that moves, that has life of any sort, from a figure, to a flower unfolding, or a tree bending in the wind, something is conveyed by that life and movement; if we do not get this we fail; however beautifully we may finish up details, the work has not the spirit of life. What we find in the greatest works, that which keeps them still living to us, is the artist's perception of nature, expressed through his material. And the greatest men see farthest. In criticising a sketch or painting, nothing is more common than to be met, on pointing out some obvious fault, with the answer—"Well, I did it from nature"; or "It was just like that in nature": and one can only say—or think—"Is that all you see in nature?"

When Reynolds, who had been trained under Hudson to paint in a literal way, came to under-

Michelangelo *British Museum*

PEN DRAWING: STUDY OF BATHER

stand the work of the great Italians, he felt, as he said, that it was necessary for him to become as a little child again, and learn anew; and he became what, for want of a better name, I suppose we may call a stylist. Now, what was the difference? We all know Reynolds's mature work; its great charms are the ease of movement of his figures, and the effective management of the lighting. I do not know any of Reynolds's earliest work, and but little of Hudson's; but we can infer Reynolds's early work from a portrait of Newton by Hudson, in Trinity College, Cambridge. It is a full-length sitting figure, in the dress of the time. The head is well painted, in a literal and rather hard manner, resembling that of Hogarth, though not so good; and it is not related in lighting to the rest of the picture, which is kept very dark, and is conventionally painted. The picture is neither frank realism nor fine convention. But we find that Reynolds, as we know him, studied the lighting of his pictures as one would compose a landscape: and he used the effects of light and shadow to express form, and to build up his picture, as

Titian did : and if there is a quality belonging to colour analogous to that of style in form, I think it should be sought in this direction. For if style, as expressed in form, depends on the essential things, the close study of structure and movement, so in colour should it not also depend on its essential qualities ? Which are the harmony and true relation of the parts, under the influence of light.

The French painter Rousseau, in one of his letters, says, " Everything springs from the universal ; whatever interest one may take by reason of religion, of manners, history, etc., in the representation of a subject, is of no value except through the understanding of the universal agency of the air—this suggestion of the infinite. Nothing can prevent a stone by the roadside, round which the air seems to play, from being a greater conception than some ambitious work that is wanting in this spirit. All the formal majesty of a portrait of Louis XIV. by Lebrun or Rigaud, will be overthrown by a tuft of grass clearly lighted by the sun ; which is only to say, in a few words, that in

art it is better to be simple-minded than clever."

The art of Millet, one of the greatest of the moderns, confirms this. His inspiration was drawn directly from the nature round about him, yet his design has the same simplicity and directness of appeal, the same quality of style, as we find in Greek and other great art. "One is never so Greek," said Millet, "as in painting naïvely one's own impressions, no matter where they were received"; and in his drawings and paintings, with their true expression of unconscious actions, we seem to get back to the simplicity of an older world. Some of his designs have the completeness, simplicity, and beauty of a Greek gem; "an artist must be moved himself if he is to move others," said Millet. And that is the secret of it all, that the artist must be true to himself; men as widely apart as Blake and Franz Hals (to take extreme instances) were alike in this. The great school of Dutch painters were strong as long as they, like the Italians, were true to their natural sources of inspiration; but how lament-

able was the failure of those Dutch artists, who thought to improve their style by adopting Italian mannerisms! Types and customs vary, but the beauty of the air, of the sunlight, and the shadow are, as Rousseau says, "of the universal"; so that things mean and sordid in themselves, like the tavern scenes of Jan Steen or Brouwer, may be so seen by the insight of the painter into great truths of nature, that they convey some vision of beauty.

Some years ago, that great artist, whose long life has just ended—Mr. Watts—was good enough to give me some advice. I was speaking of the difficulty of doing something I was trying to do, because I could not get a model to pose; and I said, "Of course one has to rely on memory." "Yes," he said, "memory is a good thing, but there's a better." I asked him what that was. "Knowledge," said he, and he took a piece of chalk and made a drawing of the bones of the knee. "There," he said, "when you really know the shape of these bones, it doesn't matter what position you draw the knee in, you'll understand it." It was a most valuable

lesson, and made things clearer to me, and I think it is worth recording; for, as Reynolds says, "An artist ought to see clearly enough to enable him to point out to others the principle on which he works." This gives point to the great difference between knowledge and skill. What we acquire in the life-class is mainly skill. What we get by the wider study of nature, and of pictures as guides or warning-posts, is knowledge; and, as we know, it is not always the most skilful student who develops into the greatest artist. Knowledge of nature should control and direct the skill; for if a painter has only acquired imitative skill, the object of his picture will naturally be to display it, and his mind is the servant of his hand; but if he has some knowledge of nature, he must feel that, however great his skill, it is as nothing compared with the beauty of nature which he wishes to express: his hand then becomes the servant of his mind.

Reynolds says that "the service of nature, when properly understood, is perfect freedom." This we may see in all the greatest artists, and

I think it is this that gives to a masterpiece one of its greatest charms ; the sense of being natural and easily done. As nature does not suggest effort, neither does the masterpiece, so that it is as true to nature in its method of execution as in its conception ; we do not feel the effort, it exists, like nature. Someone has remarked that the effect of fine painting is to make you feel that you could do it too ; and this is something of the feeling one gets before work executed with facility, such as that of Velasquez, of Rubens, or of Veronese ; it looks as easy as possible.

Methods may change, but the ideals and aims of the artist remain as they have always been, and are unaffected by time or place ; we, when our turn comes, only go over the old well-trodden ground. I came across some rules on painting[1] the other day, from a Chinese book called *The Mustard-seed Garden*, which was published in the year 1680 ; and these rules are quoted as being given by an ancient Chinese

[1] In a book entitled *A String of Chinese Peach-Stones*: W. A. Cornaby. Kelly, London, 1895.

artist of unknown date, though they might have been written yesterday. Some extracts may be of interest :—

"Excellence does not consist in multiplicity of detail, nor in bare simplicity; difficulty is not art, nor is ease: non-accordance with rules does not ensure an artistic style, and with overmuch method the result may be highly inartistic. First give rigid attention to all rules, then follow your genius and break away from them." "If you want to work without rules, first follow every rule: if to paint with ease, first take pains: if you would have a slight and simple style, first study all the multitudinous details."

Another ancient artist says, "When a picture seems to be alive with motion and breath, as though of heavenly creation, it may be called a work of genius. When the touches are something above the ordinary, and the washes are in accord with good taste, a fertility of motive controlling the whole, it may be called a work of excellence. When there is correctness of form, and a general observance of rules, the

result may be called a work of ability "—and he sums up as follows: "With the breath of the four seasons in one's breast, one will be able to create on paper. The five colours well applied enlighten the world."

II

IMAGINATION AND THE IDEAL

II

IMAGINATION AND THE IDEAL

IMAGINATION is the driving force of the artist, whether he paints the visible beauty of outward things, as did Velasquez, or the fancies of the mind, as did Blake, a man at the opposite pole of thought and temperament, whose pictures have no conscious reference to visual sensations. The painter's imagination directs whatever he does; and although the word is commonly used in the restricted sense in which we apply it to Blake, it seems to me that for a good historical picture, or even for a good portrait, some imaginative power is required: some strong intuition, some dramatic insight which dictates the point of view and controls the artist's work. It would even seem as if the possession of imagination alone, with the very poorest technical equipment, makes the

artist: not of course that it makes him a painter, but that if he has a definite thing to express he will find, somehow, the means of doing so. The work of Blake is an excellent instance of this, for in spite of his conventionalities, and from a painter's point of view, the feebleness and childishness of his execution, he conveys his meaning, and in such a way that there is even a charm in this weakness, telling of his struggle for expression: as usually happens in an artist's work, he tells more than he intends. Blake's sublimity seems to me a little stagey; his simplicity is his finest quality.

Of course his style was formed largely on that of Michelangelo, but his knowledge of the master was derived from copies or prints, the only material available, which exaggerated the muscular action. It was not until photographs of the Sistine frescoes were available for study, that we could see how fine Michelangelo really was; how true in the delicacy as well as in the force of his work.

Blake himself seems to have been quite unconscious of any technical weakness; indeed, he

thought himself better, *as a painter*, than his contemporaries. He says in his very characteristic way, referring to imagination: "he who does not imagine in stronger and better lineaments, and in stronger and better light, than his perishing mortal eye can see, does not imagine at all. The painter of this work asserts that all his imaginations appear to him infinitely more perfect, and more minutely organised, than anything seen by his mortal eye." How this contrasts with Reynolds's calm and reasonable statement, "We can no more form an idea of beauty superior to nature, than we can form an idea of a sixth sense, or any other excellence out of the limits of the human mind. We are forced to confine our conceptions, even of heaven itself, and its inhabitants, to what we see in this world."

Still, Blake was able to express his ideas; and his pictures, because of this, touch us more than any amount of capable and accomplished works dealing with imaginative themes, but lacking imagination. Blake expresses himself; his work leaves an impression on the mind, and this is

one test of vital work: for, after all, it is expression which counts in art. One may recall the well-known words of Blake, in speaking of the sunrise, "What! you will tell me that when the sun rises you see a little round golden spot like a guinea—I tell you I see all the hosts of heaven, singing Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty"; and probably if he painted a sunrise, he would feel it natural to symbolise it in that way. But if we turn to the work of Turner, who was a fine painter and a master of his materials, as well as a man of great imagination, we find that he had the same great view of nature, as a living presence, although he did not personify it as Blake did. For he was able to see and to seize the elements in nature which give the suggestion of life, and by putting them before us, he arouses in us the same feelings as nature does. In the one case there was the imaginative insight only, the emotion received from nature, but in the other there was also the artist able to analyse the grounds of this emotion, and, having great power of drawing, and knowledge of gradation and colour at his command, to express it.

The imagination of an artist is shown, I think, rather in the treatment of his subject than in his choice of the subject itself; and one may instance this by a comparison of the work of Jan Steen or Metsu, with that of Mieris. In the work of Steen or Metsu, although the common things they painted are perfectly realised, one feels that they are subordinated to the dramatic incident of their subjects (or that the dramatic incident is raised into prominence over them). Exactly how this is done it is difficult to say; it is a question of the things the mind of the artist most dwelt on, which thereby are somehow brought to our minds. In the case of Steen or Metsu it is the human interest, or the beauty of the thing as seen; we are made to feel something more than that so many items are comprised in the picture. But in the case of Mieris there is an utter lack of imagination. It is true everything is painted beautifully and minutely; one could take a lens to examine it: but he paints his hares and cabbages and carrots and things, with the eye of a marketing housewife looking for defects, and his people too, in the

same spirit. So that his work, for all its skill, is poor. It tells us nothing.

The perfect union of technical skill with great imagination is found in Michelangelo, and only in him. His work attains perfection in this balance of the finest qualities, for not only are his figures true, in their expression, to nature, but his workmanship, in its mastery and skill, is perfect; his sculpture bears comparison with that of the ancient artists. Such well-known figures as the David, the Slave, the Pieta in St. Peter's, and the beautiful bas-relief in the Diploma Gallery, are masterpieces technically, if it is possible to look at them apart from all thought of their meaning; but they were not finished so finely only to show his knowledge of anatomy, or of form, but in order to give the utmost truth of expression. His knowledge was gained that it might serve his imagination; we see in his work expressive action carried to its extreme point, but not exaggerated: and although his figures are individualised, they include more than the individual, for by fixing a characteristic action, they become

typical. His figures are not vague abstractions, made to conform to a conventional heroic or ideal type; but they show differences of build and of characterisation, as marked as we find in life, so that in spite of their being removed from us by their grandeur, they are still individual, and human in their variety. This may be seen in the frescoes in the Sistine Chapel, where the figures of the prophets and sibyls show a variety of types, as also do the fine supporting figures between them; these are so individual that one can almost recognise the different models used. It is rarely that he gives a figure at rest; he fixes the action of a moment, the most telling expression of the thought.

Can work such as this be done by rule? One can recognise the imagination of an artist—we feel Michelangelo's *mind* from looking at his works better than if he had written his ideas down; and we see that certain elements are used for expression. Yet his imitators seemed to think that by using these elements, beginning, as it were, at the other end, they would produce imaginative work; forgetting

that, though they borrowed his properties, they could not borrow his brains.

The impulse in his work is from within; the imagination directs. As Reynolds says, "There are two modes of imitating nature, one of which refers to the mind for its truth, and the other to the eye." The work of Michelangelo, and—at a distance and derived from it—that of Blake, refers to the mind. They both give expression to an imagined ideal. One cannot imagine that Michelangelo would free himself from his own strong bias, and become sufficiently detached to face nature quite frankly, like a portrait painter. His imagination governed his eyes, and he used his models only so far as they served his idea. This was not the case with Raphael, for although his work also refers to the mind for its truth, it refers, I think, more to the eye. He was more in touch with the world, more interested in his fellows. His imagination did not so much evolve things from within, as it assimilated and used things round about him. He had more observation than Michelangelo, or, it would be truer to say, a wider observation;

Raphael *Vatican*

THE MASS OF BOLSENA (RIGHT SIDE)

for no observation, no searching, could be closer and deeper than that of Michelangelo: but it was, as it were, directed always to one figure, searching it to the uttermost. He did not, like Raphael, express the relations of figures to each other in a group, or the different play of one character with another, which is one of Raphael's greater qualities; the one in which, perhaps, he excels all other artists except Rembrandt.

Raphael's figures come so naturally and beautifully into their places, and one often thinks of their beautiful grouping; while with Michelangelo, one thinks always of one or another single figure: he was a solitary man and a dreamer, disliking even the presence of his assistants. Raphael lived surrounded by his friends and pupils, he was interested in the world; and it seems to me that his painting is at its best when he painted individuals, and not abstractions. Some of his finest work, that certainly which we are most able to appreciate, is in portraiture; and if one may presume to say so, there seems, in the Vatican frescoes,

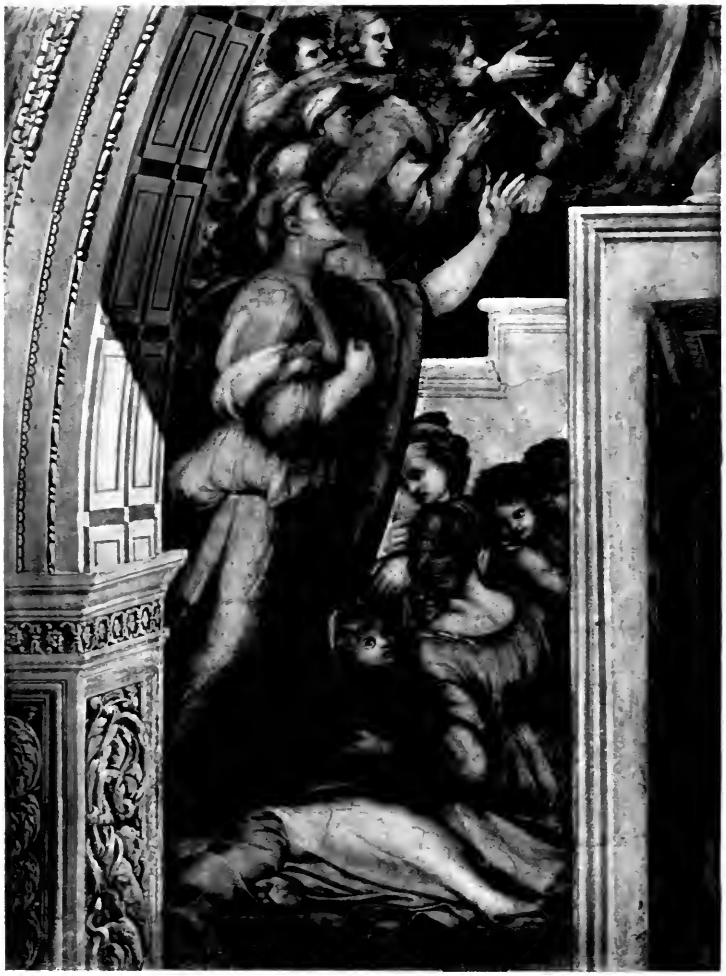
where his fine qualities of construction, characterisation, and drawing are seen to perfection, to be more enjoyment *in the work*, when he is painting actual people. The "certain idea" which, as he said, the painter must have in his mind, did not control him altogether, as it did Michelangelo; and it is interesting to notice in some of the splendid frescoes in the Vatican, the difference between the beautifully drawn and firmly characterised figures on the one side, all evidently portraits, and the conventional "Raphaelesque" figures on the other. This is particularly noticeable in the "Heliodorus," and in the "Mass of Bolsena"; the side groups of the latter fresco show a marked difference in character; one group we feel to be real and the other unreal, and the strength and variety of the realistic figures emphasises the sameness in the types of the ideal figures: a sameness we do not find in Michelangelo. With all their appropriateness of action, they do not give us the same conviction as do the ideal figures of Michelangelo; we even see in them the germ of that insipidity which marked his

followers and imitators. And it is perhaps the recollection of so much conventionality founded on the external qualities of Raphael, that blinds us to the real greatness of his work. He had a wider range and a more sympathetic imagination than any other artist; he was able to gather from everything he saw, its typical character; so that, to every subject he painted, he gave its most characteristic expression, and fixed standards which still remain, for grouping and composition. The group of Heliodorus could not be attempted again without reference to Raphael, nor could a Madonna, or any subject which he treated.

The great genius that this shows has come now to be taken for granted: it does not astonish us. His work seems to have come about so easily, so naturally, and it has been so long with us, that we take it as a matter of course, as we do the sky or the sunshine. It is not until we begin to think it all out, that all this had to be created; not until we think of the artist facing the great blank walls do we realise how stupendous was his work. And if we pass

from the consideration of isolated figures and groups—no one ever grouped figures so finely—to the design of such pictures as the "School of Athens," or the "Heliodorus," and consider the placing of the figures and the design of the background; if we study how these works are arranged and controlled, and how natural and easy it all seems, we must feel his true greatness, and that his work belongs to the eternal things of art.

We must remember, however, that Raphael's work was a continuation and development of the earlier art; the methods, and to some extent the groupings employed, were those already in use. But I think we may be sure that the new things he won were reached through the study of nature, by direct observation, not only of people, but of lighting in nature; for the arrangement of the light, and the fine aerial quality of colour in the "School of Athens" could only come that way, and the knowledge how to light effectively a large number of figures can only have been gained by first-hand observation. This broad and simple lighting, which is one of the great charms of Italian work,



Raphael *Vatican*

THE MASS OF BOLSENA (LEFT SIDE)

must have been dictated by the necessity of filling large spaces ; for, as this requires a distant point of view to be taken, the picture has to be seen broadly ; but what is wonderful, especially in Raphael's work, is that with all this there is no sacrifice of necessary detail, and at close quarters one can see that the figures are minutely finished, and are hatched, like a drawing.

This form of art developed naturally in the Italian Renaissance ; it does not develop naturally with us. Our life is too complicated, and its conditions are opposed to it ; we cannot get the same opportunities for observation, and a painter who essays imaginative work in this manner now has nothing to lead him up to it ; he cannot refer to nature, with older work to guide him, but only, a long way back, to the older work.

It is sometimes said, indeed, that there is no scope for imaginative art nowadays ; but this is not so, for imagination does not depend on externals. If it exists, it will express itself freely through the materials at hand ; and although the art of the great Italians cannot be re-created,

imaginative art is still possible, though its direction may be different. Rousseau, the French landscape painter, said, "It is asked that art should abandon retrospective history: that it should confine itself to actuality and repudiate the past. This is evidently a healthy and fruitful idea, but the artist is essentially sensitive, he is not master of his emotion, he paints best that which moves him most. Go and tell Delacroix to burn Shakespere, destroy Goethe, Dante, and all who have inspired him; tell Gericault to forget the Iliad, Proudhon to give up Longus and the great figures of Greek antiquity, Ingres to be false to Raphael. . . . The artist has a right to his professional education; we can teach him to see well, to construct well: but to feel, to be touched, is a matter which concerns him and his temperament alone. He must have the most perfect liberty of expression and of development." This seems to me true and wise. If we consider another great imaginative artist, Rembrandt, whose imagination, like that of Raphael, was nourished by his surroundings, we find that he, like Raphael, painted

Scriptural subjects. Raphael used the handsome types of his fine race for models, Rembrandt used very ordinary Dutchmen. Each had the power of imagining and re-creating a scene, and it is curious to notice the difference in the nature of their appeal to us. Raphael's appeals by its beauty, its general appropriateness and rightness; so that, apart from the charm of his figures, we feel that even if the events did not happen as he has depicted them, they ought to have happened so: we accept his version as worthy of its subject. But the first impression of Rembrandt, with his ugly and very ordinary persons, is that these events cannot possibly have happened in this way; we have an idea that it was nobler, more dignified, and so on. But we find, when we get to know Rembrandt, that he brushes all these ideas of dignity aside, for it did not occur to him that the men and women of Scriptural times could be different from those of his own: and his pictures convince us because he goes straight to the heart of his subjects, re-creating a scene with all its emotion and expression, and giving it a sense of reality

that raises it far above the conventional view impressed on our minds by the familiar traditional renderings. It is presented so truly that it too becomes typical. All his amazing skill, his knowledge of light, expression, colour, and movement, is used in the service of his imagination, to bring the scene home to us. In such a masterpiece as the "Hundred Guilder" plate, how splendid is the grouping, and how fine the sentiment expressed through the arrangement of the light, with the line of sick people coming forward out of the shadow; and all the expressions and incidents truly imagined, and something more than that; for he has expressed all the possibilities of the scene so truly that his picture is typical; the subject has been done once for all. And we find this living force of his imagination present throughout his work. There is something more in his portraits than the cold stare of the eye, there is the power of reaching to and showing us the person within; he makes his portraits speak to us. His imaginative power, though perhaps not so wide in its range as Raphael's, is deeper; his work compels one's

interest and sympathy, and leaves as profound an impression on the mind as even that of Michelangelo.

Rembrandt may be said to have fixed the type of Dutch art, as Raphael did of Italian: and his influence is still the guiding one in the living Dutch school to-day: while in Italy, whatever influence reigns now among its painters, it is not that of Raphael, or their other great masters. Theirs is an art of the past. No one was great enough to succeed the great Italians; there was nothing left but to follow at a distance; and these in turn had their followers, and the fresh reference to nature dropped out of men's minds. It is a curious comparison, that of Raphael dying at the height of his fame and the life of his school with him; and Rembrandt dying obscure and discredited, and his influence growing greater with time, and inspiring a school. Both drew their inspiration from without; one aiming at an ideal perfection of form, the other absolutely blind to it, accepting and using whatever came to hand. One can hardly compare them, or say which was the higher aim or

the greater achievement, but if we take a great man's work as a legacy to his successors, it would seem that Rembrandt's was the more fruitful; and perhaps this is because the impulse towards realising an abstract beauty is confined to few, while the desire to express people and things as they are will be felt by many; and that Rembrandt is still a living influence because he comes nearer to us, and is, as it were, everybody's friend, while men of kindred spirit with the great souls of the past are rare, and their road is difficult to tread.

There can be no doubt that Mr. Watts was one of these rare spirits. It is not my place to make, nor am I capable of making, a just estimate of his great gifts, but I may touch on some points in his work, which is as remarkable for its great range as for its high aim. In the first place, we may see that he had a thorough command of his means; he was a born painter, and had a natural gift of expression. His early pictures show this; such a work as the "Wounded Heron" is painted with an ease and accomplishment equal to that of the best Dutch still-life

painters. Indeed, it reminds one in many ways of the early Velasquez in the National Gallery, though it is not quite so stern. In the presence of Mr. Watts's early work we feel that he knew his business, and that in whatever direction his nature had led him, he would have shown himself a master: we are (as Millet said of Rousseau) "struck by the fact that a power is a power from its very beginning." . . . "You were," Millet said to Rousseau, "from the beginning the little oak which was destined to become the great oak." We may see in Watts's early work hints of the influences of the time, of Lawrence, of Etty, and perhaps of Turner; but he soon finds himself, and in the splendid series of his portraits and pictures, but especially, it seems to me, in the portraits, we see how thorough was his knowledge of form, how true was his draughtsmanship, and how fine his colour-sense. His heads are finely constructed and modelled, and true in character; nothing is slurred over, nothing essential is sacrificed. And they are remarkable among portraits in another way: that everything is subordinated

to the expression of character, to the extent even that his method of work varies according to the character of his sitter, so that there is a kind of childlike, unconscious obedience of the hand to the mind. If we notice the difference in method between the portraits of Walter Crane and of Lord Roberts, and some of his ladies' or children's portraits, we see something of his range. His colour is fine and true, with no forcing for effect; the relation of flesh to linen—to the whites, as well as to the darks of his picture—is so beautifully kept, that his colour seems to have a wider range than that of the ordinary palette. This is due to his fine sense of gradation, and also to his fine sense of quality of colour; for though, as we know, it is not possible to get a greater range than from white to black, yet a greater variety in this range is produced by varying the kind of colour (that is to say, by using in some places solid, in others transparent colours) than is possible if all the tints are mixed and painted solidly. The transparent colour, although it may be taken down to the full strength of a shadow, yet has a brilliancy from the lighter

ground beneath, which keeps it nearer to the light; and Mr. Watts's method in this is like that of the great Venetians, and his colour has the same range and fulness.

It seems to me that Mr. Watts's work divides roughly into three stages: the first is the search for truth and accuracy, the portrait stage; the second, for the expression of ideal beauty, as we see in the "Daphne" and others of that time, which are splendid examples of the way an ideal subject should be rendered. It is not enough for us to pose a model and paint a figure, and call it Venus, or Juno, or what not, and then to think we have painted an ideal picture. The idea should be the starting point, and should control both the design and its treatment, and Mr. Watts's ideal figures are splendid in this respect. They do not suggest the model in the studio, but rather that he was inspired by the finest Greek work, and tried to work in its spirit. The finest of the antique painting must have been very like his work of this time, and the illustration given, from a fresco at Pompeii, cannot fail to remind us of his work,

and to show how thoroughly he entered into the antique spirit.

Mr. Watts's third stage was the expression of his imagination; of his own feelings. He seems to have felt that it was not enough to record things, that it was not enough to give æsthetic pleasure, but that the object of his work should be, in his own words, "to suggest, in the language of art, modern thought in things ethical and spiritual"; he was not content to embody old myths in fresh forms, but has given fresh forms to ideas and problems which touch us now. The question is often raised, whether in endeavouring to give pictorial form to abstract ideas, he was not giving up the finest qualities of the painter, such as we see in his portraits and earlier works; which come from his more immediate touch with life. It may be so. For my own part, these works appeal to me more, but I do not propose to discuss it here; and indeed I do not think it really worth discussing: we must take a man's life work as expressing his nature and his convictions. This development came naturally to him, and whether by

Museum, Pompeii

ULYSSES AND PENELOPE

(WALL-PAINTING FROM POMPEII)

reason of it our loss is greater than our gain, there can be no question of the nobility of his aim, nor of the greatness of his achievement; for such works as the "Hope," "Love and Death," "Opportunity," and many others which will occur to us, have, like great poems, passed into our thought, and become part of our inheritance.

A criticism is sometimes made of Mr. Watts's work, especially of his colour, that though it is no doubt very beautiful, and fine in effect, it is all borrowed from the Venetians, and that we should not go back for our inspiration, but endeavour to create for ourselves as they did. How far is this true? If the only merits of Mr. Watts's work were that it recalls the fine qualities of the Venetians, and if his admirers were content to copy these qualities from him, and so on, we can foresee that deterioration would result; and there would be a reason to protest, and to appeal for a fresh start. But Mr. Watts's fine qualities are his own; his sympathy with the Venetians rests on his understanding of their use of colour as well as form,

as a means of expression, and expression was what he sought. He learnt from the Venetians that colour speaks to us, that the mood of a picture depends on the tone of its colour. For example, a picture may be all painted in golden tones, and so far, we may say, be untrue to the actual look of things; but within this golden envelope all the true relations of parts may exist, the general colour giving the key or setting the mood of the picture. This is what Rembrandt did; and I think we all, in our small ways, try to use colour in this way. But it is only when a man knows all the possibilities of colour that he can do this well, and that he becomes, like Mr. Watts, a master, having the whole scale at his command. I am convinced that we cannot get this knowledge if we only study in the cold north light of a studio, or even if we supplement this by study of the masters; but that we must go back to the old source, and study the whole wide range of light and colour in nature. Mr. Watts, like all great figure painters, was also a landscape painter, and some of his landscapes, such as "The dove that

returned not," are as fine things as have been done; and it was, I feel sure, through the study of landscape, not the study of little "bits," but of the great controlling things, the sun and the sky, in their relation to the earth and to people, that he was able to find out the reasons for the fine colour of the Venetians, and how to use it for himself.

In looking at a picture, the mind refers to more than is before the eye, to our consciousness of things outside the picture. There may be no sky in the picture, but our recollection of the balance between sky and earth will be felt by us; and it seems to me in all Mr. Watts's pictures, whether it is actually expressed in the work or not, that the blue of the sky is the determining point of the scale, in his mind: so that there is, as it were, reflected back from his pictures—it may be only in a vague suggestion—a sense of harmony with the great elementary things of nature, by subtle indications of their correspondences with his figures. In some of his pictures, too, the alternations of light and shadow on the figures rouses the same feeling that we

get in nature in noticing the play of light and shadow over a wide country, and perhaps indirectly recalls it. I do not pretend to know, it is an obscure and difficult thing to trace; but something of this is, I fancy, at the bottom of the sense of the life, and harmony with nature, that we feel before his finest work.

Every development of his art seems to have come naturally through his own mind, not, or hardly at all, from others' ideas; for he kept apart from schools, and was throughout true to himself and his ideals.

III

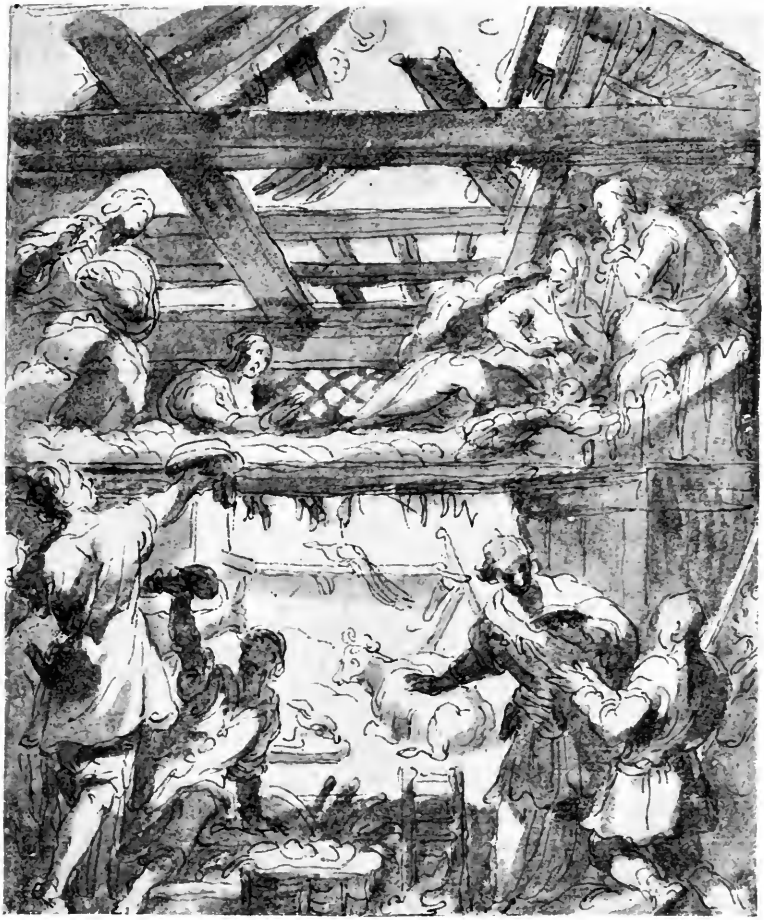
INVENTION

III

INVENTION

"THE invention of a painter," says Reynolds, "consists not in inventing his subject, but in a capacity of forming in his imagination the subject, in a manner best accommodated to his Art." . . . "It includes not only the composition, or the putting the whole together, and the disposition of every individual part, but likewise the management of the background, the effect of light and shadow, and the attitude of every figure or animal that is introduced or makes part of the work." And he goes on to say that "composition, which is the principal part of the invention of a painter, is by far the greatest difficulty he has to encounter. Every man that can paint at all can execute individual parts; but to keep these parts in due subordination as relative to a whole, re-

quires a comprehensive view of the art that more strongly implies genius than perhaps any quality whatever." This is perfectly true, and most admirably expressed. We must all have had some such feeling, on looking at a fine picture which we know to be far beyond anything we can do ourselves ; such as, for instance, Veronese's "Vision of St. Helena," which is very simple in design. And if we examine each part, although we may feel ourselves capable of painting any one detail as well as it is done in the original, we could no more paint the picture, that is, design it as an original work, than we could fly ; and we do not realise until, in spite of our skill, we have made numberless failures, that we have neither seen nor understood the mechanism of the picture : the means by which its fine effect is produced. We can appreciate the action and intention of a picture, but so can the person who is altogether ignorant of painting ; and we can, in addition, appreciate the fine painting of its parts : but we do not know enough to understand its invention, how its elements are put together so that it looks so well.



Tintoret — *In the author's possession*

STUDY FOR COMPOSITION

(PEN AND WASH DRAWING)

The qualities in a picture which appeal to the artist are not the same ones which appeal to the general public. The "man in the street" can feel the sentiment of Sebastian del Piombo's "Raising of Lazarus," or Rubens's "Descent from the Cross," or the truth of Velasquez's portrait of Philip, or of the pictures of de Hooghe; he can understand a story, but he cannot appreciate, and would probably be quite blind to, the qualities which make these works great. A bad copy, if the expression were preserved, would satisfy him; he could appreciate, for instance, the point of a drawing by Charles Keene or Phil May, but he would, I fancy, be equally pleased with a bad drawing, if it expressed the intention.

And as pictures are painted, not only for the pleasure of the artist, but that they should be found worth looking at by all sorts of people, it would seem that truth of action and expression is the first quality to be sought in a picture. It must be so arranged that this is evident, for it is on this that the picture makes its appeal. Millet said, "I wish first of all to make my

figures express the actions they are engaged in: people and things should always be there with an object."

Leonardo dwells on this very strongly, and is never tired of urging the artist to observe. He says, "When you are instructed in perspective and know how to draw the forms of bodies, it should be your delight to observe and consider the different actions of men, when they are talking and quarrelling; when they laugh and when they fight. Be quick in sketching these with slight strokes in your pocketbook, which should always be about you. When it is full take another, for these are not things to be rubbed out, but kept with the greatest care; because forms and motions of bodies are so infinitely various, that the memory is not able to retain them. Therefore preserve these sketches as your assistants and masters." He goes on, "The painter must observe on the spot, take sketches, and not wait till he wants such expression, and then have it counterfeited for him; for instance, getting a model to weep when there is no cause: an expression without

a cause will be neither quick nor natural. And a figure which does not express by its position the sentiments and passions by which we suppose it animated, will appear to indicate that its muscles are not obedient to its will, and the painter very deficient in judgment." One more quotation, which is a kind of summing up: "The painter ought always to form in his mind a kind of system of reasoning, or discussion within himself, on any remarkable object before him. He should stop, take notes, and form some rule upon it, considering the place, the circumstances, the lights and shadows."

Well, this is all only excellent common sense. If a man sets out to paint a picture, he can't even make a good commencement unless he has some fund of collected observations to start from. We know that the great painters worked in this way, and it is well worth while for us to study their drawings and preparatory work; we can learn as much from them as from their pictures, perhaps even more, because one can see the steps that were taken. And in some cases, as in the studies of Raphael, one can see

the various actions which were tried for his figures, before the final and most expressive one was reached. For it is helpful for us to see that works which seem to be perfect, and to have come together naturally and without effort, were worried over and altered, just as we do with our own works. It makes us feel that we are a little nearer to the great men when we know that they also had their difficulties. And then, these drawings are in themselves so well worthy of study. I may give, by way of illustration, four drawings, all dealing with the same subject, the Adoration of the Shepherds; one is by Tintoret, one by Marcola Veronese, one by Bassano, and one by Abraham Bloemart; and it is very interesting to notice the different ways in which the subject is arranged. Two of them are arranged as upright panels; and Tintoret's drawing shows the stable arranged in two storeys, with the Holy Family above, and a fine group of shepherds below, beautifully arranged against an open central mass of light outside. This suggestion of the grouping must, I think, have been derived from some actual

Giambattista Marcola Veronese *In the author's possession*

STUDY FOR COMPOSITION

(PEN AND WASH DRAWING)

Bassano *In the author's possession*

STUDY FOR COMPOSITION

(PEN AND WASH DRAWING)

place which he had seen; and one point of the design is that the greatest prominence is given to the figures of the shepherds.

In the sketch by Veronese there is an ingenious arrangement of a flight of steps leading through an archway. The group of the Holy Family is posed on the steps, and so is raised up, but the figure of Joseph, and an ox at the back, are in the shadow of the arch, making a dark framework which allows the light to be focussed on the Virgin and Child. This effect of shadow from the arch is one which must have been observed in nature, and it is utilised very cleverly. It is evident, I think, that the need of filling an upright panel has determined the composition in both these cases. In the design by Bassano, which is, I think, the finest expression of the subject, it is interesting to note that the Child is made literally the centre of interest, by the figures on either side bending towards Him; the lines of the stooping backs all form parts of circles, of which the Child is the centre: and we may note that this design depends on line and movement, rather than on lighting.

These sketches are done with remarkable clearness and freedom, showing that at the earliest stage the artist had a definite idea in his mind; and they are natural in action and gesture. The Italian is more demonstrative than the northern races, and his actions are naturally more expressive; and it may be worth while, by way of emphasising the fact that we render best those things with which we are familiar, to compare with these another drawing of the same subject by a Fleming, Abraham Bloemart, who gave to his figures poses and "graces" which he borrowed from Raphael and Michelangelo. His design is able and well arranged, but every one of its figures is exaggerated, and affected in pose: one sees at once that it is all mannerism; indeed, the whole design seems to be arranged for the sake of the poses. How poor this kind of work is, compared either with the Italians who are imitated, or with the Dutch painters who were true to their native inspiration! For when we look at Rembrandt's fine picture of the same subject, in the National Gallery, we are struck by its truth to

nature. In this there are no fine poses, but the subject is felt; "an artist must be moved himself, if he is to move others," as Millet said.

When we are concerned with landscape, or with figures associated with landscape, invention is, I think, a much simpler affair than when one is designing a subject, because one does as a rule see one's subject first in nature; the thing is before our eyes, and it is because we find a particular effect beautiful that we want to paint it; so that we have rather to select than to invent. We must be quick to notice what it is that impresses us; what are the elements of the picture: we must make up our minds about the quantity and position of the lights and darks; make a note of them, and, as far as possible, keep to it. Some of the finest drawings of Claude and of Rembrandt show this simple and beautiful noting of effect; the drawing illustrated is of a most commonplace scene, made beautiful by the arrangement of the sunlight and shadow over it: by the placing of the lights and darks.

It seems to me that the principal thing a

picture depends on, for its general truth at any rate, is knowledge of the effect of light and shade, in enhancing or modifying colour; and I doubt if it is possible to get this except by studying the full range of light and colour, as we find it in outdoor nature: taking the landscape painter's point of view, that light is the governing thing. In looking back to the early work, we see that the possibility of rendering the beauty of natural effect was only recognised gradually, and that at first all figures had the same relief and the same prominence; then perspective was discovered, and little by little we can trace the steps: Masaccio, Leonardo, Raphael, each gaining something, until we come to the great central figures, Titian, Rembrandt, and Velasquez, whose knowledge of light and colour sums up, it would seem, all that can be known. The development of painting has been a gradual progress towards the knowledge of light, and how things are revealed by it; and it is not too much to say that every great figure painter has been a landscape painter also, or at any rate has studied landscape. One may instance, since

A. Bloemert *In the author's possession*

STUDY FOR COMPOSITION

(PEN AND WASH DRAWING)

Rembrandt *In the author's possession*

LANDSCAPE STUDY

(PEN AND WASH)

the time of Titian and Giorgione, who were the fathers of landscape painting, Rubens, Velasquez, Rembrandt, Vermeer of Delft, Vandyke, Gainsborough, Reynolds, and in our own time Sir John Millais, Whistler, and Watts.

This necessary knowledge of the effects of light cannot be gained if we confine ourselves, in studying landscape, to the minute observation we employ when painting things in detail, for we can't sit down to it; we must cultivate the habit of making quick comparisons, and of estimating the relative force with which things are presented to us; looking at figures and groups, sky, houses and trees all at once, and with a kind of governing observation over the whole field of sight, noting and remarking light and shade, colour and gradation. The method may be as summary as we please, the roughest notes with the colours and gradations written down and numbered; any method, so that something remains in the mind. Then we can begin to get our observations into some sort of system, and build up a little reserve of knowledge, which we can confirm and establish by

our study of pictures. It is only developing a faculty we already possess ; for, as you know, we can all criticise a painting to some extent, and pronounce on its degree of truth : through the recollections of nature which are latent in our minds, but are not cultivated sufficiently to enable us consciously to use them for ourselves, constructively, as Turner and other great artists did.

This building up of a picture by its effect is, as it were, the material part of the painter's problem, and the direction of study can be indicated ; but the governing design and action must first have been imagined, and for a picture it must be imagined in light and shade. For a design that is fine in line and arrangement only, may be contradicted or neutralised by the arrangement of its colour ; or, on the other hand, a picture which is effective as a colour scheme may be poor when reduced to its elements of line. One cannot, I think, give any directions for design ; things may be pointed out, as that absolute symmetry or repetition in figures is not pleasing (this is probably because the mind

recognises that no two people think or act alike), or that equal spaces are not pleasant to the eye, or that a principal object should not be exactly in the centre, and so on: but one learns these things from the study of pictures. One method, for instance, of calling attention to the central point of a picture, may be seen in the drawing of Bassano's, where lines, like parts of concentric circles, surround the central point; another method is by lines converging to the centre of interest, as may be seen in the sketch by Tintoret, and in Mr. Watts's picture of "Cain" in the Diploma Gallery, where the arms of the angels all point down to the figure of Cain. And one may frequently trace these two sets of lines combined, in a picture; so that it is—roughly speaking—like a spider's web, as in Claude's picture of the embarkation of the Queen of Sheba. But these things are, it seems to me, done instinctively, rather than consciously; and no rules can be given for designing figures, for the picture must arise in the artist's mind, and is dependent on his temperament, on what has moved or interested him. We may point

out that such a work was composed on the principle of the pyramid, another on that of the circle, and so on; but, as Reynolds says, "Rules are made from pictures, not pictures from rules. . . . They should be subject to us, and not we to them." And if the painter knows, or can imagine, the true action of his figures, as Raphael, or Rembrandt, or Millet did; if he can see his picture in his mind, and enter into the emotion and spirit of it, the lines will come right of themselves, or they will be on the way to. One may go through the splendid series of pictures painted by Mr. Watts, but no rules can furnish us with the secret of their fine composition; there is no limit to the variety of his inventions, and yet they are all his: one can only say that this was how he imagined such an idea, that he felt it should be expressed in such a way. One can say no more of Michelangelo, of Rembrandt, or of Raphael.

We should study Raphael more than, I am afraid, we do, for his invention and grouping; he was, I think, greater than any other, except Rembrandt, in these things: not, of course,

Masaccio *Church of the Carmine, Florence*

THE MIRACLE OF THE FISH

that we should copy his gestures or groups, but we should study them. He had an unequalled power of realising his subject in its essentials, and expressing the action of each individual figure in it, in itself and in its relation to the other figures of his group. And his action is always natural, and, because natural, beautiful. It is difficult, out of the immense mass of his works, to choose any one, but one of his familiar works, the cartoon of "Christ's Charge to Peter," may serve for an example. The idea of his composition is probably derived, to some extent, from Masaccio's fresco of "Christ commanding Peter to take the money from the mouth of the fish." The proportion of the figures to the background is the same, the heads are all on a level, and the feet at irregular levels, as the spectator would see them, standing; and there is in each a landscape background with hills. The Apostles are grouped around the figure of Christ, but the grouping in Masaccio's picture is casual; most of the figures seem there by chance, and not to be related to the incident. The incident itself is not clearly told, nor are

the principal figures given prominence: but the drawing of the figures is fine.

Now, if we turn to Raphael's work, we see the great advance he made. The same natural and true point of view is taken, and there is the same relation of figures to landscape; but the main incident is given prominence by detaching the two principal figures. Then the Apostles, instead of standing about vaguely, are shown to be interested in the incident; there is variety of expression and variety of gesture throughout the group. This gesture is progressive, and from the quiet figures at the end, is gradually intensified, until it reaches the central incident of the picture; so that in this group we have, first a little group, then figures detaching, and finally the figure of Peter: the figure of Christ stands alone. Now all this gives a fine effect, but why was it done? It is hardly a sufficient answer to say that it "comes better" that way than in Masaccio's. Was it not done because Raphael realised that this variety of action was true to human nature? We all know that although a group of people do

Raphael. *Victoria and Albert Museum*

CHRIST'S CHARGE TO PETER

keep together as a whole, the more active and the more eager ones come away from the others; and so, not only has Raphael given to each figure his natural and appropriate gesture, but he has given the group *as a whole* the behaviour of a group; so that the group becomes typical. A composition has been found which is natural and inevitable; it is done once for all, and cannot be done better.

The truth sought in his inventions was, as in his figures, a general truth; to the type, rather than to the individual; such a picture, for instance, as that of "Michael overthrowing Satan" settles for ever the arrangement of that subject. It is told of the late M. Fantin, the French painter, that he was when a young man going through the Louvre with Millet, who drew his attention to this picture; but Fantin did not like it, and gave his reasons. "Yes," said Millet, "but look, what a terrible fall!" And when we think of the great mass of his work, and that one man, in a short lifetime, advanced the boundaries of his art in so many directions, to a point which has not been surpassed, we

cannot wonder at succeeding artists trying to follow him; and least of all at their failure: for how can one continue a perfection already attained?

It is worth while considering in this connection, in the light of the more complete historical knowledge of painting which we now possess, whether Reynolds's advice on generalisation has proved to be altogether sound. He says truly that "the mind is distracted in a variety of accidents, for so they ought to be called, rather than forms, and the disagreement of these among themselves will be a perpetual source of confusion and meanness until, by generalising his ideas, the painter has acquired the only true criterion of judgment." This is quite true; but then he goes on to say, "It is better that he should come to diversify on particulars from the large and broad idea of things, than vainly attempt to ascend from particulars to the great general idea: for to generalise from the endless and vicious variety of *actual* forms is perhaps more than any one mind can accomplish: but when the other and, I think, better course is

pursued, the artist may avail himself of the united powers of his predecessors. He sets out with an ample inheritance, and avails himself of the selection of ages."

Well, we all do this in a sense, but I think history shows that those who set out in that way, trying to avail themselves of the selection of ages, have set out with a larger burden than they could carry. The scientific student can, I suppose, and does, avail himself of the united powers of his predecessors; they are fully at his command: but every artist has to begin his climb at the bottom of the tree, and get up as far as he can. The powers of his predecessors are not at his command until he proves himself equal with them. The history of art gives us a distinct warning in this respect, in the sterility which has always attended the deliberate adoption of the grand, or any other style. What we rightly learn from the masters is to do as they did; to study nature. In this spirit they can help us; and I think we should try and allow ourselves to be influenced by nature, somewhat in the spirit of Constable, who said, "When I

am before nature, I try to forget that I have ever seen a picture." Of course we cannot forget the good things we have seen ; but what is meant, I think, is that we should feel, when before nature, that all pictures give but echoes of its power and beauty.

The greatest service the old painters can do is to steady our judgment ; for we are peculiarly liable to be led away by following whatever fad happens to be in vogue at the moment. This may be a consequence of exhibitions, which lead men to emulation in those qualities most appreciated by painters ; and so far as this leads artists to make their work as perfect as they can, it is commendable : but it leads also to the cultivation of virtuosity for its own sake, and as an end, which is surely a mistake. For painting is a means of expression, not in itself an end. I know that the plea of " art for art's sake " is made in justification, and that it is truly said that painting should not attempt to express things which can be better expressed in literature ; but the object of a painter need not necessarily be a story. The expression of

character, or the beauty and significance of movement, or the effects of light and atmosphere, and the emotions they raise ; any of the endless ways in which the beauty in nature may be expressed may surely be taken as the artist's aim. If " art for art's sake " mean for truth's sake, or for beauty's sake ; to express nature as well, and with as good workmanship as one can, one cannot have a better motto : but if it mean that the object of painting is simply to get, or display, fine technical qualities, then I think it is altogether the wrong way about, like putting the cart before the horse. Mr. Whistler did not paint his nocturnes for the sake of getting a beautiful quality of blue paint, but to express, as he once told me, the beauty and mystery of the night ; and all work that lives does so because it interprets or reveals some beauty in nature. The French painter Gerome once told a pupil that " painting for the sake of painting was like speaking for the sake of talking : to paint well," said he, " one must have something to say."

The danger of virtuosity is its tendency to

degenerate into cleverness and triviality, but nature does not impress us as being trivial; and as the larger part of a student's training is necessarily imitative work, it is, I fear, too often taken for granted that this, which is, after all, a kind of still-life painting, is the beginning and end of the whole matter. This is apparent, it seems to me, in all exhibitions, and it is at the root of the great difference between modern work and the old; whose aim was rather to represent than to imitate nature. The best of modern work, it is true, joins on harmoniously with the best of the old; the great French school of the middle of last century takes its place naturally with the great schools of the past, and the artists who made it were occupied with expression, with the spirit and not the letter of their art; with the simple and direct appeal to the natural feeling and emotion, rather than with details which, however interesting they may be as matters of technique, are of less consequence. It seems to me that this point can be seen very clearly if we compare Denner with Rembrandt or Reynolds. Denner's

work is most wonderful as imitative workmanship. Everything in it is painted as minutely as possible, and at close quarters, but the effect of the picture as a whole is weak; because its elements, instead of being adjusted to each other, with each detail presented in its proper degree, as portions of a harmonious whole, are disintegrated, so that, although we have every item, we have not the picture; for our attention is so compelled to every item, to every detail, as to give us almost a feeling of intrusion. There is certainly a triumph of imitation, but of how little account it all is, when compared with the easy and natural representation of Rembrandt or Reynolds, which we recognise at once as true. One could not avoid a similar comparison between the portraits of Sandys and of Watts in a recent exhibition. Watts's portraits are composed, one element in its relation to another; and this is the true view of nature, which imitative painting, for all its skill, misses: for a general impression of truth is not produced by adding together all the little truths, but by generalising.

The artist must have an idea in his mind which he wishes to convey ; he must depend on facts, but he must control them according to his intention. Rousseau has some remarks on composition which are of interest. He says, " I understand by composition that which is in us, entering as much as possible into the exterior reality of things. If it were not so, the mason with his rule could very quickly compose a picture representing the sea. It would be enough to draw a line at any height across his canvas. Now, what composes the sea, if it is not the soul of the artist ? There is composition when the objects represented are not there for themselves, but for the sake of including under natural appearances the echoes which they have in our souls."

IV

TASTE

IV

TASTE

A PICTURE begins its life when it leaves the painter's hand. He has made something that, with reasonable care, will last for centuries; in the hope that it will give pleasure, that someone will possess and cherish it, and will always like to look on it. He has expressed whatever insight into nature has been given him; he has made his work conform to his standard of taste. And it goes out into the world to live or die, to have people continually finding pleasure in it, recognising its beauty, and being led through it to a greater appreciation of nature's beauty; or else tiring of it, like a child with a toy. Or it may come back to him, and he may turn it to the wall, and never wish to look at it again. But we must remember that a picture cannot take its place definitely

in a few years; if contemporary judgment is in the main right, there are, as we all know, many instances where it has been mistaken. The immediate success or failure of a work need not count as an indication of its merit, for it is only when a picture has attained a respectable age—say from ten to twenty years—that its place, whatever it may be, is assured.

So, to arrive at a standard of taste, we must go back to the older painters; and as there are many schools and many methods, there can be no one fixed standard for all, though all are alike, in that they must refer for their merit to the degree of truth with which they interpret some aspect of nature in paint.

But there are things which, however well and truly painted, do not attract. A work may be very well painted, but its subject may be repulsive, and this we agree to call bad taste; or its subject may be unexceptionable, and yet it may be painted in a tasteless way: and so our taste is shown, not only in what we paint, but in the way we paint it.

It seems to me that taste in a picture is some-

thing like natural good manners in man: not depending on the elements—the clothes—of the picture, but on the temperament it displays, and the measure of its harmony with our acknowledged standards; for a man's picture reveals his outlook on the world, and is in that sense a part of him. If we choose a person for a friend, we like him, let us say, to be simple and natural, reliable and without swagger. Whether he is rich or poor, grave or gay, does not matter so long as we can depend on him. And it seems to me that a picture, to be in good taste, must have analogous qualities—that it should, like our ideal friend, be in accord with the best standards; it should be in harmony with the best we know.

But we should not assume that the particular direction in which we are led is the only direction, the one that everyone else should follow; for the differences of the various schools show us that there is not one fixed, undeviating standard, though some standards are higher than others: but that each quality in a picture has its own standard, and that these are all equally founded

on some truth to, or agreement with, nature. And we recognise some works as the greatest, because in them we see that their qualities are, as it were, adjusted in the same proportionate balance as in nature.

By recognising that each response to nature has its own standard, we may get to know our own limitations, and so get on to a working basis; each of us trying to make his work more perfect in its own way. For it is absurd to suppose that we should all try for the same ideals; as much so as to expect conformity in opinion on other matters.

The works of Phidias, of Michelangelo, of Raphael and of Velasquez, of Titian and of Rembrandt, take by common agreement the highest places; they are our standards. But there is a harmony in all the best work—an accord with the possibilities of nature. We agree that people in a picture should live, that their form should be well expressed, that they should be natural in their actions, and in their proper environment; that the influences of the light and air, and the colour in accordance

with this, should also be properly expressed. And on these simple and reasonable conditions it seems to me that we may take Raphael, Velasquez, Titian and Rembrandt, Claude and Constable, each in a particular quality, as giving a standard. Both Phidias and Michelangelo are so great, so unapproachable, we cannot measure ourselves against them in any way: they are above comparison. But, leaving them aside, one cannot presume to make comparisons between giants, each greatest in his own way. Raphael had, it seems to me, the greatest genius as an inventor; in this respect he had no limits. Consider the naturalness and variety of his groupings, and how his figures are all related to each other. The things he wishes to bring into prominence are there, just as they should be: his invention is so natural, that we recognise it no more in his pictures than we do in a grouping of actual people. We take his observation as a matter of course; but when we try, ourselves, to put even two or three figures together, we find how difficult it is, and how poorly our minds are furnished. And then what a mag-

nificent artist he was, how great the skill with which he carried through his long series of works; it would seem that our difficulties of drawing, expression, and command of colour did not exist for him: and since his time, nearly four hundred years ago, we cannot refer to any work of the kind worthy to be named with his.

But Raphael's work, though it is true to human nature, refers for the most part to conditions that are past, as do the Greek statues; like them, it is removed from us by racial and social conditions as well as by time. Yet, like the art of the Greeks, it is living, and should be studied in the same spirit as we study the Greek work.

We cannot revive a style which arose naturally from conditions that are past: but Mr. Watts's career shows that the most modern mind, when in sympathy with the finest work, can re-create its spirit, and he is an ideal example of the use which the old art can be to us, as a guiding influence.

If we take Raphael's work as a standard for composition and for ideal generalisation, we must take that of Velasquez as the standard for

painting actual things. It does not seem possible to surpass his work in its dispassionate and inclusive truth. In such a work as the later portrait of Philip, everything is given as truly as in life, and the only reference seems to be directly to nature, and not to other painters; and one may imagine that Velasquez really did, "when before nature, forget that he had ever seen a picture"; as Constable says he tried to do. Is it altogether owing to the difference between the Italian and Spanish temperament—or is it not rather because of their finer and more subtle art—that the pictures of Velasquez are nearer to us? They are more "modern" than those of Raphael (comparing the portraits of each), and while the resemblance to nature is so great, the art is so concealed, that it hardly occurs to us there can be any art in it. What a fine judgment was that of Reynolds on Velasquez; "What we are all trying to do with great labour, he does at once."

We do not feel like this before Titian, or before Rembrandt: we feel the beauty of the picture, but the art is evident, and the point of view has

to be felt, and accepted. It is a *parti-pris*; an element of expression in nature, developed and dwelt on to the utmost, and in the case of both artists, perhaps, appealing more to the emotion than to the reason. In Titian's work we are moved by the harmony of colour in light, and in that of Rembrandt by the mystery of light and shadow. Titian gives us a standard for colour, and all that it may be made to convey or suggest to us, and Rembrandt gives the expressive significance of light and shadow. We may take these four painters, Raphael, Velasquez, Titian, and Rembrandt, as each giving a standard of truth.

Now, what is taste? Reynolds says, "We apply the term taste to that act of the mind by which we like, or dislike, whatever be the subject. Our judgment upon an airy nothing, a fancy which has no foundation, is called by the same name which we give to our determination concerning those truths which refer to the general and most unalterable principles of human nature: to the works which are only produced by the greatest efforts of the understanding," and he

goes on to say that "the natural appetite or taste of the human mind is for Truth." If this is sound sense, and I think we must agree that it is, then taste must be dependent on some standard of truth.

But it does not follow, as we know, that the true representation of everything and anything is in good taste. Things which are horrible or repugnant to our feelings cannot be. They go against our nature, and the significance of a picture should not lie in anything which is repugnant to our senses. It may be said, "Such things exist, and why not paint them?" And, as we know, some painters are particularly fond of horrors — decapitations, hospital scenes, etc. —and they paint them well and truthfully. I don't mean to say that we should only paint what are called "pleasing" pictures; but still one may take the idea of truth, in connection with taste, to imply not only true representation, but that the thing represented should be in accord with the general instincts of human nature; so that things tending to cruelty would be, in that sense, untrue to nature. The work

of Rembrandt raises this question; the interest and charm of his lighting is so great, that it governs the objects he paints: but with all the magic of his colouring, his pictures are sometimes repellent. His picture of the "Butcher's Shop," for instance, is wonderfully painted, with magnificent warm whites, and reds, and browns—a most perfect study; but in spite of the great beauty of its paint, can it be said to be in good taste? As painting it is splendid, but in a thing that is always to be looked at, there should be surely some selection of the elements that give pleasure, and not pain. Rembrandt seems never to have felt this; his keen interest and frank acceptance of everything led him at times to paint things which must make us feel that a thing may be true to life, and yet not be in good taste: and while he convinces us that truth of expression is of greater moment in a work than personal beauty or fine proportion, he does not convince us that any matter is equally acceptable; though he holds our admiration always by the beauty of his vision, even while we dislike his choice. And

Teniers, Steen, and Brouwer, in their tavern scenes, touch us in the same way, though not so strongly; for they are not so terribly in earnest as Rembrandt: there is a touch of comedy in their work, and the human side is interesting. If we could imagine ourselves going with Brouwer into one of the squalid taverns he paints, we should no doubt want to get out again quickly. But Brouwer would say, "Oh, don't mind those fellows; they're just enjoying themselves in their own way; they're always like that. But look how beautifully the light shines on them—look at that red coat against the rich shadow—at those men quarrelling!" And so, as we see in the pictures of these painters, a second interest is created or aroused, depending on the greater things—on simplicity of action, on lighting, colour, or atmosphere—and it is this which charms us; and for the sake of the fine rendering of these qualities, we forgive or tolerate, or even like, the mean subjects of their choice. It is the truth or beauty of the lighting and colour, the painter's qualities, which keep such things on the right side of the

boundary. The same subjects, painted inartistically, without taste, would have no right to exist.

There could be no greater contrast than between the pictures of Steen and Brouwer and those of Watteau. In the one case almost every element in the scene is mean and poor and ugly in itself; in the other, every beautiful thing has been carefully chosen and combined. Beautiful women, young men and children in fine dresses; trees, fountains, statues, the suggestion of music—everything that can please is there: so that in thinking of taste in painting, one instinctively thinks of Watteau. Every jarring note is carefully kept out. Yet the effect of the picture, its charm to the painter, does not, it seems to me, depend on all these beautiful things, but rather, as in the work of the vulgar Dutchman, on the way he has lighted and treated them. The jewel-like quality of his colour is expressed through his realisation of shadow in relation to it, and the beauty of his pictures depends largely on this, and on the way they are put together. For if

we compare his work with that of his imitators and followers, although they used the same properties and materials—we see the same elements in their pictures, the same dresses and backgrounds—how poor and artificial they are after Watteau. So that harmony of colour and true lighting, as an element of truth to nature, is an element of taste.

But it may be said, surely the effect is forced in Watteau; one does not, in daylight or sunlight, see these strong darks? Yes, this is true, but it is impossible to get strong colour to tell, as a light, unless it is contrasted with, or supported by, dark colour, as the Venetians did; and if by darkening the shadows, the painter can get the effect of the sparkling lights, he is justified in sacrificing the truth of the general colour for the sake of giving, by a particular relation of the parts to the whole, a concentration on certain things. For by this concentration our mind is directed to the principal things, as it would be by our own interest in them, if we were looking at the scene. Watteau does what he wants to do. He makes us share his

interest or enjoyment in certain things. Yet if we were painting figures under trees in sunlight, we ought not deliberately to imitate this convention; we ought, I feel sure, always to approach nature frankly: but if we wanted to concentrate on a particular passage as Watteau did, we should have to do so by a similar means.

I have tried to express by these comparisons that taste is not quite the same thing as fashion in art; that it depends on the principles on which a work is done, being in accord with a right understanding of nature, much more than on the properties the painter uses to compose his pictures; although these may be great and valuable elements of interest in it. The important thing is the use the painter makes of them; how far he can bring his means of expression into accord with his perceptions of beauty.

We all have some ideal towards which we work, and it is well not to be too easily satisfied with ourselves. We should make a point of comparing our work, not only with that of our contemporaries, but with what we know to be the best. It is so easy now to get photographs

of first-rate pictures ; and we should get some of our favourites, or a good copy of something we like, and put them up in our rooms with something of our own beside them that we are rather proud of, and see which we get tired of first, and find out why. We should not only enjoy looking at a good thing, but dig into it ; try and take it to pieces, and see how it is made. And I think we shall generally find that it is a matter of selection or suppression that makes the fine picture better than our own ; in our desire to give everything we equalise the interest. It is a good thing, too, to take up something of one's own work that has been done long enough to be forgotten, which we can criticise as dispassionately as if it were by someone else, and search out its faults, with one's ideal in one's mind.

But we cannot work without coming under the influence of the " taste of the time "—we are in the current, and part of it. And this taste varies from year to year, is governed by no standard, and affects us unconsciously; so that we sometimes are shocked on finding an old

work of our own to be full of affectations, of which we were quite unconscious while painting it: and it is, I think, a good thing if we are. Only the very strongest men are unaffected by this influence; and they, while they are doing work that will set the taste or fashion to a later generation, are sometimes out of the taste of their own time. No doubt Hogarth was considered to be in bad taste by the formal painters of his time, and Chardin must have been quite out of the current of his day. We know, too, that Millet's work was for a long time thought to be in bad taste, and that Corot was (I think) over fifty years of age before he sold a picture; yet these men are all accepted now, and one wonders that any difficulty should ever have been made in accepting them. This is not so much due, I think, to dislike of novelty in itself, as to a kind of resentment felt at work which implies that the current ideals may be wrong. Painting has a way of getting into ruts or grooves, and we don't like being asked to reconsider our ideas. Sir George Beaumont, a very conventional landscape painter, who asked Constable,

"Where do you put your brown tree?" was no doubt shocked when Constable told him that he painted trees green.

The public taste must rest on the standards maintained by painters; it cannot form a standard. Indeed, it is questionable whether, in a broad sense, there is such a thing as public taste. There are a comparatively small number of people, not painters, who really understand and love fine painting; a large number with every wish to, who are very willing to learn; and beyond that, I fancy, the great majority of people don't trouble themselves one way or the other. They have other things to do and think of, and the questions which agitate artists are of absolutely no interest to them.

The conditions under which we work, too, are very different from those prevailing in early times, when the painter was as necessary as the carpenter or shoemaker. A picture would be ordered for some purpose — for a house or a church—and the painter would do his work as well as he could and send it home, and there would be an end of it. And later on, when

pictures became articles of commerce, the painter worked for the merchant and for the private patron, as he does now. But the painters had, and maintained, their standards of good work. This was before the days of large exhibitions, though exhibitions are, in a sense, as old as the hills; for Apelles used to exhibit his works to the public, and, as we know, Velasquez, when he went to Rome to paint the Pope, first painted the portrait of his servant, Juan de Pareja, to get his hand in. "And when this was taken, with other good paintings, to adorn the cloisters of the Pantheon on the feast of St. Joseph, as was at that time customary, it met with such universal approbation that, on the unanimous opinion of the painters of various nationalities, all else seemed painting, this alone truth" (*Justi*). So that things were then much as now, and the artist depended on exhibition (though not so much as he does now) for recognition by his fellows.

But every virtue has its attendant vice; and the development of our large exhibitions, in which pictures bid not only for artistic,

but also for public approval, has brought about a change. There being so powerful an inducement to a painter to please or attract attention, pictures are painted for the purpose ; and as he who shouts loudest is best heard in a crowd, the element of sensationalism comes in, so that, as we sometimes see, pictures — even of horrors—are painted, with apparently no other object or purpose than to draw a crowd. And we may often hear it said of a picture, that it makes a good exhibition picture, but one would not like to live with it ; or that a work is very popular, though it is not well painted.

Another result of exhibitions is that the painter is tempted to attract attention by forcing the picture into prominence by means of strong colour or violent contrasts, so that one may see pictures with pure white at one end of the scale and pure black at the other, playing on every colour of the palette at once ; out of all truth to the modesty and harmony of nature, and so out of taste : and this is called " painting up to exhibition pitch." I am sure we can all recall feeling, in exhibitions, the restfulness and

naturalness of a fine harmonious picture, such as one by Watts or Whistler, among others which are forced out of harmony for the sake of, as it is called, "telling strongly." We should always remember that harmony is the true strength of a picture.

Now it seems to me that this aim—to force a picture into prominence—is beside the mark for an artist. Those of us who are engaged in painting know how subtle an art it is, and how much there is to be learnt; and we find that it is only as we get on in life that we are able even to understand the beauties of the greatest works; but those who don't study painting, don't understand these qualities at all. It is difficult to go beyond generalities, but I will try and make a little point clear. Painters know that the great difficulty of their art lies in getting a picture together, rather than in the actual painting even of its principal parts; and one of the greatest beauties in fine work—we may take the portaits of Vandyke, Gainsborough, or Reynolds as instances—is the way the background is used to "make the picture";

light being placed in one place and dark in another so beautifully, that it all seems natural and without artifice. But painters only find out these things after much time and study; and those who know nothing of painting will probably not even see the background, or recognise the means by which, say, a number of figures are grouped together, or an effect of atmosphere rendered in landscape. It is indeed doubtful if people who have never given a thought to these matters are conscious, in actual life, that figures are relieved against backgrounds; or even that there is light and shadow on faces or other objects: they have never considered the appearances of things, or their relations one to another. But they will of course know all about facts, how a person is dressed, etc., and they prefer pictures which give these things as definitely as possible. And if the painter should be led by the comparative ease with which such an acceptable standard of work can be reached, to rest content with it, it is a pity. For we have good standards set for us, and should respect them and try to maintain them,

so that in time good painting should be better understood. We have only ourselves to blame, and should not blame the public taste, if in our desire to attract attention we depart from what we know to be good standards.

It is often said, and always felt by painters, that we haven't the same chance nowadays as the old men had; our civilisation makes things so much uglier, we can't take things as they are. There is some truth in this, but I don't think we need worry too much about it, since people have always looked back to the past and thought their own times prosaic and inartistic. Reynolds considered that the dress of his time was unsuitable for representations either in painting or sculpture "for the sake of dignity," "because the familiarity of modern dress is alone sufficient to destroy all dignity." But yet he painted Nelly O'Brien, and is said to have pronounced Velasquez's portrait of the Pope the finest picture in Rome! We now find the dresses of his period delightfully picturesque, and we no longer have the same ideas of the beauty of a "dignity" borrowed from the

Greeks and Romans, which prevailed in his time ; an idea that they were always, as it were, measuring their proportions or adjusting their togas. We know now that the ancient art was not only devoted to gods and goddesses, but that it was also very human and playful. Study it and you will see this. Some of the paintings from Herculaneum and Pompei are as fresh and spirited as the work of Delacroix or Rubens.

We should make the best of our times ; though it is, I fear, undeniable that our complex civilisation does not make for beauty, and does not give us such opportunities for its expression as do simpler social conditions. Painters, as we know, have always shown a preference for painting simple people, because their actions and gestures are natural and expressive. And though the city man who goes to his office in the morning by the "tube" is quite as worthy a person as the average ploughman—probably more so—yet a picture of the ploughman going to his work pleases us, and we recognise that there is a beauty in it ; while one of the city man going to his office would strike us as commonplace,

tasteless, unnecessary, and depressing. This is doubtless because the mind naturally refers to the beauty of the great elementary things—the sky, the sunshine, and the hills, rivers, fields, and trees; and in people to those things which suggest beauty, activity, and health. We all have a longing for the perfect things.

After all, light seems to me the governing thing, as far as the painter is concerned; it redeems anything that is capable of redemption. There is a story told of Reynolds, that when someone came to sit to him in a very ugly hat, "Never mind," said he, "there's light and shade on it"; and, after all, if it is in us to do good work, a masterpiece is as possible now as ever it was.

But there will always be some men who, like Mr. Watts, seek to express and bring home to us perfections beyond those which their immediate surroundings afford. Mr. Watts accepted what was beautiful in his own time, but it was not enough to satisfy him; and we may fitly take him as being an instance of Reynolds's saying, that the natural taste or appetite of man is for

truth : for his works refer, and he refers us, back to the great elementary truths. I think all painters must feel this, especially in his fine imaginative work, where things and persons whom we know to be unreal are presented with a degree of reality which is exactly proportioned to the expression desired, yet in no way suggesting literal imitation. In fine taste, as in his other great qualities, he was, I think, the greatest artist of his time. And we should take courage from his example, when we see that even in our matter-of-fact times ideals are not disregarded either by the artist or by those to whom he appeals.

V

DRAWING

Albert Dürer *British Museum*

STUDY OF ARMS AND HANDS

(PEN DRAWING)

V

DRAWING

DRAWING is an obvious convention, for we do not see lines round or upon objects, but one tint adjusted against another. Yet it comes more naturally to us to represent things by this convention of lines than by tones and gradations, such as a photograph from nature gives us. Primitive people naturally express things by outlines, and are satisfied with the idea of the object so conveyed; and in early days, before there were, as we may suppose, any theories or schools, expression by drawing, in outlines or in flat masses, was evidently held to be sufficient. It was only slowly and gradually that drawing advanced from a mere symbol, to the stage of imitation or representation, in light and shadow, of the appearance of things.

Drawing is a form of expression, like speech or writing—I think, indeed, that drawing is the foundation of our alphabet—and although painting has long passed its primitive stages, and aims at imitating the effect of nature, yet the object of painting and its kindred arts is still the same as it was at the beginning; expression. And if our art is to be vital, it must, whatever be its method, have expression as its object; there must be something the artist has to say.

If we consider drawing as an art of expression, it gives us, I think, the key to other forms of art, such as those of the Orientals; which we cannot easily grasp, because we do not, as it were, know the language. And the earliest Western art—such, for instance, as that shown in the Celtic manuscripts—is for the same reason strange to us, though it was, no doubt, natural and perfectly intelligible at the time. And we may notice, in passing, how the rudest and most summary representation of an object or figure will even now satisfy ignorant people or children, whose perceptions in these matters seem to be

in the same stage as those of primitive races: they do not require more than a few signs by which to identify an object. Drawing makes the most direct appeal to our intelligence, and whatever idea an artist wishes to convey can be conveyed by line, so that it is the foundation of an artist's study. It is difficult, of course, to draw well; and so high a standard has been set that it is impossible to excel what has already been done: we should study the work of the great men, in order that we may, if possible, approach to this high standard.

We can, I think, roughly classify drawing into two divisions, which correspond to a very rough and loose distinction which may be drawn between old and modern painting; the older paintings and drawings being marked by the search for form, and for expression by form: and the later by the development of "effect," that is, of the influence of light and colour on form. We know the finished paintings of the great artists fairly well, but their drawings help us to understand them by showing the first steps, and, one may say, the scaffold-

ing by means of which their work was built up.

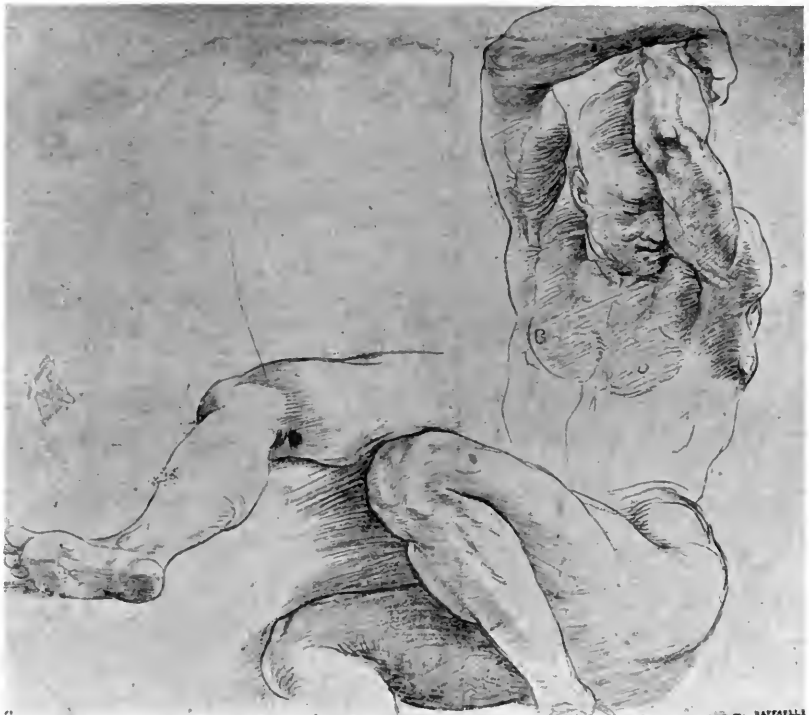
We may touch on the drawings of some of the early artists which show the study for form, and on some by artists of our own day whose work has been influenced by them; all figure studies. It should be noticed, however, that there is a difference between these studies and the studies which students make in schools. These were made with an intention, for a purpose; and not, as school studies are made, only for the sake of the study itself. As we all know, there is no better method of teaching drawing than through the study of the figure; and study in schools has everywhere replaced the older system, of pupils working in a master's studio. Yet it is very doubtful whether, with all the advantages a student has nowadays (for I don't suppose any of the old masters had five years' continuous practice in drawing and painting, without a thought except how to express what was before him), the system of schools gives as good a training as the old system, of pupils working under a master for a definite purpose.

The work of the older artists, even those not of the first rank, is remarkable for its satisfactory accomplishment, for going straight to the point; while our work seems more or less tentative: and I think it probable that one reason for this weakness is that we depend too much on the posed model. The effort to merely imitate the model, acquired in the school, may become a lifelong habit, obscuring or excluding the intelligent study of form as shown in natural movement; through the mistaken point of view that the school-work is an end, whereas it is only a means to an end.

Very few of the earliest painters' drawings exist or are known, but the work of Masaccio may be referred to for its fine drawing, and also the work of Pisanello, whose beautiful drawing can be seen best in his medals; of Piero della Francesca, and of Crivelli. There is also in the British Museum a wonderful sketch-book by Jacopo Bellini, of the year 1430, which should be studied; it is full of designs for compositions, and drawings from life, of the greatest charm and delicacy, with, of course, the angularities

which are characteristic of early work. In this angularity the Italians resemble the Flemings; though, as might be expected, the Italian work is finer in type and in proportion than the Flemish work, in which the effort was to be strictly true to nature, regardless of its imperfections and awkwardnesses. There is a drawing by Van Eyck in the Antwerp Museum—strictly speaking, it is an unfinished picture—of St. Barbara. The whole subject is carefully drawn in, and only the sky and part of the distant landscape is painted, but everything is drawn throughout with the most beautiful precision and delicacy. The work of Peter Breughel, too, is very fine in drawing, in the same definite manner.

The greatest draughtsman of the primitive painters was perhaps Dürer, and everything of his that can be seen is worth studying for its unsurpassable thoroughness and fineness. We see in his work the search for accurate definition of form carried to its furthest point, with great simplicity of method. The illustration, a drawing of hands and arms, a study for the plate of Adam and Eve, is a good example of the thoroughness



Raphael *British Museum*

STUDY FROM LIFE
(CHALK DRAWING)

Ingres — *Musée de Montauban*

(By permission of M. J. E. Buloz, Paris

STUDY OF DRAPERY

of his work; yet though it is so fine it has a distinct manner: we can tell that it is a German drawing. This German manner, though present in the work of Holbein, is not so marked as in Dürer. It is, indeed, absent from the matchless portrait drawings of his in the Royal collection at Windsor; these drawings are above mannerism, and must be as true to nature as it is possible to be. In looking at them we are reminded only of nature, not of any other artist; and this is only the case with the greatest work.

If we consider what is the difference between the Flemish or German and the Italian manner, it is, I think, that the Northern artists relied on observation only, while the Italians were able to reinforce their observation by some standard of form and proportion. And while there is a wider observation of character and freer invention in the Northern work, there is a finer judgment in the Italian, a greater sense of beauty. And if we go further, and inquire why a figure having certain proportions is perfect and beautiful, while one having different proportions is not, we get into speculations on the

nature of beauty, on what it rests or depends, which are difficult, and perhaps insoluble. We must take it for granted that certain proportions, arrived at long ago by the Greeks, give the most perfect human type. We cannot tell why the proportions of a Doric or Ionic column are beautiful. We know that they satisfy us, and that we could not improve on them; but we do not know how many efforts, how many trials were made before this perfect form was reached.

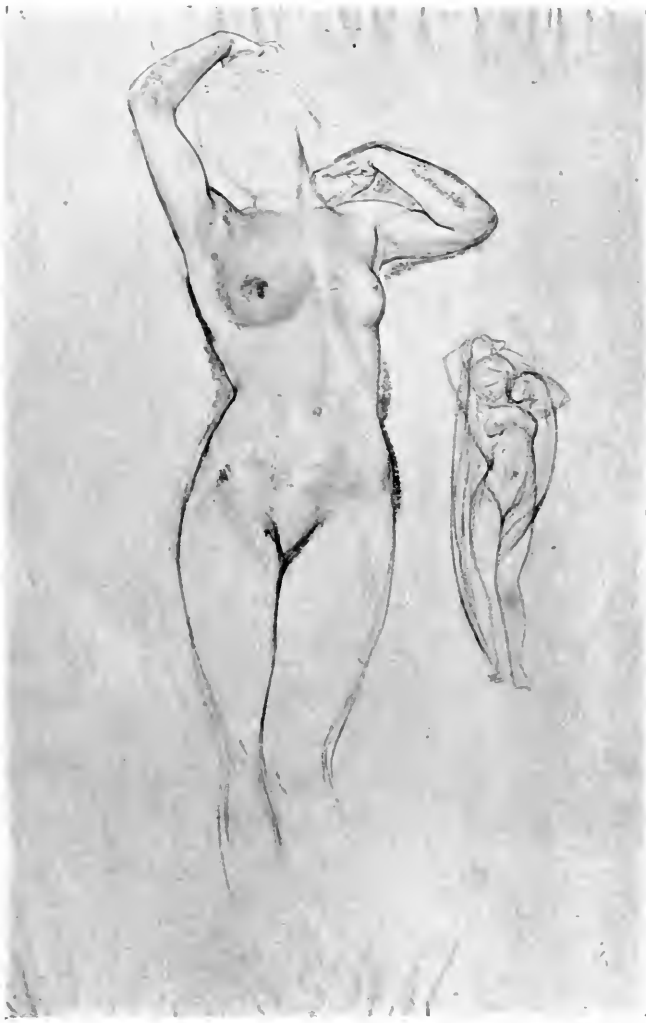
The pre-Raphaelite painters took their inspiration from the Flemish and Italian Primitives, and the fine school of illustrators, in which Walker, Houghton, Sandys, and Pinwell were the leading men, owes its impulse to the pre-Raphaelites; more especially, perhaps, to Millais and Rossetti, whose drawings are well worth study.

Leonardo da Vinci was one of the greatest draughtsmen, and one gains a truer idea of his power from his drawings than from his paintings. He was the first who thoroughly broke away from the stiffness and "posed" look of the

earlier artists, and gave the freedom of natural movement. We may see from his anatomical studies what immense pains and trouble he took to get a thorough knowledge of form and construction, searching for its finest type and for true movement, and putting down his line—a most beautiful line—with the greatest precision and delicacy. Yet there is a certain restraint in his drawing which we do not find in the drawing of Raphael, which is true, and, at the same time, free and unrestrained. In the drawing by Raphael given as an illustration (the original is in the British Museum), it may be seen how everything is beautifully given with the simplest means, so that one feels it to be altogether right. We need not touch on the followers of Raphael, but we should study Ingres, one of the greatest draughtsmen who followed his ideals, whose drawings are excellent examples of style; and the drawings of Lord Leighton, which are worthy to rank with those of Ingres as carrying on the Academic tradition.

The main point about these drawings is that they are drawn from construction—that is,

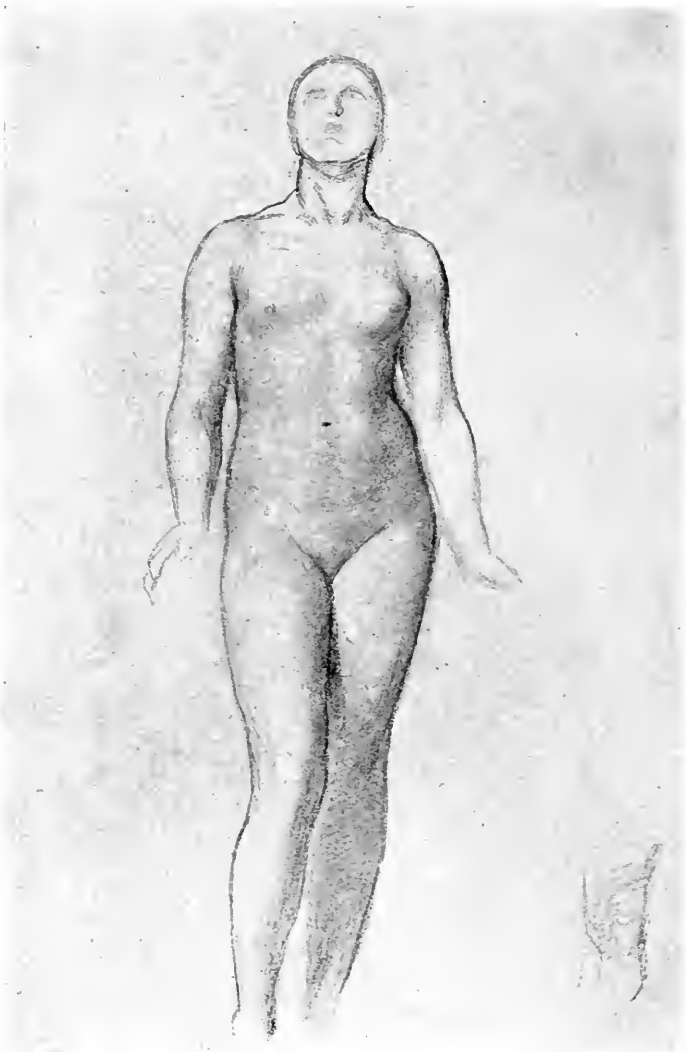
from an intelligent understanding of how a figure is put together; not from unthinkingly copying the model just as he happens to be at the moment, as is so often done in life schools. Of course, in drawing from a model, one has to copy him, but it should be borne in mind that one gains most, not by imitating the model, but by trying to learn from him; so that, when our student days are over, and we may have, perhaps, but a short time to make a drawing from life, or may even have to draw from memory, we can bring some store of knowledge to bear on our work; otherwise we are helpless, unless we can get long sittings. Raphael's drawing cannot have taken him more than half an hour, but there is everything in it; and Michelangelo's drawings also show this swift application of great knowledge. I do not think we could have a better method of drawing from life than that of Raphael and Michelangelo, and one may instance Alfred Stevens, Millet, and Watts as showing the influence of this fine tradition. One may trace Michelangelo throughout Stevens's work. Millet, though he was not



Lord Leighton, P.R.A. *Royal Academy*

STUDY FROM LIFE

(CHALK DRAWING)



G. F. Watts, R.A. *Royal Academy*

STUDY FROM LIFE

(CHALK DRAWING)

a follower in the strict sense, as Stevens was, was inspired by him in seeking the significance and expressiveness of movement; and so was Watts, whose drawings have the quiet, unquestionable authority of a great master, in every line.

The drawings of these artists have one thing in common, although their methods differ, and that is: expression through definition of the form, and not through light and shade or effect. One is often asked in the life school, when recommending a student to think only of the form in drawing, whether, since form is only manifested by means of gradations, one should not try to express the gradations and so give the form. If it were possible for the student to do this there would be no objection; but it is difficult to learn the form alone, and when form is complicated with questions of gradation and tone, not only on the figure itself, but on its background and surroundings (for all these must be studied if the relation of tones is attempted), it becomes impossible. Therefore it is best frankly to adopt the convention of out-

line, to forget the background, and to think only of modelling by light and shadow, and so to express the form.

The search for form, through true construction, is the firm basis of an artist's work. We should in our student days get ourselves as firmly grounded in form as we can. We should strive for this knowledge, even if our taste may lead us towards expression through colour, and we eventually give form the second place. For an artist can never, I feel sure, develop his gifts as a colourist unless he has this firm groundwork. In support of this, I may cite a most interesting letter from Whistler, whose genius as a colourist is unquestioned, which was recently[1] published in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*. It was written to his friend Fantin, the painter, in 1867, and puts the case for severe draughtsmanship admirably. It is well worth reading in its entirety, but one may quote a few passages. He begins by saying that he is working very hard: "For I must tell you that I am now much more exacting and hard to please than when I threw

[1] *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, September 1905.

everything pell-mell on the canvas, knowing that instinct and good colour would always pull me through. . . . Ah, my dear Fantin, what an education I am giving myself! or rather, what a terrible lack of education I feel! With my own natural gifts, what a painter I should be now, if, vain, and content with these qualities, I had not despised everything else!" Then he goes on to regret coming under the influence of Courbet and realism: "This damned Realism," he says, "made immediate appeal to my painter's vanity, mocking at all traditions, and crying aloud with the assurance of ignorance, 'Vive la nature!' This cry has been a great misfortune for me." "One had only to open one's eyes and paint what was before one." And he instances his pictures, the "Piano," the "White Girl," the Thames and sea pictures, accusing himself of vanity in showing splendid gifts, which, with a severe education, would have made him a master. He goes on to say, "Why was I not a pupil of Ingres?" not, he explains, that he likes Ingres's work, but he says, "How healthy his influence would have been!" "Drawing, above all," he

says. "Colour alone is vice, though certainly it may be, and should be, one of the greatest virtues. Well controlled by a strong hand, well guided by her master, drawing, colour is then like a splendid woman with a husband worthy of her." He concludes by saying that he has been educating himself in this direction for a long time, and feels sure that he will conquer his faults.

I think he was hardly just to himself. Probably the letter was written in a fit of depression, for certainly the pictures he names are beautiful in drawing as well as in colour. Yet the letter is a true "cry from the heart."

One may ask, Should we take any one manner as an example? I think not; although, no doubt, the finest style of drawing is that of which we may take Ingres's and Watts's work as examples, following the traditions of the great Italians: and we should try to get the accuracy, the largeness, and simplicity that these drawings show. I don't think one could take up any of the earlier methods without making it a kind of pose. The work of the early men gives us the lesson that

we should be faithful to nature; the greatest men show the greatest truth to nature, and are certainly the best to study. Though when we go through a gallery we don't estimate each work according as it approaches or falls short of the grand style. We take it for what it is; and, in looking at a number of pictures, we make the acquaintance, as it were, of so many different temperaments, holding each in a certain esteem.

It is largely a question of temperament, and even of individual eyesight. One man will feel that he can only express nature by patiently and exhaustively representing everything, like Van Eyck; while another will feel large masses and movements to be more important. The whole range of art is now part of our common knowledge; yet each one of us, in a way, must begin at the beginning, and in himself, in his own small way, go through all the stages that the art has gone through; beginning carefully, even hardly, and gradually and naturally arriving at as much freedom as he can attain to.

VI

DRAWING

J. F. Millet — *British Museum*

STUDY OF FIGURE

(CHALK DRAWING

VI

DRAWING

DRAWING may be considered not only as realising and expressing actual form, but also as recording the appearance of things under varying conditions of light; this is the "modern" point of view. In the early work, every figure or accessory was studied rather for itself than as a part of the whole; in modern work, each figure or object takes its place in the scale of light, shade, or colour, in which the picture is arranged. This wider range includes landscape painting, and the association of figures with landscape under its varying conditions; it shows not so much a deeper insight as a wider sympathy with nature, for it would be impossible to surpass the depth of sentiment or feeling which we find in the early artists' works.

In speaking of the modern point of view, I

would take Titian as its starting-point; and I think that Claude, Rembrandt, Gainsborough, and Watteau may be given as artists whose work shows this tendency, of drawing for effect, rather than for form; though perhaps Watteau shows a balance of both tendencies, and is hardly so definite an example as is Claude or Rembrandt. In the drawing by Titian, given as an illustration, it is remarkable how much is conveyed by very simple means—the air, and movement of the sky, are suggested; and in Gainsborough's drawings there is also this suggestion of life and movement, conveyed—as in the illustration given—with a very charming, if mannered, touch, by the arrangement of light and shadow.

Watteau in his drawings shows the influence of Rubens, and though the Fleming is robust and natural in his movements, and the Frenchman delicate, and perhaps a little affected—Millet criticised his figures as marionettes—yet each conveys the sense of life and action. In Watteau's drawings this is given by the most delicate, and yet precise, indications; his touch is so beautiful, so sensitive and fine, that his

drawings are most delightful things for an artist to study; and we may notice, in the illustrations given, how daintily and finely the movement of the figures is given, and how well the dresses, and the design of their folds, are suggested.

Claude's drawings are of the greatest interest and beauty; in them he shows himself to be even greater, as an artist, than we know him to be through his paintings. We all know the special beauties of his work: his wonderful skill in expressing light, by his perception of delicate gradations extending through a wide range, and the clearness and freshness of his tints. He gives, with every appearance of truth, the illusion of the sun shining in the clear sky, or the receding planes of a wide prospect, all full of air; and it is done so finely that his work has never been surpassed. But with this, there is a methodical planning and "staging" in many of his pictures; they are too obviously composed: and they are animated by a conventional and quite uninteresting set of personages. But these weak points are overpowered and redeemed by the greatness of his artist's

vision ; and it is with the pleasure of a surprise that one finds, on going through Claude's drawings in the British Museum—there are over three hundred in the National collection, most of them studies from, or for, his compositions—quite a large number of fresh and most beautiful studies from nature, of trees, buildings, and views, all most carefully drawn and individualised, and studied for effect. They are nearly all in bistre, done with pen and wash ; and are evidently made direct from nature, with a simple enjoyment in what was before him. These drawings are much more attractive, to me, than the elaborate compositions which we know so well, which were no doubt painted to meet the taste of the time ; for it must be remembered that pure landscape as in itself a motive for a picture was at that time hardly conceivable ; landscape was used as the setting of a formal scene, and the landscape painter had, in a sense, to express himself indirectly.

The spirit of these sketches is quite free and delightful, as may be seen in those chosen for illustration. The "Study of Trees" is as true

Claude *British Museum*

A GROUP OF TREES

(PEN AND WASH DRAWING)

a study as could be made; easy, and at the same time precise as possible, giving the sense of life in the trees. Another drawing is of a "Tree-trunk" covered with ivy, and every leaf and stem is drawn minutely; the arrangement of light and shade in this study is beautiful. An early drawing, a "Study of Boats," is very delicate and precise, and is good in arrangement; and the drawing of "Trees by a River," one of the most beautiful, is remarkable for its effect of sunshine; it is beautiful in composition, reminding us of Wilson, and Corot, and indeed of almost every landscape painter: for many works have been, and are, painted on these lines.

Claude's practice was evidently to make first the careful outline—to draw the structure—and then to wash in his effect, all in monochrome. It is a good method of sketching, and should be more practised; for it is worthy of notice that one seldom finds sketches from nature in colour among the old painters' studies. They are nearly always in point, or pen and wash, recording the facts and the main gradations; and colour was doubtless with them, largely a

matter of observation and memory. Indeed, it is probable that they did not approach nature in the sense of reproducing the effect of its colour, as we try to, but laid the greater stress on the gradations of light and shadow; and this would account for the brown foregrounds and strong darks which we see in old landscapes.

Among all the Claude drawings in the British Museum, there is only one—of a Roman arch—which is altogether in colour, although there are slight indications in some others; it is, however, recorded that Claude did paint direct from nature, indeed that he was one of the first artists to do so; but none of these studies are known to exist.

The early sketch-books of Turner show that he worked in the same way as Claude, making outlines and wash drawings; and no doubt it was the usual method. But his later sketches were in colour, and Constable's sketches are mostly in colour; and though landscape painting has lost the big grasp of nature which we see in Claude and Turner, some advance has been made; there is a nearer approach to general truth of

colour. We have, however, only gained truth in matters of detail, at the cost of the effect. Perhaps it is impossible to combine the two things; and I think it is, at any rate if so wide a field of vision is taken as Claude and Turner employed; with a smaller field it can be done, and has been, by Constable and his successors.

We are, I think, too much given to copying the facts of nature, and do not sufficiently regard the beauty of its constantly changing effects. To record these, a simple and rapid method is desirable, such as is seen in Claude's drawings, and in those of Rembrandt, the greatest master of all in gradation. Rembrandt ignores regular beauty of form, or proportion; concentrating on expression, character, and action, with strong human sympathy and dramatic instinct. He approaches his subject always by light and shadow, or by the suggestion of it, even in his line drawings. Perhaps this point can be made clearer by a comparison; if we take the work of Charles Keene, the one English draughtsman who comes nearest to Rembrandt, we find in it an instinctive selection of the line or accent which

gives movement or expression; and this accent is, it seems to me, determined by shadow, or expresses shadow, as with Rembrandt. If now we take the work of another great draughtsman, Phil May, who also, like Keene, sought expression with the greatest economy of line, we find that his accents are determined by form; even by outline, as with Dürer or Ingres, rather than by light and shade.

The drawings illustrated are an "Interior," a fine example of Rembrandt's method, a most beautiful study of gradation; and a "Winter Landscape," one of the finest of his many landscape studies. In this drawing it should be noticed how beautifully it is all drawn. The proportions of things at different distances are so well given, and the pen-work is splendid; the accents are as fine and as delicate as possible in the distant parts, but strong and decisive in the foreground. The sentiment and even the colour of winter is finely expressed.

To sum up: there are many methods, but any one is good, provided that nature is studied intelligently. It really depends on what it is

Rembrandt *British Museum*

AN INTERIOR

PEN AND WASH DRAWING)

desired to express; and as this rests on temperament, so each one must find his method. But, for study, the best method is, I am sure, to draw in line, and as searchingly as possible, so as to learn form; and afterwards, taking a wider view, to study light and its gradations. This is the groundwork; beyond this it rests on individual judgment and feeling. One cannot imagine such a work as Madox Brown's "Last of England" could be painted in any other way than it is; it demands our most searching attention in every detail, and the more we take in, the more we feel the strength and pathos of the picture: the interest accumulates and intensifies with each thing that is observed. It is defined throughout; there is no "losing and finding": we do that in our minds by dwelling on the importance of some things over others. But the sentiment of a work may be quite as strongly conveyed by different means; as in Rembrandt's "Adoration of the Shepherds." This, and the "Last of England," have one thing in common, expressive design; but while Madox Brown gives an accumulation of detail, Rembrandt hardly gives

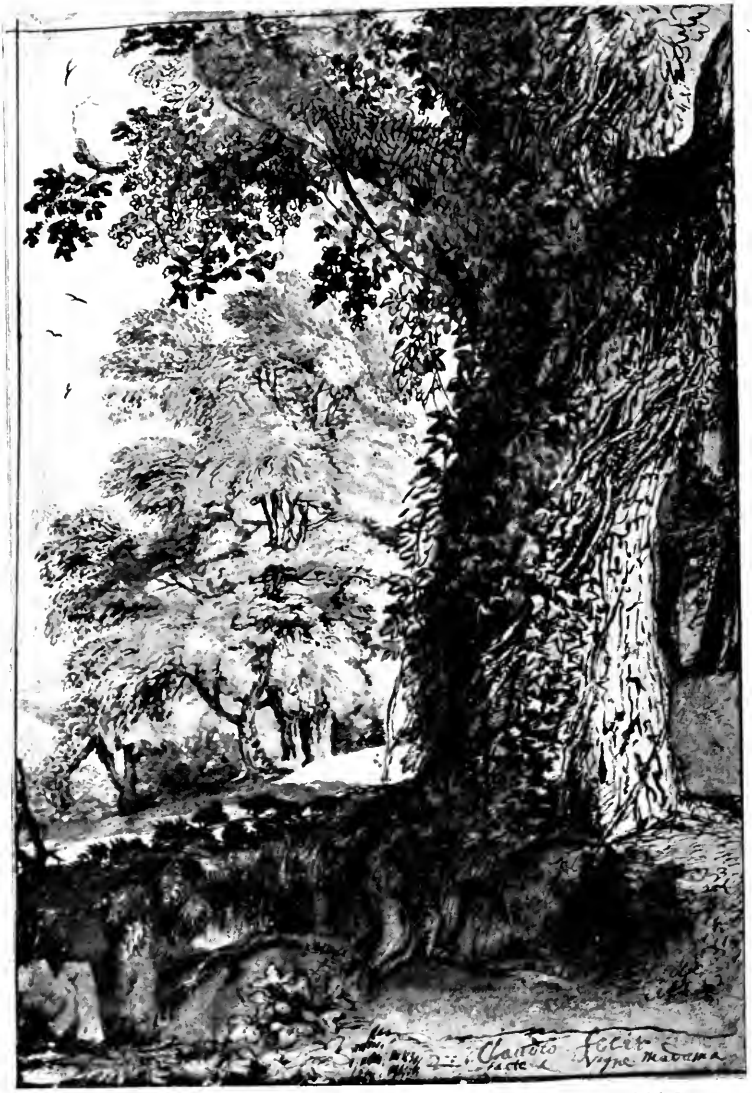
any, and produces his effect by subtle variations of tone. In the one case the picture is like a story read to us, we are told everything; in the other, we are brought, by means so subtle that we do not realise them, into the mood and meaning of the picture.

The art of Ingres is beautiful and exact, the perfection of accomplishment, but lacking, or almost lacking, in human interest and sympathy; and in this he falls far short of Raphael, who is very human. The art of Rembrandt is vague and uncertain, regardless of formal beauty, but full of emotion; sympathetic, unmatchable in force of expression. If we compare these two men, we find that they represent opposite tendencies of the artist's mind. In the case of Ingres, we find reason, measurement, close searching, impelled by a desire to express with exactness the beauty of form; it is the scientific side of the artist's mind, the spirit of the seeker or inquirer. One does not trouble about what his figures are doing; his pictures are uninteresting, but the skilful drawing charms us. Rembrandt is quite the opposite; the whole impulse is to give expression,

and any means is used, any suggestion taken to help. His figures interest, in themselves; and because we feel this interest we find the method beautiful by which it is conveyed. Rembrandt's is the impulsive, the "artistic" temperament; Ingres's fault is that his work is too perfect in proportion to its human interest: there is very little heart in his work. Still, and perhaps because of this—that his only pre-occupation is with the posed model—his drawings are fine models for method in life-drawing. One could not say this of Rembrandt, though he is immeasurably greater than Ingres; and, however great is the importance of training, it only supplements natural endowment: it cannot take the place of it.

VII

QUALITY IN COLOUR



Claude *British Museum.*

STUDY OF A TREE-TRUNK

(PEN AND WASH DRAWING)

VII

QUALITY IN COLOUR[1]

IT is a common experience that an engraving or a photograph of a picture does not give us the same impression as the original work; we find often that a picture which may look well in a reproduction has very little charm in itself, as a painting: or a picture which is not at all effective in black and white, may in itself, as a painting, be beautiful. This is, of course, dependent on the effect of colour; whether it is true, harmonious, or fine in quality. We can judge drawing, or movement, equally well in a photograph or in a picture—there is no mystery about it; but colour is full of mysteries and subtleties. Its effects are produced by means which are hardly definable, for, as we know, the

[1] The pictures mentioned in this lecture are in the National Gallery, unless otherwise indicated.

actual colours used in a picture are not what they profess to be ; and we may accept a passage in a picture as white—that is, as representing white, and so, for the purpose of illusion, of *being* white—while it may actually be, as a pigment, yellow, grey, brown, or blue ; its apparent value as a colour depending on its relation to other colours in the same picture.

This is a question of the value of colours rather than of their quality. The quality of a colour depends on the way the paint is put on, rather than on the colour itself. For instance, one may see two copies of the same picture, and at a little distance one copy may seem as good as the other ; but if we examine them closely, we may find that one copy has heavy, disagreeable paint, while the other may have the clearness and charm of the original. In the one case the quality of the paint is bad, in the other good. What makes the difference ?

It is, mainly, the clearness of the paint ; that it is untroubled, not churned up into a mess, but put down simply and sweetly, so that it looks to be lightly and easily done. This fine quality

of paint, joined, of course, with good drawing and harmonious colour, is what we look for, and find, in the finest work. But quality of colour, important though it is, is, I think, a minor beauty; harmony of colour is of greater importance. For the difficult thing to do, in making a picture, is to establish the right relations between the colours of the different parts, so that the picture is in harmony; this, especially, is where talent and judgment are shown. A picture may be painted in solid colour throughout, altered and repainted until its colours are harmonious; and though the quality of the paint may not be fine, still it may be a good picture. On the other hand, one may recall pictures—for example, some of the early Victorian time, by painters who came after Lawrence—in which quality of colour is the principal merit; pictures in which the flesh is pearly, the lights are brilliant, and the shadows transparent. In these works everything is skilfully done, but still as a whole they are not good; because the minor beauty of quality was sought, and the more important thing — the harmonious

relation of the colours to each other—was disregarded.

The aspect, or effect, of the picture depends on the harmony between its parts, and shows the painter's perception, or sense, of colour. We may compare Bronzino's fine "Venus and Cupid," in this respect, with Tintoret's "Milky Way." The two pictures are somewhat alike in their elements, and in each the quality of the paint is fine. Bronzino's is beautifully drawn, the colour fresh and clear, but as a whole it is discordant compared with the Tintoret; its colours seem too obvious. Another instance is the beautiful picture by Beltraffio, the "Madonna and Child," a picture fine in design, drawing, expression, and execution. It is painted as clearly and definitely as possible; the quality of the paint is beautiful, but the flesh-colour is not: the flesh looks hard, like wax.

A fine quality of paint, in itself, tells us that the painter understood his methods; and when, in addition, the picture conveys to us the beauty of nature, we recognise the great artist: a man of fine perceptions, and master of his means.

It is, I think, hardly too much to say that the pictures which have been treasured for centuries, and have come down to us as precious things, have kept their place more by reason of their colour than through their drawing. Drawing commands our respect, but we love fine colour; and such work as that of Ingres, of Ary Scheffer, or Gérôme, although it may be faultless in drawing, does not stand against the work of colourists like Delacroix or Bonington; it would even seem as if bad drawing may be forgiven, but not bad colour. Much of the work of Manet, for instance, is ill-drawn and repellent; but the colour, in itself, and in its harmony with other colours, is nearly always fine. It would seem as if he was content to let everything else go, if he could only get beautiful, fresh, clear paint in his work. And it is one of Velasquez's distinctions that he got this beautiful freshness of paint, with fine draughtsmanship; which no one else has been able to do.

It has been said that time and varnish are the greatest of the old masters; I don't think this is so. I don't believe that time or varnish ever

made a bad picture into a good one; although time improves a good picture, and no doubt some pictures owe their richness partly to their varnish. For instance, there are two small pictures in the National Gallery—the "Adoration of the Kings," by Filippino Lippi, and the "Israelites gathering Manna," by Ercole di Roberti—which have an extraordinary depth and richness of colour (in the picture of the Israelites there is a beautiful opposition of blue and gold) which I think is to some extent undoubtedly due to a warm varnish. But the pictures must always have been beautiful in quality, and clear, for they are, I think, both painted in tempera; and unvarnished tempera pictures are very luminous. One may see this in the large altarpiece by Crivelli, which appears to be as fresh, and as free from any sign of change, as when it was painted; and there is an early St. Sebastian, also unvarnished, and as clear as on the day it was done. These works have nothing to gain by varnish; they would rather lose. One may take, as a later instance, two pictures by Henry Morland (the father of George

Claude *British Museum*

STUDY OF BOATS

(PEN AND WASH DRAWING)

Morland) of girls washing and ironing. Morland and Reynolds were contemporaries (the dates of their birth and death almost coincide); but what a difference between the two artists' works! Morland's are bad in colour and poor in quality; they are dull and chalky. The other contemporary works in the same room, though darker, are more brilliant; yet they have been equally subject to time, and, we may presume, to varnish also. So we may conclude that the good picture was always good, and the bad picture always bad.

Each method of painting—fresco, tempera, and oil—has a quality peculiar to itself; and the greater flexibility of oil-painting makes it possible to use it in three different ways—as transparent colour, as opaque colour, or as a combination of these two, which is the usual way. And so there are wide differences in oil-paintings; but frescoes, such as those hanging on one wall of the National Gallery, by Signorelli, by Perugino, and by Pintoricchio, are all very similar in general effect: and this is due partly to the limited number of the colours employed, all earths or minerals, and partly to the medium itself. As

we know, the colours are painted on and into a wet-plaster ground, and so form part of it. The surface of the fresco is the granular surface of the plaster, and the colours being dry, like pastel, reflect more light, and are more brilliant than when mixed with oil.

Fresco has also a peculiar greyness, an aerial quality, produced throughout by the little lights and shadows on each granulation of the surface. There is a tempera picture by Roger Van der Weyden, a "Deposition," which is painted on a canvas showing a strong grain; its effect is similar to that of a fresco, and is produced by similar means—the unevenness of the surface. This delicate veiling of light gives a peculiar beauty to fresco, and helps to harmonise the colours; though these are always beautiful in themselves, through being painted at once on the white plaster, which gives the same sense of light within the colour, as is given by the underlying white paper to a wash of water-colour. The surface of a roughly painted oil picture, so long as it is unvarnished, has the same veiling of light as a fresco, and much the same effect.

It is worth while remembering that no alterations can be made in fresco, and that in tempera alterations will show in the course of time. We can see these retouchings in some pictures—for instance, on one of the figures in Van der Weyden's picture; and in the "Death of Procris," by Piero di Cosimo, there is a correction in the drawing of the hand that lies on the ground. In both cases the correction is muddy in colour, while the rest of the picture is as clear as can be. The "Death of Procris," one of the most beautiful works in the gallery, is particularly fine in quality throughout; it is clear all through, and the landscape is especially beautiful, and very simply done. The fine landscape and sky, too, in Michelangelo's unfinished "Entombment," is a thing to notice; it seems to be done in the simplest possible way—just a delicate wash on a white ground; yet it suggests finely the depth and transparency of the sky. The small "Crucifixion" by Antonello da Messina is beautiful in the same way, and so is the little "Madonna and Child" by Pintoricchio.

We can see, from an unfinished "Nativity,"

by Piero della Francesca, how carefully everything was planned out, drawn, and painted, piece by piece; with exact knowledge of how it was all to come together. And the early Flemings—Van Eyck, Memling, and their school—worked in the same deliberate way. The "St. Barbara," by Van Eyck, shows his careful preparations; the only difference between the Flemings and Italians being that the former used an oil varnish, which allowed the work to be continued indefinitely, instead of an egg medium. But they were just as careful to keep the colour clear, and to avoid alterations.

It is curious to notice, in so much of the early work, that the lights, such as flesh, etc., were kept transparent, with the ground showing through, while the darks were loaded with thick paint. We may see this in Bellini's head of "Peter Martyr," Holbein's "Duchess of Milan," and other works. This method is quite the reverse of that in oil-painting, where the lights are loaded and the shadows kept as clear, or as thin, as possible; and I think it likely that the power which oil-painting gives of using a thick body

of white, gave it its victory over tempera, by enabling the artist to alter a work in progress.

The large painting by Catena, the "Warrior adoring the Infant Christ," is one of the finest pictures in the gallery for the rich quality of its colour; and though one can hardly think it possible, it seems to be painted straight away, in its full strength and almost at one painting, in transparent colour on a white ground: one can trace the ground under the paint throughout. It is difficult to realise the perfect command of means which this work indicates, and it is hardly too much to say that no one to-day could do it. I do not know an artist now who does not arrive at his colour gradually; getting the whole picture laid in, and then by degrees bringing it into harmony, by altering a tone here or a colour there, until he feels that he has got his work into balance. But in this picture all these matters seem to have been decided before any colour was put on the canvas at all. So that when it is once put on, it remains in absolute freshness and purity.

Now, what does it mean, this colour put down

once for all and never changed? It seems to me—and it will, I think, be apparent to any of us—that it indicates a most wonderful mastery, a skill practically unknown to-day. We all of us make many alterations, and cannot get our work to satisfy us without infinite labour and revision; but these men did their work at once, with something of the ease and certainty that a house-painter shows in graining a door (and there is often a beautiful quality of colour in this quickly-done grainer's work). We may grant that the early painters were ignorant of many things which we have to learn, and that the problem of representation was a more simple one for them; we may make every allowance for ourselves, yet we must acknowledge that the men who were able to work in this way were very great masters indeed.

Tempera painting is hardly practised now, and indeed all this early art is practically a closed book; our conditions are so different that it cannot arise again, naturally, with us: the impulse is gone. But I have dwelt on the work of these early men because it shows, in the

Claude *British Museum*

A RIVER AND TREES

(PEN AND WASH DRAWING)

simplest and most definite form, the underlying thing about all good work—that we must know clearly what we want to do. And also, of course, we must learn how to do it. The old painters, as we may see from Cennini's book, laid the greatest stress upon methods; talent could look out for itself, but the painter must learn his trade. These men seem to have worked in the spirit of happy children, satisfied with the means at their command. We, knowing all that has been done, are by so much the more unsatisfied.

The sleeve in Titian's so-called "Ariosto" is a magnificent piece of work of the finest quality; though it is a dark colour it seems full of light. One cannot see how it is done, but I should think that, like the pictures by Catena, it is painted thinly over white. The later work of Titian seems to be more frankly painted; although it may be laid in first in black and white, the painting seems to be simple and direct throughout: one can, of course, see that there are alternations of thick and thin colour, and that the large masses of colour, blue and red draperies, etc., are finished with thin paintings over a

solid lighter underpainting. The great depth of colour without heaviness, which Titian's work shows, can only have been reached gradually; and though Titian no doubt made alterations (one can see a retouching on the nose of Mary Magdalen in "Noli me tangere"), a passage altered would probably be effaced down to the ground or foundation before repainting. I once saw, in Mr. Watts's studio, one of his pictures in this state. The picture had been finished, but he had decided to change one of the figures; and the changed figure was laid in in solid black and white, or umber and white, the rest of the picture being, of course, in its finished state: when this was dry it would be painted on, and brought into harmony with the rest of the picture, and the alteration would never show.

Titian's paint is beautiful in quality, his pictures are beautiful as a whole; and I think that the greatest beauty of his work is in its harmony, in the relation of one tone to another, rather than the richness of any one. This harmony seems to depend on the management of the half-tones and darks, which support the

colours; and surely this is the most difficult part of painting. For things in light are obvious and can be painted definitely; they make a point of departure. But passages of half-tone, such as those of flesh in shadow, of which there is a good instance in Tintoret's "Milky Way"; things which, though they are dark, appear light, these subtle things are the difficult ones. In this picture the deepest darks are not heavy, and the shadows are different in kind from the lights, as they are in nature. But here, again, it is not so much the quality of the shadow, or of any other passage in itself, that is so fine, as the relation of the lights and shadows to each other, with a beautiful quality of paint.

And Rembrandt's work is the same; it is full of delicate glazings, and repaintings in solid colour, which were glazed down again to get the sense of light in the shadows; though in many of his single heads he painted quite frankly and simply. The "Old Lady's Head" is, apparently, done in one painting. We may note in this that the shadow side of the face is in transparent colour, and contrasts with the rich, full painting

of the lights; and the portrait of "Titus" in the Wallace Gallery is frankly done, and is, I think, fairly solid paint throughout. It seems as if the method of glazing and repainting was used to increase the range of the colour.

After all, the quality of paint is a matter of perception and feeling rather than of rule; if an artist feels the beauty of surfaces, the range and variety of light in nature, he will make some approach to it in his work. The ordinary straightforward method of painting—to paint the apparent colour at once (that is, to learn to *see*)—is a good one, as far as it goes; the best, I think, for school practice. But it only goes a little way. Practically, it is best in a study or sketch which we can get through at a sitting; and if we attempt a subject that embraces a wide range of colour, or light, we find we have to get an extension of the range by varying the kind of paint; with transparent colour in some places, and solid in others. One may go through all the great painters' works, and throughout it seems to be felt that the paint in the shadow passages must be of a different and more subtle kind than

Watteau *British Museum*

MOTHER AND CHILD

(CHALK DRAWING)

that in the lights. Where this is not done there is a certain monotony in the work; as in some of the larger paintings of Frans Hals (the one in the present Old Masters' exhibition is an example [1]), which are painted solidly throughout: in any one of the single heads in the picture it is not so apparent.

For beautiful quality of paint Watteau and Gainsborough are remarkable. Watteau gives a beautiful effect by brilliant touches alternating with transparent colour; his colours look as if mixed with some rich varnish, and have the brilliant quality of enamel: and there is the same quality of paint in the little picture by Le Nain, "Le Goûter."

But for the charm of a fresh, light touch, I doubt if any painter equals Gainsborough at his best. Velasquez and Frans Hals are the only painters who can be compared with him in this respect. But Hals is dull, and even Velasquez looks a little heavy beside Gainsborough. I could not help feeling this in a recent exhibition,

[1] Old Masters, 1906. No. 102: Portrait of the Painter and his family.

where Velasquez's fine "Venus" was hanging between two portraits by Gainsborough; the Venus looked heavy beside their freedom and lightness of touch. And in the two fine portraits in the present exhibition[1]—especially the lady's—the colour is put on with an enjoyment which must be felt by the spectator. It is so fresh and clear that it seems a different kind of paint from that in other men's works; yet this is only because of the beautiful freedom of the work. I have often wondered, in looking at Gainsborough's work and that of other painters who painted very thinly, how they got over the painter's constant difficulty of the paint "drying in" in the darks, as the work went on; and I am inclined to think that they allowed time for the work to dry thoroughly before repainting, and did not trouble about "oiling out." (We are told that Vandyke varnished before repainting, but I do not know how far this information is trustworthy.) We all know how fresh the work, especially the thin painting, looks in a good old

[1] Old Masters, 1906. No. 18: Portrait of Miss Adney; No. 78: Portrait of Giardini.

picture; and we all know, too, many modern pictures that in a few years look leathery and dead, through the practice of "oiling out." If the oil is mixed with the colour it is all right, as in Morland's and Wilson's work; but if oil is left on the surface it deadens the paint.

A work that is solidly painted throughout is generally heavy, because through being painted "on and on," the paint becomes opaque, and bad in quality. But if it is painted thickly enough to get a surface which breaks up the light, as in the man's portrait by Hogarth,[1] it is not bad; and if it is painted solidly all through, without alterations, there is great beauty in the quality of the paint: partly because of the pleasure we feel in following free execution, and partly because the paint itself, when put on frankly, acquires a richness of its own, an enamel-like quality, which is beautiful. The "Old Lady's" portrait by Frans Hals is a good example of this; it seems to be done at one sitting. And some of Canaletto's work, such as the fine picture of the "Stoneyard," seems to be painted

[1] Old Masters, 1906. No. 7: Portrait of J. St. Aubyn, Esq.

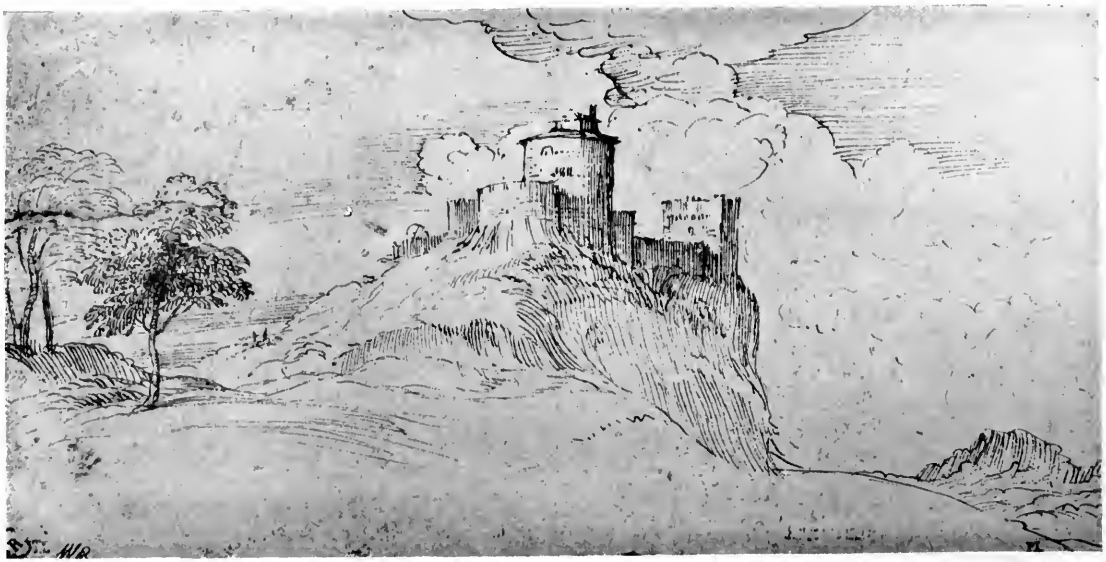
solidly throughout; each part at one painting; there seems very little glazing in this picture, or in his picture of the "Rotunda," which is most marvellous as a piece of execution. In this little picture, the figures and lamps, etc., though they are touched in a conventional way, are very expressive, and are most beautiful as paint; and such work as that of Wilson, of Romney, and of Morland, who often painted solidly throughout, has a rich, fat quality. We see it in Romney's "Parson's Daughter." It seems only possible to get this at one painting. Hogarth's portraits, which are painted solidly, are heavy; they were evidently worked over many times. But his "Shrimp Girl," and Gainsborough's "Portrait of his Daughter," may be mentioned as examples of fine quality in thin painting, done, as I think both these works must have been, at one sitting; they have a beauty and freshness which no amount of working over will give.

Many of the old painters seem to have worked on a dark ground, usually brown. Velasquez's "Boar Hunt" and Zurburan's "Monk" are probably painted in this way, and probably

Gainsborough *In the author's possession*

STUDY OF LANDSCAPE

(CHALK DRAWING)



Titian

British Museum
Photo, Vasari Society

STUDY OF LANDSCAPE
(PEN DRAWING)

Canaletto and Claude's were also; and a very beautiful and subtle kind of colour is produced by thin opaque colour on this dark ground: it is a kind of double colour, owing to the ground partly showing through. It has, however, the disadvantage of not always remaining as when first done; the balance of the colours changes, owing to the thinly-painted passages becoming more transparent with age, and darkening into the ground: while the solid high lights remain as they were, and stand away from the other parts of the picture. This can be seen in a large portrait ascribed to Vermeer of Delft, in the work of the Caracci, of Berghem, and the late Roman school, and in that of Lely and Kneller. But if the painting is equally solid throughout, as in the work of Canaletto, it does not seem to matter if the ground is dark; the colour is good if it is done freshly and at once.

After all, this freshness of touch seems to be the principal secret of quality; the one clear touch allowed to dry with its natural surface becomes beautiful. If it is scraped it loses its brilliancy, I think because the protective skin of oil is

removed; in fact, the less we do to the paint, the better paint it is. So that to do that little rightly, we must know what we want to do. It all comes back to that; the directness of work which is the basis of good quality, can only come through practice, and, as it were, unsought; and I think the best practice, both for colour and touch, is to be had in painting still-life, especially flowers, which have the greatest beauty in form, colour, and texture. There is no sense of effort in a flower; and if we feel this, it will inspire us to try for the same quality in our work, to try and make our hand so sensitive and sure that we can give good drawing with a firm touch; so that our picture, like the flower, should look sweet and not laboured. We have good models; there is Velasquez, and Chardin, of whom the De Goncourts said, "Never perhaps was the enchantment of mere painting carried further than by him, in touching things uninteresting in themselves, and transfiguring them by the magic of execution." And the fine work of Fantin shows that the finest art can find expression in these simple things.

A question has often occurred to me before an old picture, where great richness of effect and beautiful quality of colour is produced by glazing down with warm colours over a thickly painted surface: Should the student work in this way? Reynolds did habitually, and the beauty and force of colour so produced is undeniable. But the student should, I feel sure, not try to improve the effect of his work by such methods. We see the result in Reynolds's work, and can follow, to some extent, the train of thought which led him in this direction; but we cannot take his or any man's experiences ready made, as the basis for our vision of things: we must work out our problems for ourselves in the most straightforward and simple-minded way that we can. We must of course learn all we can about methods; and if we see a passage in a good picture that we do not understand, try and think out why it was done; and we may be eventually able to understand, and to use, as Mr. Watts did in his later works, every method of getting rich colour. But Watts's early work was very straightforward; and we cannot do better

than found our vision on the men whose works give the ordinary aspect of nature, such as Veronese, Moroni, Velasquez, Vandyke, De Hooghe. We cannot have better models than these.

VIII

THE RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF SUBJECT AND TREATMENT

Watteau *British Museum*

THE ENGRAVER

(CHALK DRAWING)

VIII

THE RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF SUBJECT AND TREATMENT

PICTURES may be esteemed on many different grounds; as for sentiment or story, for design or colour, or for any of the subdivisions of these qualities; and any one quality, if well presented, may justify a picture's existence, even though it may be poor in other respects. The finest pictures satisfy us on every ground, and are complete expressions; subject and treatment are in perfect accord: and painters fall in love with the work, while others feel the sentiment.

These, of course, are the perfect works, where masterly execution is at the service of a gift of expression. But perfect works are rare, and if we take the two main elements in every picture, the subject and treatment, or method of its

presentation, we find that there is often a want of accord between them.

It is very difficult to say which is of greater importance, the subject or its treatment; the ideal is, I think, that there should be a single impulse controlling both. A picture should be the outcome of a desire to express something, and the execution should naturally and willingly direct itself towards this. If it have a story, it should not, I think, be merely used as an excuse for the painting; nor, on the other hand, is a picture good if its only merit is that it tells a story clearly. The picture must be good *as a painting*; whatever be its subject, its presentation *as a picture* is of the first importance. It should give pleasure to the eye; and if it is to live, it will live by the appreciation of its technical qualities, rather than through its subject or story: for this may be forgotten, as has happened with many old pictures. And it is but reasonable to suppose that the survival, or otherwise, of contemporary work will be determined by the same causes as have operated in the past.

The fine still-life by Velasquez, which is called

"Christ in the house of Martha," may serve as an illustration of this. As a picture of that subject, it is badly designed; because the real interest is in the still-life and foreground figures, and not in the little figures behind, which give the title to the picture. It would not lose if these figures were merely of casual people, or were even left out; the picture would remain, as it is, an admirable study of genre. In this case the story is but the excuse for the painting, but the picture lives because the painting is good. Velasquez's "Dead Warrior," on the other hand, is a well-designed picture, because all the elements —especially the last trail of smoke from the extinguished lamp—are appropriate, and help to express the idea.

I do not think a picture is better without a subject (in the literary sense). There must be some reason for a picture's being done, and if it is to set forth a story so much the better, so far as the appeal of the picture is concerned; for the story or sentiment of a picture will touch many, while a work depending only on qualities which the trained eye of painters can appreciate,

makes but a small appeal; and a picture is made to be looked at. But there would seem to be a kind of antagonism between the idea and the way it is expressed; and the relative importance of the one or the other is, it seems to me, a question of taste; it depends on the taste of the artist, and of those to whom he appeals. A bad painter, if his work is popular, feels justified by his public, for the sentimental picture in a shop window gives pleasure to persons who are quite blind to fine art; but we may leave bad painting out of account, and dwell rather on the artist's problem, of the accord that should exist between subject and treatment.

As we know, art springs from the desire to say or to set forth something in a more expressive way than is possible by other means, and painting had practically for centuries no other aim than to set forth the story of Christianity. It was only by degrees that painters got to know and appreciate the beauty of the "thing seen."

It may seem contradictory to say that the beauty of so much of the early work, for instance, depends on the impulse for expression, while we

should aim mainly at technical accomplishment. If the mere setting forth of a story at their hands produced such beautiful results, should not a similar impulse be good enough for us? "Why," we may say, "should we trouble about methods?" But the old painters were masters of their methods; they learnt all the details of their work, down to the preparation of their colours and grounds—matters of which we are, as a rule, ignorant; and they were very methodical in their workmanship. No doubt they tried to make their pictures as real as they could; but in their day, the conscious interest in the appearance of things, which we enjoy, did not exist; and many things which are commonplaces to us, such as the contrast of light and shadow, the relation of one apparent colour, or colour value, to another, and the laws of atmospheric and linear perspective, were hardly known to them. So that their minds were left free, to express, in the most definite and obvious way, the themes they chose. This simple-minded attitude is one source of the charm of primitive work; and if we set an untaught child nowadays to make a

drawing, he will do it in the spirit of the early artists, defining everything, and painting with flat masses of colour, just as we see in Japanese art, and in that of the earliest Italians. If we ask, "How is it, then, that the early artists' work is so beautiful?" one can only answer that, although their methods were primitive, these men were great artists and had great taste.

When a work is well imagined, all its elements take their place naturally; the planning and execution go together, and there is no discord. A picture, for instance, whose subject is one of action and excitement, will suggest this by its abrupt contrasts, while one that is calm and tranquil in sentiment will be delicate in its transitions. The "Battle of St. Egidio," by Paolo Uccello, seems to me a good example of this; although the method is as deliberate as possible, the picture gives a sense of excitement by the abrupt way the colours are disposed. One may contrast the effect of this picture with that of Bellini's "Death of Peter Martyr," a picture which always seems to me to show a lack of

accord between the figures and their setting. In this work the grove of trees, and the little town, and the woodmen, are painted so beautifully, that I feel the interest is rather there than in the principal figures; and I think that, if we witnessed the murder, we should not have the leisure to look at other things so deliberately as is implied by the manner of the painting. It is a most beautiful picture, but is there not a want of accord somewhere?

So much has come between us and the primitives, that any attempt to work in their ways must be conscious and deliberate; we must ignore so much: and if their point of view is chosen, it must be from conviction. The pre-Raphaelites in their early days, when their art was a faith rather than a method, did great things. One of the finest is the "Annunciation" of Rosetti, which has as much feeling for the spirit of its subject as any of the earlier works, and follows their method. We can see that it has been all planned out beforehand, and then painted piece by piece. But this method was not natural, as it was with the early men, it

was deliberately adopted; and we know that Rosetti could not keep his mind away from the later developments of painting. And though he attempted more difficult problems in later years, it is doubtful whether he achieved results as great, or kept to so high a level, as in this early work. It is admirable in the complete accord between subject and treatment, which, by the way, all his work shows. "Fundamental brainwork" is the phrase Rosetti used to define the essential thing in art, and it is a phrase worth remembering.

For the sake of contrast, one may compare Rosetti's picture with the "Annunciation" by Crivelli, in the National Gallery. This is a beautiful piece of work, but, as a picture, it has very little repose; the conception of the whole scene—the elaborate architecture, the over-dressed angel, and the ecclesiastic with his model of a church—seems to me fantastic and affected: and as a picture of the Annunciation I think it misses the point altogether. Yet it is fine workmanship all through, and has one very beautiful passage; the quiet little room

of the Virgin, with the books and things all put tidily on the shelves. This picture shows, I think, a want of accord between subject and treatment, but it is finely painted, and is an example of a picture which stands through the beauty of its workmanship.

The frescoes in the Sistine and the Vatican hold their place in the estimation of the world because in them great themes are treated worthily. There is fine conception of the subjects, and the greatest skill and beauty in the work, and they stand away from all other things. But only the greatest artists of all are free from bias, either towards subject or towards virtuosity. This latter is the direction in which the painter's inclination leads him, and it is the right one; but it is well to remember that the greatest men had their skill as a matter of course, and used it for expression. The old painters told their stories naïvely and simply, but we have such an accumulation of precept and example that we cannot; so much is expected, and our work must satisfy on so many grounds: and though good work will always have a value, it may be

the greatest, *as work*, still we should not make execution an end in itself.

It is inevitable, and quite right, that a great artist's work should influence others; but all schools which found themselves on a particular master seem to end in exaggeration of his mannerisms; only the independent spirits keep their place, and it is but too true in art that "many are called, but few are chosen." One sometimes hears an artist say, "I allow nothing to come between me and nature." Admirable! but can we? Does not everything that has been done, every masterpiece which has impressed us, come between us and nature? We are helped and directed to see nature, and, as Reynolds says, the best road to originality is through the study of what has been done. Modern painting owes much of its strength to the inspiration of Velasquez, but it also owes some of its weakness to the same source; that is to say, some artists have not really understood their master, and though their work has an attractive looseness of execution, it has neither the delicacy of drawing nor the just tones of Velasquez:

Watteau *British Museum*

A SEATED FIGURE

(CHALK DRAWING)

after the first surprise there is nothing more to see. But if there is one thing more than another that Velasquez's work reveals to the student, it is that his easy mastery was not easily attained; there is clear sight, deliberation, and determination in his early pictures, but not facility; and I should say that if ever there was a hard-working, even a plodding student, it was Velasquez. His early works, it seems to me, tell us this. And even at his finest time it is much the same; for the "Philip," with all its freedom, is most subtle and delicate; and so is his "Venus." This picture—the "Venus"—may be instanced as showing a want of accord between subject and treatment. The lady is not Venus, but an ordinary model; she is, however, so finely painted that the lack of imagination is outweighed by the splendid work. If it were not for this, the picture would be commonplace.

In one sense, too, we may say that in Rubens's pictures subject and treatment are not always in accord. The goddesses in the "Judgment of Paris" are not goddesses at all, but very substantial Flemish women, nor are his Sabines

at all Roman; but yet, in another sense, his pictures do show a complete accord of the subject with the execution. We see that he realises the story, and gives it its dramatic point; that he is interested in it, rather than in the technical work of painting, which has been so thoroughly mastered as to give him no trouble at all. His works strike us at once by their dramatic invention, rather than by their fine painting; and only afterwards do we realise the fine work. In Velasquez's "Venus" the flesh painting is the *raison d'être* of the picture.

The work of Veronese, like that of Velasquez, lives through the fine qualities of its painting rather than through imagination or sympathy with his subject. The "Marriage at Cana," in the Louvre, might almost as well represent anything else, so little is the mind drawn to the central incident; and, so far as the effect of the picture is concerned, it does not matter. The "Vision of St. Helena," too, in the National Gallery, is only a picture of a beautiful woman sleeping. The formal introduction of the cherubs with the Cross, though it points the story, adds

nothing to the expression of the picture; it is purely a masterpiece of painting. And the "Darius' family before Alexander" does not touch one except through its workmanship.

The early painters' works are removed from us by an archaism which, though it was, I think, quite unintentional, has the effect of putting them, as it were, in another world. The work of Botticelli is perhaps the most striking example of this; it shows always perfect accord between subject and treatment; and his "Venus," his "Primavera," and the Madonnas he painted, though they always show the same type, and are neither Christian nor pagan in sentiment, satisfy us in the same way as Rosetti's pictures do, as being complete expressions of a temperament—of a personal view. His "Madonna" in the Louvre is so fine in feeling and expression, that one feels that if she were dressed in rags the picture would still be beautiful; and every element of richness and beauty that the picture contains helps to enforce its sentiment: but in a work like Crivelli's "Annunciation," where the human interest is nil, all

the elaborate ornamentation fails to make it interesting.

Giorgione's "Fête Champetre" is one of the most beautiful pictures in the world; it is, like all that is known of his work, perfect in harmony and accord throughout, with a noble kind of realism, poetical rather than imaginative. It is the natural expression of a temperament. This is the basis that unites all good work, that makes Rembrandt brother to Michelangelo; for with each, the thing is the presentation of something as imaged, or imagined, in his mind. The picture made, as it were, to order, from external elements, however able it may be, is on a very much lower plane. And Rembrandt, Watteau, and Hogarth may on this ground be classed with the imaginative painters. It is interesting to notice in Hogarth's work how expressive is his painting, and how truly in accord is every element in his pictures, when he follows his own temperament; and how commonplace and uninteresting he becomes when — as in the "Sigismunda"—he essays a professedly imaginative subject.

Rembrandt *British Museum*

A WINTER LANDSCAPE

(PEN AND WASH DRAWING)

In imaginative or creative work there may be, and often is, want of accord between subject and treatment, because the subject is not really felt; but imagination is a rare gift. In literal work, which depends on the presentation of something seen, the artist's task is easier. It is rather a question of insight and technical skill, as in the work of Holbein, which is, as it were, measurable, although his level, as a draughtsman, has not again been reached.

One may instance, as examples of fine unimaginative work, that of Van Eyck, Breughel, Vermeer of Delft, and Peter de Hooghe, artists whose work is perfect within its chosen limits; Steen, Metsu, Terburg, Frans Hals, Holbein, Veronese, and Moroni; and Velasquez, whose vision is nearer and more natural to us than that of other artists: the honest common-sense of his method makes all theories seem artificial.

There are so many different excellences in painting that one cannot say of any one direction that it is the only one to follow; but, as serious students, we should make it our business to examine all schools and methods, and to get at

principles: to find out why this or that thing was done. For we cannot reconstruct the art of any period; and our art should come about naturally, should be in touch with the thought of the time, and as far as possible with our own types and conditions.

The whole range of thought and time is open to the artist; but to paint imaginative subjects, he must have imagination; if not, he had better leave such themes alone. Watts owed his technique, and the fine qualities of his work, to the study of the masters, but he owed them nothing on the imaginative side; he painted his own inventions, and his methods are in accord with them, so that his works are complete expressions.

We should remember that learning to paint will not make us artists, any more than knowledge of grammar and logic will make us poets; it is a question of mental attitude and natural gifts. The artist should have sympathy, reverence for beauty, and the capacity for enthusiasm. His mind as well as his hand should be trained; he should study out of school, as well as in; and I

cannot but think that some experience of the world is rather an advantage to the artist than otherwise. It helps us to know ourselves, keeps us from narrow-mindedness, and should, by force of contrast, increase rather than lessen our love for our art.

In the words of Chardin, who said that "painting is an island of which he had only skirted the coast," "let us be charitable." Diderot records a conversation with him, *à propos* of the Salon of 1765. "Gentlemen," he says, "let us be charitable. Among all the pictures here, seek out the worst; and understand that two thousand unhappy ones have broken their brushes, in despair of ever doing things even as bad as these. Parocel, whom you call a dauber, and who really is, if you compare him to Vernet—this Parocel is nevertheless a man of mark, compared with the men who started with him and have given it up. Lemoine said that it takes a painter thirty years to learn how to keep to his sketch, and Lemoine was no fool. If you will listen to me, you will learn perhaps to be lenient. We begin at seven or eight years of age

to draw from copies—eyes, mouths, noses, ears, then feet and hands. Our backs are bent over our work for a long time, then they put us before the 'Hercules' or the 'Torso'; and you have not seen the tears that the 'Satyr,' the 'Gladiator,' the 'Venus,' the 'Antæus,' have caused to flow. You may be sure that these ancient masterpieces would no longer exist to excite the jealousy of moderns, if the students could have worked their will on them. And then, after days and nights before these lifeless things, they put us before the living model, and all at once the work of our preceding years seems to count for nothing. We have to learn to see Nature; and how many have never seen and will never see her! It is the torment of our lives. After five or six years before the model, we are left to follow our own genius, if we have any. One's talent is not determined in a moment, and it is not at the first attempt that one has the candour to avow one's incapacity. How many attempts, some successful, some unfortunate! Precious years have gone by before the day of disappointment and weariness comes. Then what to do? One has to

find another occupation—and with the exception of twenty or so, who show their work here every other year to dull people, the others are unknown, and perhaps are happier than we are!" He goes on to say that "what we see is the work of a small number of those who have struggled with more or less success, and that he who has not felt the difficulties of art will do nothing of any worth." I am sure that we must all feel the truth of this.

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